

NUMBER

6

**Dia Art Foundation**

**IF YOU LIVED HERE**

**The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism**

**A Project by Martha Rosler**

**EDITED BY**

**Brian Wallis**

**DISCUSSIONS IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE**



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Martha Rosler, At the Greenpoint Men's Shelter, Brooklyn, 1989

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## A NOTE ON THE SERIES

This is the sixth publication in a series sponsored by the Dia Art Foundation called "Discussions in Contemporary Culture." The series is based on an ongoing program of lectures and symposia held at Dia's performance space at 155 Mercer Street, New York, to explore topics relating to culture for diverse communities. We continue to rely on artists, scholars, and critics from outside Dia to initiate and develop these events with us.

In 1987, Dia invited five arts professionals to meet with our staff in New York to discuss Dia's exhibition program for the coming years. This group represented a diversity of informed opinions and positions and included: Harald Szeemann, Curator, Kunsthhaus, Zurich and independent curator; Kaspar Koenig, Director of Portikus and Chancellor of the Städtisches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt; Kathy Halbreich, Curator of Contemporary Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and former Director, List Visual Arts Center, MIT; Yvonne Rainer, filmmaker and instructor, Whitney Independent Study Program; and Richard Bellamy, director of the Oil & Steel Gallery (1980s) and Green Gallery (1960s). Out of these discussions, particularly through the urging of Yvonne Rainer, emerged the need to support the work of artists engaged in exploring a broader range of art making than that generally presented in museums and galleries. The Dia staff at her recommendation approached socially engaged artists Group Material and Martha Rosler to consider projects at Dia. It quickly became clear that these projects could not be conventional exhibitions.

Rather than developing projects at 548 West 22nd Street, Dia's new exhibition facility, the decision was made with the artists to use the Dia spaces in Soho at 77 Wooster Street for installations and 155 Mercer Street for open public discussions or "town meetings," tying the two together as much as possible. Situated at the geographic center of Soho and the New York art world, these spaces offered ready accessibility to the audience actively participating in this critical process as well as to the general public. The starting point for this publication thus was a series of events conceived and directed by Martha Rosler over the course of more than two years (1987-89), including planning sessions; a series of three exhibitions; and open public "town meetings." Rosler called this project "If You Lived Here . . .," exploring general and specific issues of community and housing, homelessness, and urban planning, in particular, through diverse artists' pro-

jects, public discussions styled as “town meetings” emphasizing participation of the audience, and rigorously compiled research. Rosler’s project followed a project by the collaborative artist team, Group Material, which used a similar model of installations interspersed with “town meeting” discussions, which resulted in *Democracy*, the fifth publication in the “Discussions in Contemporary Culture” series and a companion volume to this one.

Rosler wanted this publication to function less as a distillation of the many preceding events and discussions and more as yet another, integral phase of this overall project (part process, part discussion, part display of objects, part exposition, part text). Much of the visual material in this book, the essays by Rosler and Rosalyn Deutsche, and extensive reprinted material represent significant new dimensions to the project.

With “Town Meeting,” Group Material and Martha Rosler invented a program at Dia asserting, in its many phases and parts, social and political inquiries as the guiding principles of organization. This revised a system of values to which the Dia Art Foundation, as an arts organization, had grown accustomed. The rallying points for each installation and town meeting did not fall within the aesthetic or art historical realm that an arts organization is supposed to be able, in some advantaged way, to discern. Instead, these art-specific criteria were secondary (in the formulation of the public discussions as much as in organizing the installations of visual art), and were of value only to augment the focused arguments being made concerning aspects of the way we define and organize ourselves as members of communities.

**Charles Wright**, Executive Director

**Gary Garrels**, Director of Programs

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We owe a great debt to Yvonne Rainer, who brought us to Martha Rosler and Group Material (whose project at Dia culminated in the companion volume to this one), and to a new view of how our program can function. Martha Rosler guided her project and the development of this book with self-effacing dedication to the ideals of a collaborative undertaking. Her insightfulness and perseverance underlie this project. We are grateful to Brian Wallis for his thorough editing of the transcripts of the town meetings, and for his essential guidance in the development of the book. Rosalyn Deutsche's excellent essay gives a helpful perspective on Rosler's objectives and on the meaning of art that truly engages a place and a social setting. We are very grateful to the participants in the panels, including the many individuals who came to these events and publicly shared their opinions and concerns.

Phil Mariani was instrumental in the careful coordination of the production of this book. Karen Kelly, Programs Assistant, performed extensive research and coordination of artists' materials essential to this publication. For needed research, and for his invaluable assistance to Martha Rosler in the development of the book, we are grateful to Dan Wiley.

Gary Garrels, Director of Programs, helped to coordinate the immensely complicated undertaking of the overall project with the help of the entire Dia staff. Bethany Johns, who has worked with us to design other publications in this series, did an excellent job of working under pressure on the design and layout of this book. We also greatly appreciate our ongoing relationship with Thatcher Bailey at Bay Press, without whom this series of publications would not be possible for us. For partial support for the Town Meeting project and this publication and the companion volume entitled *Democracy*, we are grateful to the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency; the New York State Council on the Arts; the Richard Lounsbery Foundation, Inc.; Art Matters, Inc.; and the Albert Kunstadter Family Foundation.

**Charles Wright**  
Executive Director

## PREFACE: THE WORK OF ART IN THE (IMAGINED) AGE OF THE UNALIENATED EXHIBITION

Art that edifies and makes your spirit soar; art that gives you a taste of inspired madness; art that enhances and validates your superior taste; art that contains messages in beautiful wrappings; art that testifies to the universality of the lone, suffering, melancholic artistic impulse. You didn't find such art in the shows curated by Group Material and Martha Rosler at the Dia Art Foundation's Wooster Street space from September 1988 through June 1989, or if you did, such expressions were imbued with very different meanings through their inclusion in these exhibitions. The artist's melancholy was here transformed into grief, rage, and social activism by and for those fallen to AIDS, civil neglect, homelessness, political mendacity.

The two separate series—"Democracy," organized by Group Material, and "If You Lived Here . . .," organized by Martha Rosler—and their concomitant Town Meetings, have pushed the debates around art and politics into a new dimension. Although Group Material's shows included well-known artists, the sheer abundance of "unknown" participants, including children and the homeless, made for an exhilarating blowing-away, and a more-than-implicit critique of the customary conserving-and-excluding strategies of museum- and gallery-sponsored art exhibitions. Needless to say, the governance of the art *market* was not in evidence here. And not unexpectedly, "pluralism," that ideological underside of market-value "one-of-a-kindness" and stanchion of cultural life in these United States, was not an operative factor despite the diversity of materials, styles, and origins of work shown. What surfaced again and again as one spent time in these shifting, seemingly chaotic installations was the conflict between official utterance and nonofficial representation of everyday life, between the exalted bromides of Western democracy and their thinly disguised "freedoms": to die of AIDS, to live on the streets in a cardboard box, to not learn to read, to speak without being heard, to make art that will never be seen.

For ten months the symbols of public and private identity and icons of presumed consensus—from flag to desk to hearth to hair—were paraded, trounced, and dissected, while their myriad misuses for capital and political profit were amply documented in film and video. Intermittently the eight Town Meetings provided a forum for the airing of opinions and reports

from the various activist fronts. Issues of race, sex, and class inevitably collided. There were no resolutions—other than the one that was voted in at the “Cultural Participation” meeting, where it was resolved that hereafter, when invited to appear on panels, we would demand the inclusion of people of color. There were few people of color present at this particular meeting. The Town Meetings were remarkable for their capacity to accommodate disagreement, anger, crankiness, borderline psychosis, useful information, theoretical discourse, and productive networking, engaging people of all ages and from all walks of life. Their prevailing whiteness is indicative of the ongoing racial inequities in the art world.

I am occasionally struck by the memory of a pronouncement made in the mid-fifties by a painter friend of mine (a woman no less!): “The cream always rises to the top.” Like all such analogies to “natural selection,” this one evades the issue of who recognizes and separates the cream, and whose interests are served by such distinctions. The Group Material and Rosler projects are a vivid demonstration of how art exhibition can constitute a radically different approach, one that can offer not only a diversity of objects but can contextualize a social field in and from which the objects are produced and derive their meaning. In other words, art exhibition does not have to separate, or isolate, its objects from the conditions in and under which those objects have been produced. Most art exhibition obscures these conditions under the smoke screen of “quality,” or the implicitly superior taste involved with selection. Someone standing behind me at the recent Velázquez show at the Met remarked, “The Inquisition was going on then.” Yikes! Who would have known! Unobtrusively and tastefully placed notes at such exhibitions do little to mitigate the dominant impression that there has been a previous “separation of cream.” Emphasis on quality has once again carried the day. The various modernist attempts to overturn these values—from dada to pop to minimalism—failed, not in the objects they produced, but at the site of their *exhibition*, which invariably focused—as most exhibitions continue to do—on the singular object alienated from its social context.

In light of Dia’s longstanding and continuing commitment to cream separating, it behooves me to register my own lobbying effort on a five-person panel (convened by Dia, to its credit) as an initiating factor in the realization of these shows. One can only hope that the closing of the Wooster Street space that housed “Democracy” and “If You Lived Here . . .” does not signal the end of Dia’s involvement with artist/activist-curated exhibitions, and that these particular projects have constituted a genuine precedent for future exhibitions sponsored by that commendable organization.

Meanwhile, these books are powerful testimony to the value of art as a social force in a time when progressive social consciousness at the institutional level needs all the prodding it can get.



MORAND AND VAQUERO VIEW NEW YORK

## FRAGMENTS OF A METROPOLITAN VIEWPOINT

Walk through any city these days and you are likely to see people living in the streets. No matter how clean, stylish, or well-swept the city, it is likely to have a street population. When we talk about homeless people and urban shanties, we no longer mean only those in cities like Lima or Soweto. We might be talking about any city in post-Reagan America or in Thatcherite England—or, thanks to recent liberalizations, we might be thinking of Budapest or Warsaw. It is an inescapable fact that at the end of the twentieth century many people around the world are forced to live in the streets. How could such a thing be happening—particularly now, as the Western mass media are gloating over the collapse of the Soviet model of communism and the victory of “our way of life”? And why are we—at least, we here in the United States—putting up with it (or allowing it to happen, colluding with it)? And what can be done?

In order to address these questions, we must confront the social space in which homelessness occurs—the city. We must consider the city both materially and as a set of processes and governing concepts. The city, any city, is a set of relationships as well as a congeries of built structures; it is a geopolitical locale. More than simply an array of conflicting representations, a city is a site of production of productive significations. In the modern world, space itself (not simply material goods) is produced, as the French social philosopher Henri Lefebvre notes:

*Space as a whole enters into the modernized mode of capitalist production: it is utilized to produce surplus value. . . . The urban fabric, with its multiple networks of communication and exchange, is part of the means of production. . . . Capitalism and neocapitalism have produced an abstract space that is a reflection of the world of business on both a national and international level as well as the power of money and the “politique” of the state. . . . In this space, the cradle of accumulation, the place of richness, the subject of history, the center of historical space, in other words, the city, has exploded.*

In other words, the city, which at first might appear to be an unplanned welter of heterogeneous structures with streets and avenues threaded throughout, itself encodes an image of the economic realities of the society

that produced it. In the past couple of decades, the U.S. has witnessed the return of sweatshops and “home work” by indentured people, often immigrants—most of them women—and child labor, while modern megacorporations have begun to engage in runaway-shop practices on a global scale, moving their productive sites here and there, their assembly sites somewhere else, wherever labor is cheapest and tax breaks, health and safety laws, and other conditions are most favorable. Networks that unify the globe in terms of information flows simultaneously facilitate the fragmentations and discontinuities of processes of production and physical structures, including residential communities. This pairing of linkage and dispersal has produced the exaggerated urban fragmentation and discontinuity so characteristic of postmodernism and has cast irony on the once-obvious slogan “The Streets Belong to the People.” Today, the street has been rendered an imaginary domain.

In his influential essay “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” Fredric Jameson developed a theoretical model of the postmodern city. His paradigmatic monument is the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles, the “impossible representation” of the “new world space of multinational capital.” The hotel provides an interior world in which the grounding of the outer world appears to be repealed. Mike Davis’ “Urban Renaissance and the Spirit of Postmodernism” is an excellent corrective to economically and socially reductive elements in Jameson’s argument. Davis wishes, on the one hand, to stress as a social policy decision “the definitive abandonment of the ideal of urban reform as part of the new class polarization. . . .” On the other, he challenges as inconsistent Jameson’s periodization of postmodernism in terms of the stages of capitalism. Davis points to global crisis as the cause of capital overaccumulation rather than as a sign of “the triumph of capitalism’s irresistible drive to expand.” He comments, also, that “foreign investors now totally dominate downtown construction” in Los Angeles, making it an example of the unprecedented international financial speculation. Davis shows just how offensive an intrusion the Bonaventure is into the center city. Indeed, Los Angeles’ vast new Bunker Hill complex, of which the Bonaventure is a part, is walled off from the increasingly Third World, working-class city below. To write the history of postmodernism—that is, of contemporary life—in terms of accounts describing the “life world” and experience of the wealthy and the privileged is, at a minimum, to tell only a small part of the story.

John Portman, the Bonaventure’s architect and developer, began his architectural career with Peachtree Plaza in Atlanta in 1976. Now the sprawling downtown redevelopment that has overtaken the city is called “Fortress Atlanta.” Postmodernism as written into the city by that class is characterized by the development of fortresses, generally high-rise ones. These for-

tresses are the hotels, offices, residences, and—as exemplified by the new Museum of Contemporary Art in L.A.'s Bunker Hill—museums built to contain and amuse the professional managerial sector plunked down in the middle of moldering center-city decay.

Fortresses recall frontiers, and urban geographer Neil Smith has dwelt at length on the notion of the frontier as a metaphor for urban growth. The myth of the frontier has been operative in American life since the beginning, but most recently it has also found its way into the narrative of gentrification in advanced capitalist countries around the world. According to this metaphor, the center city of the late twentieth century is the new urban frontier, and those who inhabit it are “natives” waiting to be displaced by “urban pioneers,” folk heroes of the era. Smith points out that today the frontier is a frontier of profitability. “Where the nineteenth-century frontier represented the consummation of *absolute geographical expansion* as the primary spatial expression of capital accumulation,” Smith writes, “gentrification and urban redevelopment represent the most advanced example of the *redifferentiation* of geographical space toward precisely the same end.” The fortress model means that one finds enclaves of wealth on the terrain of the poor, sometimes leading to highly visible confrontations, as in New York's Tompkins Square Park.

Postmodern discontinuity, like scattered sites of industrial and image production, is also manifested as a blurring of boundaries between public and private life—to which I'll return later. Intentionally or not, this blurring serves the interest of greater but less confrontational social control. In the transitional period of the 1960s, new school campuses and public buildings began to look like forts—to control students in the one case and impede urban insurrectionists in the other. More recently, the sophisticated solution has been the evaporation of sites of what formerly passed as a public world. Urban fortresses now encompass not just single buildings but entire areas (Bunker Hill, Battery Park City) or downtowns (Atlanta), and their fortress character is not immediately apparent, having melted innocently into the city plan, the glorified façade, or the palm court with its invisible crowd-control techniques.

In earlier modern times, even when the myth of social comity was regularly punctured by urban riot and street crime, the streets and social institutions could—at least theoretically—be made reasonably safe for polite society by adequate policing and by the workings of strong social institutions for segregating classes (and races). Contemporary society, with its changes in information and transportation flows that have forced a de jure adherence to social ideals of equal participation—not least in consumerism—but without adequate economic means to put them into practice, no longer supports that late version of a chain of being in which each being holds a



particular, known place. Instead—as clearly articulated by the hard-edged Margaret Thatcher—the very notion of “society” is being challenged by self-identified social conservatives. Even as marxism falters as a social theory, Marx’s prescient analysis of the effects of the commodification of labor power is hard to disavow. As all social value tends to be reduced to monetary terms (as Marx described), what has replaced “society” is, of course, money. Underscoring the loss of social values this entails, Margaret Thatcher’s counterpart Ronald Reagan redefined the essence of America as the place where “anyone still could get rich.” What *society* will not provide can and must be purchased.

This new vision of society is clearly articulated in the latest trend in downtown architecture. In the past decade, in the effort to “revitalize” downtown shopping districts, a number of North American cities have built “skywalks.” These enclosed second-floor shopping-arcade walkways are suspended between buildings and open onto vast commodity-packed, elevator-fed atria, banks, and hotel lobbies. In the Toronto version, the city downtown is honeycombed with miles of such arcades underground, connected to the subway system.

Perhaps such enclosed passageways can be explained by terrible winter cold or summer heat that interferes with shopping and banking in Toronto, Minneapolis, or Houston. But it struck me, on a visit to clean, jewel-like Cincinnati, that the primary justification for this internal importation of the suburban mall is simply to remove the pedestrian/shopper from the street. Demoted to a site of surveillance and vehicular passage, the street is abandoned to maintenance services and the occasional spectacle. And increasingly, the street is a waste space left to the socially fugitive and the unhoused—those unable to buy or to serve. The creation of “waste space” is as much a part of the social production of signification in modern life as the built environment. It is this “empty” space, to which the destitute are relegated, that is increasingly identified with—or as—“the street.” The waste space resides where society used to stand.

Formerly public spaces have thus been recoded as architectural interiors, overblown atria of Portmanesque hotels and of corporate headquarters, often incorporating lavish interior jungles and elaborate, full-time video surveillance systems. Similarly, the shopping mall, suitably internationalized (Benetton everywhere) and removed from its physical locale, has become the center of social life, despite the fact that it is a space emphatically removed from the public sphere, patrolled by private police and without benefit of, say, the right to freedom of speech or assembly.

Sites of public entertainment are also increasingly commodified and restricted: stadia, “theme parks,” and, preeminently, television. City museums and public gardens, more and more expensive for the general public to enter,

may be closed to the public entirely when rented for exclusive corporate or society parties. In all cases, the easy in-and-out of public access, the flow of bodies, is curbed by the flow of (commodity-derived) signification. Meanwhile, in an ironic reversal, the older suburbs (where people first fled "society" as represented by the city) are falling into decay and are increasingly inhabited by those displaced from city neighborhoods as a result of gentrification and by the homeless.

### **The Picture of Homelessness**

Homelessness, like all social problems, exists in a stream of conflicting representations. The image of the homeless person has undergone several metamorphoses over the past couple of decades. Indeed, a displaced person was not thought of as a "victim of homelessness" or an instance of the homeless until the crystallization of this idea and the dissemination of the term in the early 1980s. Americans soon began to recognize homelessness as a problem, and by mid-decade its dimensions were laid out in newspapers, on television, on talk shows. But in general, attitudes toward homeless people have been changeable, myth-ridden, and not especially benevolent.

Until recently, people who lived on the streets were labeled tramps, bums, vagrants, and derelicts. Depression imagery prevailed. The stereotypical "Bowery bum" was perceived as an alcoholic male transient of no particular race (though in fact such a person was overwhelmingly likely to be Caucasian). By the turn of the 1980s, the stereotypical street denizen had become a deranged hebephrenic bag person, smelly and threatening, a person evicted from a state-run mental institution. Lone homeless women, or "bag ladies," became a familiar mass-culture image: Lucille Ball played one on television.

As the decade progressed and homelessness became endemic, the image of homelessness, instead of gaining depth, was broadened to cover a more varied population, including displaced, primarily black, inner-city down-and-outers and vets; then inner-city mothers and children; then refugees from the rust belt and the foreclosed family farm—including family groups now perceived as possibly white. When the media discovered the homeless, it was this last group whom they discovered: white homeless families adrift in Middle America.

The actual dimensions of female homelessness are lost in the current image of homeless women as deranged, as mothers, or as prostitutes (and therefore as crack-addicted or a source of HIV infection). The homeless New York woman Joyce Brown, using the street name "Billie Boggs," became a celebrity-for-a-day in the late 1980s (and even addressed a Harvard audience before returning to the street) after her case occasioned a landmark legal decision preventing the forced incarceration of homeless people in shel-

ters or mental facilities. But little in-depth coverage was devoted to the lack of care such facilities offer to people like Billie Boggs to ameliorate mental or physical disabilities or to find permanent housing, or to the particular vulnerability of homeless women.

The single male (urban) homeless person—not to mention the black homeless person—was often forgotten or desubjectivized. The homeless person has become a specter of the age, a figure manipulable as a concentrated representation of a shared paranoia once justifiable through recourse to the Red Menace or earlier to the Yellow Peril. Occasionally someone will stop and give spare change to a panhandler; the homeless person is sometimes “deserving” of pity and charity, but these tender sentiments are apparently revocable. As a young, white, privileged person remarks about the homeless in a recent videotape, “Well, maybe they *used to be* people . . .”

Conservative forces attempt both to minimize estimates of the number of unhoused people and to blame them for their predicament. Articles in the *New York Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and *Newsweek*, even a commentary (by a black newspaperman) on PBS’s *McNeil-Lehrer News Hour*, for example, have traced homelessness to severe social dysfunction, manifested as alienation, drug taking, or low self-esteem, thus classically substituting effects for causes. Cynically, the homeless are stigmatized for having remarkably few close family ties, as though the conditions of adversity that constitute homelessness were not ample cause for the weakening of social bonds. The *Post*, for example—owned by a New York real estate developer—editorialized: “The notion that homelessness is an economic problem—a result of a lack of affordable housing . . . is plainly false. Families that linger on in shelters generally do so for reasons that have less to do with lack of money than profound social dysfunction—ignorance, drug addiction, apathy” (October 8, 1989). And as an indication of what is presumably the official federal view of homelessness, Ronald Reagan told David Brinkley (in a sort of exit interview in December 1988) that he believed that people sleep on grates because they like it. Despite official serenity on economic realities, the United States has the highest rate of poverty in the industrial world (*New York Times*, December 38, 1988), and the Centers for Disease Control reports that the number of deaths by freezing has more than doubled over the past decade (*New York Times*, December 25, 1988). Would the president tell us that people also freeze to death because they prefer it to shelter living?

Public sentiments toward government aid to the homeless have swung back and forth. In the United States, as in Thatcherite England, homelessness is perceived as a social threat and perhaps a moral evil—a sore on the body politic; but the trend toward privatization and the inability to locate a public sphere have made the middle classes, themselves financially squeezed by stag-



Dana Burvitz, selections from "Gargoyles to Scare Developers and Other Urban Artifacts," ceramic, 1987-88.

nant wages, reluctant to call on the state for solutions. In the late 1980s, pollsters detected a trend in the United States favoring federal aid for the homeless, even if it meant increased taxes. Polling consensuses are notoriously fragile and capricious, however, and by mid-1990, the media were commenting on a negative turn in public attitudes toward visible homelessness. Municipalities became increasingly willing once again to apply vagrancy laws and other disciplinary measures. The reality that most of those made homeless were members of the urban working class and that many continue to hold jobs but simply can't pay the rent is apparently not of public interest. There is nothing new about "out of sight, out of mind"; it has nothing to do with postmodernism. Giving homeless people one-way bus tickets out of town or criminalizing homelessness preserves the view—but it doesn't solve the problem of "the street."

#### Homelessness and Social Power

Homeless people are constantly subjected to brutal pseudo-solutions that drain away personal energy and interrupt efforts at collective self-empowerment. Even the discreet charity of those who wish to help, such as those who include rooms for homeless people in newly constructed public libraries, suggests that we have accepted the inevitability of this population. But why should we accept the failure of the state to care for the destitute? Many agencies and religious groups, with a great deal of volunteer work, tend to the needs of homeless people. But even the best, most meticulous of these efforts are precarious. Facilities that have for years cared for the "old



homeless," the male skid-row alcoholics, are now swamped by large numbers of "new homeless." Furthermore, such assistance can hardly empower homeless people as a group. How might they remedy their situation and combat the disinformation campaigns aimed against them?

Although activists and organizers have actually won for homeless adults the right to vote (you can't vote without an address), the homeless are not a constituency; no legislator is answerable to them. It is always difficult to mobilize the socially disempowered; much more so this scattered, heterogeneous group of poor people. And, despite some suggestions from the vicinity of New York's Tompkins Square Park, whose resilient encampment of homeless people is often rallied by local East Village activists and anarchists, the homeless are not an armed insurgency waiting to be born.

Nevertheless, homeless people have successfully gotten together, organizing to speak for themselves and to force social attention to their needs. In some cities many of the homeless are veterans, primarily Vietnam-era veterans, and organizers like Robert Van Keuren in San Diego attempting to coordinate relief efforts and self-help organizations on that basis. In the face of obstacles, in various places, including Detroit, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and New York City, homeless people (primarily men) have formed unions and ad hoc groupings. Joining coalitions to demand housing is another necessary step. Such coalitions are essential in the vital effort: to reconnect the isolated images of homelessness with the rest of the spectrum of poverty and racism.

Women are powerful organizers of the poor and the homeless. In various Latin American and African countries, homeless women organize the

dispossessed, who often live precariously in wretched squatters' colonies. And in the United States, women such as Jean Chappell of Parents on the Move, and Wende Marshall of the Hotel Tenants Rights Organization organize those housed by cities in "welfare hotels" and other temporary housing (men like Ray Richardson of the Homeless Clients' Advisory Committee have also been active in this regard). However, the most effective organizing still occurs before displacement or eviction—before homelessness—through groups of tenants in public housing, like the effort led by Maxine Green of the National Tenants Organization, Tom Gogan of the Union of City Tenants, and others. Tenants in privately owned residences are organized and mobilized by the many women of the Metropolitan Council on Housing; Ruth Young, Oda Friedheim, and Bonnie Brower of the Housing Justice Campaign; Irma Rodriguez and Betty Lorwin of the Task Force on Housing Court; Elaine Chan of It's Time—and Ted Glick of Atura.

#### **Poverty, Racism, and Social Responses**

About half of the perhaps 3 million homeless people in the United States are children. Overall, 39.5 percent of the nation's poor are children, and this proportion is increasing steadily. Yet, as researchers like Dr. Ellen Bassuk have documented, children are the least able to cope with the psychic trauma of dislocation and stigmatization. Displaced children and their families—most headed by single women—are predominantly black and brown. In this context, racism is proving to be a durable, powerful, and politically useful tool in keeping a blind eye turned on the problem.

Populations of color are concentrated in central cities; for instance, 82 percent of African Americans live in urban areas. But in New York during the 1980s, low-income households and households of color steadily lost ground in both housing and income. More than a quarter of the city's residents fall below the official poverty line. Even for those able to contemplate purchasing homes, discriminatory mortgage practices have been shown to affect black prospective borrowers disproportionately. Other things being equal, a congressional report has shown blacks are twice as likely as whites to be refused mortgages.

The facts of black life are grim. Not only are blacks not advancing to top corporate positions, their rate of college attendance is stagnant (at about 12 percent), black life expectancy is dropping, and black infant mortality, already scandalously high, is climbing to levels rivaling those in many Third World countries. Among young black men the unemployment rate is so high and the danger of violent death so great that many in the black community have taken up the horrific witticism that black men constitute an endangered species.

Racism has not only helped produce this catastrophic social situation, but it has also helped justify purely fictional solutions to the burgeoning problems of drugs, crime, homelessness, and AIDS. Rather than seriously attacking the problem of homelessness—rather than a *war on homelessness*—the government has chosen to mobilize against drugs, embodying the military metaphor literally. Pulling triggers depends on a military-industrial-academic complex already in place. It allows for ideological mobilization of the total society in a repressive spectacle in keeping with the punitive and bellicose spirit of the age. The spurious war on drugs has been victorious only in public opinion polls, successfully replacing “homelessness” with “drugs” as America’s number one problem.

### **The Production of Homelessness—Gentrification and Displacement**

Urban cycles of decline, decay, and abandonment followed by rebirth through rehabilitation, renovation, and reconstruction may appear to be natural processes. In fact, however, the fall and rise of cities are consequences not only of financial and productive cycles and state fiscal crises but also of deliberate social policy. According to urbanist Peter Marcuse, homelessness has three related causes: the profit structure of housing; the distribution of income; and government policy.

In many “inner cities” or “center cities,” decline, disinvestment, and abandonment took place throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as the middle class fled. The protracted crisis of capital of the mid-1970s onward occurred primarily in the productive sector and, together with tax-structure changes, made real estate investment increasingly attractive—until the end of the 1980s. By the late 1970s, the trend toward population loss by U.S. cities had begun to be reversed. The middle class began to return in what was dubbed by its boosters an “urban renaissance.” But the beneficiaries of this renaissance often did not include those already there.

The new professional-managerial class is increasingly concentrated in urban areas, creating a cordon of similarly professional support services. Executives, lawyers, consultants, and so on, wind up living and engaging in leisure activities in close proximity. But, at the same time, poor workers, typically including undocumented workers from this or that country, are also concentrated in the center city, providing essential services. The competition between these two classes for the same space has led to gentrification.

The term “gentrification” describes the conversion of decaying industrial or working-class neighborhoods into residential zones for the professional-managerial class. Gentrification requires, perforce, a process of disinvestment before reinvestment takes place. Under whatever rubric, the process involves not only the withdrawal of monetary support on the part of the private sec-

tor, including both landlords and banks (in an illicit policy called “red-lining”), but also the withdrawal of city services such as fire protection, hospital services, schools, and road maintenance. When the recapitalization of gentrification occurs, many of the original residents have already been forced out or are forced to live under grotesque conditions. Many inner-city residents not displaced by the abandonment and disinvestment are finally cast out of their neighborhoods by this process of gentrification. Some of those displaced double or triple up with friends and relatives in already cramped apartments, and others simply find themselves on the streets.

In the past fifteen years, a large portion of rental housing has been lost to condominium conversion—often supported by tax breaks. Many single-family or apartment dwellings made into rooming houses during financial downturns have also been turned into condominiums or returned to their earlier uses. Condominium conversion includes a postmodern fetish for ransacking not only historical styles but history itself, as demonstrated by the conversion of public spaces to private residences. If New York City’s former police headquarters can be made into condos, then crumbling downtown hotels could be converted as well. Such hotels, many of which were originally built as single room-occupancy (or SRO) hotels designed to house transient male workers and wanderers and finally alcoholics in downtown “skid rows,” are now being emptied and returned to the market at the service of another class entirely. (Sometimes, between decay and conversion, such hotels house the homeless, at baroquely extortionate cost to the cities footing the bill.) In New York City alone, over 100,000 such SRO rooms have been lost since the mid-1970s. The city’s belated effort to halt such conversion was ended by a 1989 court decision that upheld the right of landlords to dispose of property as they choose, tossing out the argument that housing is a social good and must respond to social need. In the end, there is simply no place for many of the SRO tenants—who include a significant number of indigent older women—other than the street.

To understand the great expansion in the number of people living on the streets everywhere, in suburbs as well as center cities, then, is not straightforward or simple. One has to take into account the shift of the economy from productive industry to nonproductive financial and real estate industries; government policy; and the growing income gap between rich and poor. Throughout, the accompanying ideological shifts in the meaning of public responsibility and of “the public” itself—not to mention of “the city”—render our attempts at solutions all the more difficult to institute.

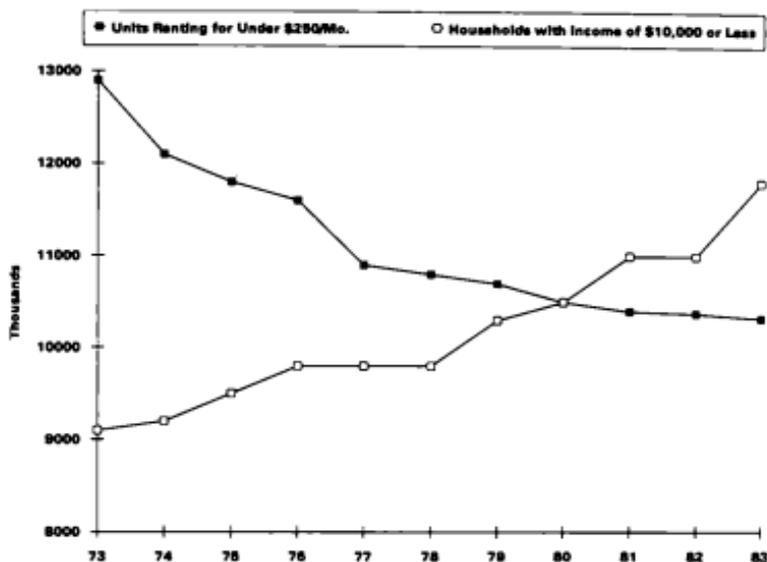
#### **The Big Picture: Poverty and Policy**

Capital concentration masquerading as free-market economics triumphed with the election of Ronald Reagan, who presided over rapid and massive

social disinvestment, seemingly made urgent by the gigantic budgetary deficit. This "big picture," the meaning of Reagan's election, provides a fuller story of the production of homelessness. Although early on Reagan joked about the shrinking of the social budget in the language of authoritarian paternalism, the mainstream press cravenly neglected to explore the extent of Reagan's destruction of social welfare until after he left office (and then only briefly). As I write this in June 1990, conservative commentator Kevin Phillips has just published *The Politics of Rich and Poor: Wealth and the American Electorate in the Reagan Aftermath*. Detailing the shift in wealth under Reagan and the ideological engine driving it, Phillips confesses that accelerating economic inequality under the Republicans was more often a policy objective than a coincidence. Dennis Wrong, reviewing Phillips' book, summarizes: "Ideological conviction rather than . . . sheer greed . . . moved Ronald Reagan's policy makers to cut taxes, change the tax laws to eliminate their progressivity, deregulate many businesses, reduce welfare spending, raise interest rates, and borrow lavishly against budget deficits" (*New York Times Book Review*, June 24, 1990).

But greed turned out to be an effective cover. In the 1980s, the collective imaginary was seized by newly sexualized images of virile, hedonistic men and women in business get-ups. The prime-time soap operas *Dallas* and *Dynasty* became the most popular television shows not only in the U.S. but in country after country around the world. In America, identification with the power image of entrepreneurs, corporate types, and even accountants—precisely those who in previous decades were regarded as untrustworthy, hollow, and abysmally boring—helped pave the way for a massive transfer of wealth. The populist egalitarianism of previous eras was replaced by gleeful ostentation. This ideological climate facilitated a surprisingly widespread support for the regressive structure of the 1986 tax reforms. Illusions aside, after the tax law changes, the Congressional Budget Office reported that the poorest tenth of households would pay 20 percent more of their 1988 income in federal taxes than they did a decade earlier, whereas the richest 10 percent would pay almost 20 percent less.

The principal economic result of Reaganism was that in the 1980s the extremes of wealth and poverty grew far further apart than a decade earlier, producing the widest gap between rich and poor in our history. According to the nonpartisan Center on Budget and Policy, "the wealthiest 40 percent of American families received 67.8 percent of the national family income, the highest percentage ever recorded." Between 1978 and 1986, the *New York Times* reports, the average family income of the poorest fifth of the population declined by 10.9 percent while that of the richest fifth increased by 13.85 percent. Congressional estimates show that 71.7 percent of the nation's wealth is held by the richest 10 percent of families; the remaining 90 percent holds 28.2 percent of the wealth. If the value of homes (the major

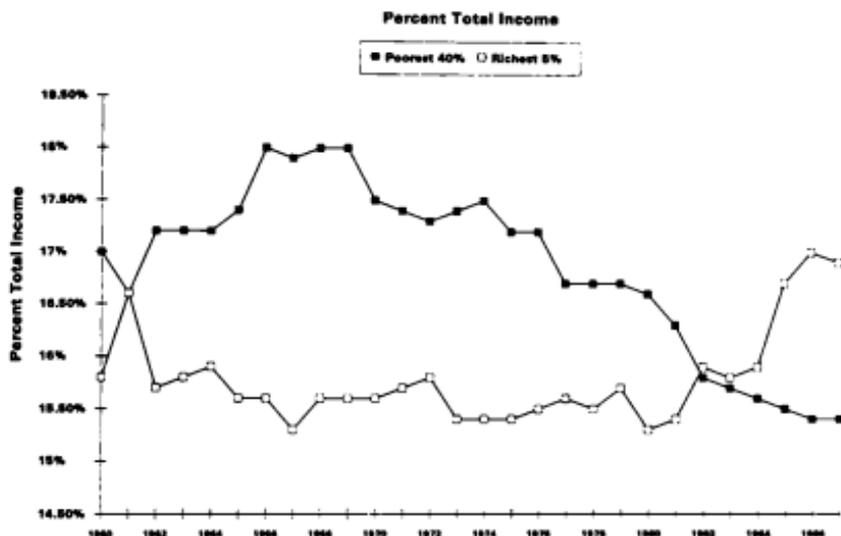


Low-income rental housing shortfall (1983 dollars). U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Annual Housing Surveys, 1973-1983.

source of wealth for most Americans) is excluded from these figures, the concentration is even greater, with the richest 10 percent owning 38.2 percent of all private wealth and the remaining 90 percent owning only 16.7 percent.

In real figures, this means that fewer than a million-and-a-half people hold two-and-a-half times as much of America's wealth as that held by the remaining 212 million people. One consequence of this concentration of wealth is the recent explosion in the number of billionaires in the U.S. raising the average family income to \$13,120, an all-time high. Despite this inflated average, however, more than 32 million people subsist below the official poverty level. Furthermore, the poverty line itself is placed questionably high, since it is based on figures developed thirty years ago, when housing costs took up a much smaller percentage of the average income. The growing inequality of household income in the decade was paralleled by a growing inequality of wage distribution in a period in which executive compensation began to exhibit unprecedented gigantism.

Women are still at the bottom of the economic ladder, and the phrase "the feminization of poverty" was made newly resonant in the 1980s. Women of color are poorer than white women, and woman-headed households fill the rolls below the poverty line.



The worsening distribution of income. (From *Dollars and Sense*, December 1988.)

What all this means is that the rich got much richer at the expense of blue-collar workers and the poor. Despite preinaugural calls for assistance to the poor, the policies of the Bush administration are essentially a lower profile continuation of those of the Reagan administration. The poor have so far gotten from George Bush only a paltry increase in the minimum wage (from \$3.15 to \$4.50). Throughout the Reagan decade, the minimum wage stayed at its 1981 level and real income, per household, declined to the level of the mid-1960s—but now requiring two workers per household to generate. Public assistance rolls were brutally cut (some of these cuts have now, belatedly, been ruled illegal), and many of those eligible for assistance had their benefits cut and restored, cut and restored again, in a cynical process called “churning.”

Reaganism also targeted housing. The federal agency of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as recent congressional investigations have shown, improperly directed billions of dollars toward well-connected, primarily Republican developers of housing for the relatively well-to-do. Even more reprehensibly, during the 1980s, the federal government essentially got out of the business of building housing. Federal funds for low-income public housing construction were cut from \$37 billion in 1981 to \$16 billion in 1985 and to \$7 billion in 1988. These budget-slashing operations were ac-

accompanied by hot propaganda campaigns against public housing and its inhabitants (see discussions “Housing” and “Planning” in this volume). The burden of housing and other social services was shifted to the states with funding through “block grants,” but the inevitable result was property tax revolt and revenue shortfalls.

The tax structure continues powerfully to favor home ownership over renting, providing hidden subsidies that are never mentioned when the question of “public assistance” comes up. In the Reagan years, 1981 to 1989, the median price of a home went from \$53,000 to \$97,000.

The increasing unreachability, for all but the wealthy, of the “American dream of home ownership” has received wide press attention—but the press has been slow to connect the decline of home ownership with the savings-and-loan scandal. Savings-and-loan institutions, or S&Ls, were the primary means by which Americans could finance homes, but the deregulation of that industry—began in the Carter years—turned them into cash cows in which, as one commentator observed, the profits were privatized and the losses socialized. The S&L bailout, now estimated in the trillions of dollars, will make the purchase of homes even more difficult, because interest rates will be higher and mortgage money scarcer. Compounding the injury to society, it has been estimated that 10 to 20 billion public dollars were wasted in fraudulent real estate sales related to the S&L scandal. The possible uses to which these monies could have been put include the taboo solutions of rebuilding the cities’ crumbling infrastructure and building or rehabilitating dwellings for the poor and the homeless.

Solutions to urban problems and inequities are not just around the corner, but a new picture of the city featuring the preservation of intact working-class and lower-middle-class neighborhoods must be promulgated. The lack of representation of poor and working-class people in our public forums and in the halls of power is reflected in the wholesale erasure of their narratives from the city’s history (or its conversion to fictionalized nostalgia) and their neglect at the hands of public and private planners. Housing has to be rethought as a social resource, not simply as a series of opportunities for profit. “Livability,” of course, means rational planning of city flows, from transportation to waste systems, but also requires attention to the fatal ills of human poverty and neighborhood blight.

Populist city planning and agitation at the grass roots are required, but cross-class and cross-neighborhood coalitions are also essential. Activism requires a wide array of responses, from street actions and demonstrations to proactive planning, scholarly studies, and popular books and articles. Image adjustment can be conducted by efforts ranging from computer simulations like that done by Berkeley Environmental Laboratory’s Peter Bosselman to argue for the historic character of New York’s Times Square or certain vi-

sual street irritants like billboards or stencils such as John Fekner's "Decay" in New York or the Urban Center for Photography's "Demolished by Neglect" in Detroit. These are part of a widespread campaign emphasizing the right to decent housing and for a decent social place that must be carried out by whatever means necessary.

### Artists in the Cities

What variety of means *is* available in the effort to persuade and convince? How can one represent a city's "buried" life, the lives in fact of most city residents? How can one show the conditions of tenants' struggles, homelessness, alternatives to city planning as currently practiced—the subjects of "If You Lived Here . . ."? These have been the central issues shaping this project. Its forums, of course, provided an opportunity for direct speech. The three shows, however, also featured varieties of "direct evidence" and argumentation about the grounding of urban life. Artists, community groups, and activists made their points through an array of materials, from videotapes, films, and photographic works to pamphlets and posters to paintings, montages, and installations.

Certainly the conventionalized picture of the postmodern city, with its fortresses and deeply impoverished ghettos, with its epidemics of drugs and AIDS, reinforces the imagery of the urban frontier and discourages even partial approaches to poverty and homelessness. For artists, the image of the city's mean streets may feed a certain romantic Bohemianism. Yet, because artists often share city spaces with the underhoused, they have been positioned as both perpetrators and victims in the processes of displacement and urban planning. They have come to be seen as a pivotal group, easing the return of the middle class to center cities. Ironically, however, artists themselves are often displaced by the same wealthy professionals—their clientele—who have followed them into now-chic neighborhoods.

The "percent for art" programs put in place in a number of U.S. cities have also brought artists into the urban-planning blueprint, at a time when even the idea of public art—like the notion of public space—is being severely attacked. This isn't the place for a broad consideration of public art, but what is worth mentioning is the current high-profile version of "beautification," an ambition to improve the "quality of life" often invoked by anxious city administrations in canceling both taxes and unsightly urban elements for the benefit of powerful corporations. This sort of public art project is exemplified by Battery Park City, a megaproject on New York's Lower West Side. Financed by international capital (in this case, Olympia & York, the corporate entity of Montreal's Reichmann Brothers), Battery Park City imagines itself to be a fantasy enclave of residences, offices, parks, and gardens—

something like the ruling-class rooftops in Fritz Lang's film, *Metropolis*. What is of interest here is the regularized incorporation of art by the authority running it—precisely as though this exclusive preserve reinvented the public, on privatized but publicly subsidized turf. Although the art program has been touted as showing risky “socially conscious” art, such work seems severely compromised by its context.

Irrespective of such public or corporate commissions, artists have always been capable of organizing and mobilizing around elements of social life; the city is art's habitat. But how do artists address directly the issues of city life and homelessness in which they are implicated? Most directly, of course, many artists engage in activism, including working with homeless people in shelters and hotels, as do Nancy Linn and Rachael Romero; producing posters and street works on urban issues, as do Robbie Conal, Ed Eisenberg, Janet Koenig, and Greg Sholette; or engaging in other forms of political activism, as do Marilyn Nance, Mel Rosenthal, and Juan Sanchez. Krzysztof Wodiczko and the Mad Housers work with homeless people in projects whose stop-gap solutions to homelessness show up the absurdity of official responses. But there are many other approaches as well.

Postmodern life is characterized by the erasure of history and the loss of social memory. Social life includes multiple streams of contesting momentary images, which, detached from particular locales, join the company of other images. Images, in appearing to capture history, become the great levelers, the informational counterpart of money, replacing material distinctions with their own “depthless” (that is, ahistorical) logic. One of the social functions of art is to crystallize an image or a response to a blurred social picture, bringing its outlines into focus. Many artists and critics engage with these dislocating politics of the image through critiques of signification. Such critical practices temporarily check the flow of (what passes for) public discourse. But such critiques-in-general, crucial as they are to a reorientation of social understanding, don't exhaust the avenues to urban meaning.

Consider the city once again. It is more than a set of relationships and a congeries of buildings, it is even more than a geopolitical locale—it is a set of unfolding historical processes. In short, a city embodies and enacts a history. In representing the city, in producing counterrepresentations, the specificity of a locale and its histories becomes critical. Documentary, rethought and redeployed, provides an essential tool, though certainly not the only one.

The arguments for documentary apparently need to be made anew. Image politics and still-contested notions of difference have prompted serious philosophical critiques of the claims to transparency and univocality of news, documentary, and photography in general—critiques made in the context of the growing distance between imagery and social meaning in the culture at large. Even past documentary works, which have taken on new

meanings in textbooks, art history books, and gallery sales, are a matter of perpetual reinterpretation.

The "problem" of documentary is compounded by the art-world distrust of populist forms (for various reasons, some of which are valid and others simply manifestations of professional snobbery). Who could possibly deride a healthy skepticism in regard to the propaganda of the obvious that characterizes the myths of documentary transparency? On the other hand, the agitational intentions of activist social documentary aren't sufficient in themselves to secure a conviction except in the court of formalist aestheticism.

It would be ironic if those of us seeking a more complex account of experience and meaning were enjoined by our own theoretical strictures from presenting evidence in support of social meaning and social justice. Documentary practices are social practices, producing meanings within specific contexts. Rejecting various entrenched documentary practices hardly amounts to a negation of documentary in toto. The critical minefield surrounding practices rebuked for empiricism calls for careful negotiation. Social activists, certainly, continue to recognize the importance of documentary evidence in arguing for social change. It is the necessity to acknowledge the place—and time—from which one speaks that is an absolute requirement for meaningful social documentary. This requirement allows for an unspecified range of inventive forms but doesn't dispose of the historically derived ones. Naturally, this shifts the terrain of argument from the art object—the photograph, the film, the videotape, the picture book or magazine—to the context, to the processes of signification, and to social process. An underlying strategy of the project "If You Lived Here . . ." (of which this book is a part) has therefore been to use and extend documentary strategies.

A documentary photograph of a member of a social group composed of undifferentiated stereotypes—the "homeless," say—today serves the same purposes as did similar images at the inception of social documentary as a public photographic practice: it "humanizes" by particularizing. It suggests the character of a person's existence, in which material circumstances contradict human worth, and the more dire the conditions, the more the photo may have to tell us. Sometimes the "condition" is invisible, a conceptual understanding laid over the image by the viewer. But the problem is that of projection, of imagining that the characteristics we "see" in the person or scene are those that are "there." For that reason, the more patent the image, the more it accords with "common-sensical" presuppositions, the less it may have to tell us. This is not a condition that should make us vacate the territory of image making, for it is precisely the role of the context—especially the verbal text (written or otherwise supplied) linked with *this* image-text—that establishes a meaning beyond a simple ground for projection.

Documentarians—unlike “street photographers,” another sort of practitioner entirely—have hardly relied on images alone to tell the right story. The development of high-profile, commercial, professional photojournalism, and the art-world appropriation of all kinds of photography into its own procrustean canon, paved the way for a photographic practice passing for social documentary to shorten its circuit from the street to the gallery wall. Lost along the way were more than symbolic claims for agitational intentions. The dead hand of “universalism” has lain heavily on documentary’s shoulder, for a documentary work alibied as revealing an underlying human sameness becomes simply an excuse for spectacle. That is the basis of one of the most telling critiques of documentary, particularly of the subgenre *exotica*—a form of anthropology that masquerades as humanism when the subject is the down-and-outer in advanced Western society or in its familiar margins (Mexico or Bensonhurst). One of the problems of representations of the city is to make an argument without betraying people.

In one of the exhibitions for “If You Lived Here . . .,” a pair of texts placed side by side on the wall argued for and against photographing the homeless. The first text, an excerpt from an essay of mine on documentary photography, criticized “victim photography” for rarely serving the purpose which (presumably) its makers intended—namely, to gather public support, to generate outrage, and to mobilize people for change. Rather, I argued, documentary photography may inadvertently support the viewers’ sense of superiority or social paranoia. Especially in the case of homelessness, the viewers and the people pictured are never the same people. The images merely reproduce the situation of “us looking at them.”

In the other text, “On Photographing the Homeless,” photographer Mel Rosenthal argued for photographing the homeless. Although, he wrote, he was troubled by photographing people in desperate straits—people who, even when they gave their consent, may not have had much idea of how their photos would be used—on balance he felt that images of real individuals can dispel the numbness many people feel. Context, however, still remains crucial, and Rosenthal acknowledges this. (I’ve remarked elsewhere that political photography is repressed in our culture by being hung in a gallery.) Rosenthal’s projects are never geared toward the gallery-museum circuit. His South Bronx photographs, for example—made during a period when he worked at a health clinic in the Bathgate area where he grew up—were published in activist and grass-roots magazines. Rosenthal gave prints to the people photographed, who often had no other photos of themselves. In exhibition form, these photos of resiliency in a war zone are accompanied by an array of quoted remarks (some of which are reproduced in this book) providing the necessary—damning—information.

It would be reductive to insist that no levels of mediation can exist between those who experience a situation and those who view it. In a fragment of an interview with Alexander Kluge reprinted in this book, Kluge takes up precisely this question of participatory versus supportive mediations—by chance, in relation to the eviction of squatters in Germany. There has to be room for an interested art practice that does not simply merge itself into its object. Interestingly, though, Bienvenida Matias, in *Loisaida* (the Hispanic Lower East Side of New York), and Nettie Wild, in Vancouver, B.C., were each invited to live in the housing communities whose struggles they were documenting on film and videotape (Matias in *El Corazon de Loisaida*, or *The Heart of Loisaida*, and Wild in *The Right to Fight*). Both accepted.

Ultimately, there's no denying that no matter how the works in "If You Lived Here . . ." originally were woven into the social fabric, the venue of the exhibitions was an art gallery, even if partly "transformed." The idea of these shows wasn't simply to thicken the context for the reception of "photographs of the Other." It was, first, to allow for a consideration of an under-reported, underdescribed, multidetermined set of conditions producing simple results: homelessness and sadly inadequate housing. Perhaps no less importantly, the project intended to suggest how art communities (might) take on such questions. Since the problem of homelessness, like all social problems, exists in a stream of conflicting representations, it is not possible to change social reality without challenging its simplifying overlaid images. That was a main task of "If You Lived Here . . ."

"Home Front," the first of the project's three exhibitions, meant to establish an ambience quite different from that of the usual art gallery. Substantively, it was conceived as a set of representations of contested neighborhoods. The term "Home Front" suggests a war zone, after all—and one outcome of a loss on that front is homelessness. The show provided a look at contested housing, primarily urban housing; it also offered help to embattled tenants, directing them to militant neighborhood groups and advocacy organizations. Some of the battles on the home front are protracted, some skirmishes have been all too visibly lost, but both successes and failures need to be considered.

In "Home Front," also, the truculence of official responses to the housing crisis was indicated by the prominently painted remark attributed to New York mayor Ed Koch: "IF YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO LIVE HERE, MO-O-VE!" (See Allan Sekula and others' Long Beach poster for a longer articulation of the same idea.) Statistical graphs and charts were arrayed around the room, above eye level, in the gallery equivalent of "waste space." These graphs were interspersed with real estate ads touting luxurious living

in all those Manhattan high-rises with pretentious names; the prose and the poetry of profit—and loss.

Although homelessness was at the center of “If You Lived Here . . .,” it was the entire focus only in the second exhibition, “Homeless: The Street and Other Venues.” But it was critical, in this exhibition, not to reproduce the dichotomies that inform most discussions of homelessness—“us and them.” Here, the wall text was a quotation from urbanist Peter Marcuse: “Homelessness exists not because the system is not working but because this is the way it works.”

The third exhibition, “City: Visions and Revisions,” offered some movement toward solutions to urban problems: from new designs for urban infill housing, to housing for people with AIDS or for homeless women, to utopic visions of the cities. In this exhibition, the production of urban space itself was conceived of as a matter of economic and social decisions and as a complex “metasignification.” Some of the city revisions weren’t victories. The slogan on the wall was drawn from the French student uprising of May 1968: “Under the Cobblestones, the Beach.” Its romanticism may perhaps be excused by its reminder that the built environment is just that, and that, furthermore, the question of the body, of pleasure, and therefore of liberation cannot be divorced from rational considerations of urban life.

Throughout the project there was an effort to blur “inside” and “outside,” to abolish the distinction between the gallery space as a large, squarish room and as a world apart, a zone of aestheticism. Couches and rugs faced video monitors in various places in each exhibition, and billboards and other oversized works originally installed “in the street” were hung on the gallery wall. A reading room provided a wide variety of material, from flyers for demonstrations and protests to organizational brochures for tenants and homeless people, activists, and volunteers. There were also photo books and catalogues, historical studies, scholarly books and critiques, project descriptions.

The reading room was reconfigured and repainted for each show; in its original design, the walls were on wheels. In “Home Front” it was a solid little castle against one gallery wall and harbored a living room space. In “Homeless” it was a shelter of empty beds with a desk screwed to the external wall. In “City” it was a desk on the outside of a hut in the middle of the gallery. It held a black-shrouded installation about the eviction of Latin American workers from San Diego County’s brushland as tract towns spring up nearby—the waste space of displacement under the suburban street.

In the exhibition “Homeless,” in addition to the reading room resources, there was counseling provided by Homeward Bound, and lists of institutions from private and public shelters to soup kitchens and counseling and employment services were posted and available to be taken away.

Many works in the project employed the customary means of traditional documentary, namely, photography, film, and video. It is worth considering, therefore, how some of the makers positioned themselves in relation to the "documentary problem." Often the videotapes and films show little evidence of questioning; they simply get on with their business. In videotapes like Julia Keydel's *St. Francis Residence* and Arlyn Gajilan's *Not Just a Number*, for example, the interview format is well-adapted to allowing the unheard to speak about their lives. Other films and videotapes were directly activist. For embattled tenants, *Don't Move, Fight Back* (made in conjunction with Strycker's Bay tenants' group in upper Manhattan); *How to Pull a Rent Strike* and *Techos y Derechos* (both by Tami Gold and Steve Krinsky for East Orange, New Jersey's Shelterforce); and *Clinton Coalition of Concern* (made by Brian Connell, a videomaker who is also a member of the coalition) are rallying tapes, informing people about others who are fighting or have fought successfully to save or improve their homes and providing a set of steps to follow.

Even failures can be instructive. Lost struggles are represented in the films, *The Fall of the I-Hotel*, by Curtis Choy and Chonk Moonhunter (a hotel housing primarily long-term elderly Filipino residents is lost to gentrification in downtown San Francisco), George Corsetti's *Poletown Lives!* (a working-class, largely Polish neighborhood in Detroit falls to a proposed auto plant), and Pablo Frascioni and Nancy Salzer's *Survival of a Small City* (gentrification displaces poor and working-class nonwhite residents of a former mill town in Connecticut).

Perhaps questioning documentary's historic reliance on physiognomic evidence, Mark Berghash's photographs showed very large, tight closeups of people's faces. First-person texts or audiotapes of the subjects were included. Some were of people in terrible circumstances, such as homelessness, and others were of well-situated people, but we don't know who is whom. Bob McKeown employed traditional social-documentary strategies in photographing the formation of the Homeless Union in Wayne County, Michigan. But the Urban Center for Photography, of which McKeown is a member, collectively produced a different kind of work, in which very large photos of people and buildings were placed in downtown Detroit, along with the stenciled legend "Demolished by Neglect."

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in all those Manhattan high-rises with pretentious names; the prose and the poetry of profit—and loss.

Although homelessness was at the center of “If You Lived Here . . .,” it was the entire focus only in the second exhibition, “Homeless: The Street and Other Venues.” But it was critical, in this exhibition, not to reproduce the dichotomies that inform most discussions of homelessness—“us and them.” Here, the wall text was a quotation from urbanist Peter Marcuse: “Homelessness exists not because the system is not working but because this is the way it works.”

The third exhibition, “City: Visions and Revisions,” offered some movement toward solutions to urban problems: from new designs for urban infill housing, to housing for people with AIDS or for homeless women, to utopic visions of the cities. In this exhibition, the production of urban space itself was conceived of as a matter of economic and social decisions and as a complex “metasignification.” Some of the city revisions weren’t victories. The slogan on the wall was drawn from the French student uprising of May 1968: “Under the Cobblestones, the Beach.” Its romanticism may perhaps be excused by its reminder that the built environment is just that, and that, furthermore, the question of the body, of pleasure, and therefore of liberation cannot be divorced from rational considerations of urban life.

Throughout the project there was an effort to blur “inside” and “outside,” to abolish the distinction between the gallery space as a large, squarish room and as a world apart, a zone of aestheticism. Couches and rugs faced video monitors in various places in each exhibition, and billboards and other oversized works originally installed “in the street” were hung on the gallery wall. A reading room provided a wide variety of material, from flyers for demonstrations and protests to organizational brochures for tenants and homeless people, activists, and volunteers. There were also photo books and catalogues, historical studies, scholarly books and critiques, project descriptions.

The reading room was reconfigured and repainted for each show; in its original design, the walls were on wheels. In “Home Front” it was a solid little castle against one gallery wall and harbored a living room space. In “Homeless” it was a shelter of empty beds with a desk screwed to the external wall. In “City” it was a desk on the outside of a hut in the middle of the gallery. It held a black-shrouded installation about the eviction of Latin American workers from San Diego County’s brushland as tract towns spring up nearby—the waste space of displacement under the suburban street.

In the exhibition “Homeless,” in addition to the reading room resources, there was counseling provided by Homeward Bound, and lists of institutions from private and public shelters to soup kitchens and counseling and employment services were posted and available to be taken away.

Many works in the project employed the customary means of traditional documentary, namely, photography, film, and video. It is worth considering, therefore, how some of the makers positioned themselves in relation to the "documentary problem." Often the videotapes and films show little evidence of questioning; they simply get on with their business. In videotapes like Julia Keydel's *St. Francis Residence* and Arlyn Gajilan's *Not Just a Number*, for example, the interview format is well-adapted to allowing the unheard to speak about their lives. Other films and videotapes were directly activist. For embattled tenants, *Don't Move, Fight Back* (made in conjunction with Strycker's Bay tenants' group in upper Manhattan); *How to Pull a Rent Strike* and *Techos y Derechos* (both by Tami Gold and Steve Krinsky for East Orange, New Jersey's Shelterforce); and *Clinton Coalition of Concern* (made by Brian Connell, a videomaker who is also a member of the coalition) are rallying tapes, informing people about others who are fighting or have fought successfully to save or improve their homes and providing a set of steps to follow.

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*Lodgers . . . in the West 47th Street Police Station* into a sculptural relief whose conceit centers on the interpretation of the facial expression of a principal female figure. Coincidentally, this photo from the late 1890s was hung in the entryway to the complex tenement-kitchen installation by the Chinatown History Project. That work provided a detailed examination of the narratives of life, historical and contemporary, on the Lower East Side and Chinatown. To develop its argument, the group included wall texts, a hand-out for gallery-goers (reproduced here), and a slide-and-tape show on the area's different groups and on current tenant organizing.

In many works, perhaps especially in videotapes, the subjects speak about and in some cases produce works about their lives. I'm thinking now of *2371 Second Avenue* and *Life in the G*, videotapes made by teenage Hispanic New Yorkers in conjunction with the Educational Video Center; and the photos and documents produced by photographer Marilyn Nance of her city-owned building in Brooklyn, that provided part of the tenants' court case.

In an entirely other sort of instance of the self-production of meaning, the group Homeward Bound maintained an office in the gallery (and participated in the forums), as advocates for themselves and other homeless people. Their portraits, taken the preceding summer by photographer Alcina Horstman during their hundred-day encampment in front of City Hall—during which they registered passers-by to vote—hung in their office area. These images, using an artfied documentary approach, meant something very different in that office space. Homeward Bound's organizing efforts include both substantive movements toward bettering their lives and advocacy with municipal agencies, along with attempts to reposition themselves in relation to the reigning images of homeless people. Most homeless people aren't in a position to take on these roles.

### **Focus on New York**

The largest body of work in "If You Lived Here . . ." centered on New York City, particularly Manhattan, and this book concentrates that focus even more. New York is the largest city in the United States and Canada. New York is (still) a renter's city, an immigrant city, a city of great populations of color (including the largest number of African Americans on the continent), a city with a strong history of unionism and progressive politics but also of the uglier face of class struggle, such as police brutality and patrician rule, race riots, efforts to divide and contain immigrant populations and to segregate the city by race and class.

New York is also the home of Wall Street, which services international finance capital. In the past decade-and-a-half, New York has become a city

ruled largely by banking and real estate interests. New York is an international city, with exclusive midtown *pieds à terre* for the jet set and less enticing accommodations for its immigrant groups. And New York is a city of vast abandonments, of decayed tenement stock that was never quite fit for habitation, and of glitzy new high-rise palaces and recently gentrified neighborhoods. Although New York is a city with strong rent protections, these protections have been eroded over the past couple of decades, and market rents have soared to the highest in the nation.

Under the first great modern urban-planning despot, Robert Moses, New York provided a model for the rest of the nation, not only for grand-scale refiguring of the urban environment, but for the deployment of egalitarian rhetoric to justify social engineering ultimately devoted to the segregation of classes. Just as Moses' projects provided shaping models, more contemporary projects and situations, such as Battery Park City and the Times Square redevelopment on the upscale side and the Lower East Side and the South Bronx on the down, are exemplary.

New York doesn't just mean Midtown Manhattan. Although the four other boroughs (and the rest of Manhattan) have their share of expensive housing, suburban tracts, and gentrified districts, in three of them—the Bronx, Brooklyn, and in pockets of Queens—the poor, the nonwhite, the underhoused, and the homeless are collected. Not surprisingly, then, discussions of New York generally take in only Manhattan, with the spectral Other world represented by the South Bronx (collapse) and occasionally Brooklyn (a borough of Others) added in. Thousands of artists (and other middle-class people, including many whites) have wound up in Brooklyn, but Brooklyn—which would be the fifth largest city in the United States had it retained its separate status—doesn't figure in most discussions of urbanism, let alone of the art world. (Willie Birch, Erik Lewis, Marilyn Nance, Juan Sanchez, Dan Wiley, some of the makers of *Metropolitan Avenue* and of *People's Firehouse #1* are Brooklyn residents; of this list, the majority are people of color.) That lack is repeated in this volume.

New York, then, is a good model of a modern-day metropolis, and the way its living conditions are addressed, or not addressed, can serve as building blocks in wider explanations that can collect more than local examples.

New York, the center of the U.S. art world and the home of finance capital, is an appropriate place to tackle the intersection of art and real property. These shows were held in a gallery in Soho, an art district that forms part of the largest concentration of art-world institutions in the world. Soho—the first municipally mandated artist district—is a site of hypergentrification in a central urban area that has undergone several transformations of use in its hundred-and-fifty-year history. (The enameled lamppost texts designating Soho as a historic area begin with cast iron architecture,

then relate that artists moved into the district in the early 1970s, and end by describing it as “now a lively residential and shopping area.”)

During “If You Lived Here . . .” some people asked, “Why are you holding this project in Soho?” The question was asked only by people involved in art. And there could be no answer for those who feel that Soho is a true enclave, the Vatican of art, physically located in, but otherwise exempt from, the rules of New York. For those not involved in art, the question of showing in Soho may seem an incomprehensible quibble. Still, the Soho question is important, and it relates not simply to the gallery world in the abstract but to the project sponsor, the Dia Art Foundation. Dia established itself in the 1970s as an *haute moderniste* private foundation devoted to individual (white) (male) modernist artists, providing them with work space and generous stipends. Dia purchased a number of buildings and sites in Manhattan and elsewhere (as in Marfa, Texas), especially in Soho and Tribeca, becoming part of the real estate/art institution nexus. (Although most of its holdings have been sold, a reincorporated Dia now owns, in addition to its five Lower Manhattan properties, a site in Quemado, New Mexico, and a couple in New England.) It seemed important, therefore, to take the opportunity to challenge the paradigm of art production and distribution that Dia in its earlier incarnation had presupposed and which still clings to its exhibition practices, in step with most of the art world.

Earlier I remarked that the project meant to depart from the art gallery pattern. It appeared necessary to effect a significant transformation of the Dia gallery. Its front, with frosted windows and gray paint, was so self-effacing that it was common for intended visitors, and even for me, to walk right on by. I put “Come On In—We’re Home” in large red letters on the doors, and ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) put up posters on AIDS and homelessness. For “Homeless,” housing activist and artist Stuart Nicholson painted a text comparing shelters to refugee camps on the sidewalk in front of the door. In the interior, I got away from the emptied-out look by filling it up.

Many commentators mentioned the transgressive character of these crowded exhibitions, and some seemed to miss the pristine quality of the modernist space, feeling intimidated by the volume of work and the reading room. But *who* was feeling intimidated? For some art-world professionals the project seemed to represent an outright rejection of art. Although by and large the work in the show was authored, framed, and neatly hung, accompanied by white labels, the show’s organizational principles depended on other issues as I have described them here. The shows’ inclusiveness annoyed some writers well known for their systematic dismissal of modernism’s presuppositions.



Donald Trump strokes new model of Trump City, planned for Manhattan's West Side, 1988.

The static and unconscious presuppositions about the art audience that some critics brought to these shows surprised me. Despite twenty years of rethinking the art system, a spotty amnesia has broken out in this regard, and some have forgotten that the art-world audience isn't born but constantly constructed and reconstructed, laboriously, just like any constituency. Many people, including artists and art students, come to Soho; they came to the Dia gallery, and they saw the shows. In addition, the diverse groups and people who made up these shows and forums brought a significant portion of the audience: church workers, elected representatives, New York City schoolchildren, college students, architects, urban planners, activists, advocates, homeless people, volunteers, filmmakers and videomakers, painters, poets, muralists, sculptors, photojournalists, and art photographers. Each event in the project—shows, poetry readings, film screenings, workshops, forums—was separately advertised; each brought interested people. Some of the project fliers didn't mention the art connection. Articles in mainstream newspapers left art out of it. Heterogeneity engendered heterogeneity, and people brought their friends.

This book is made up primarily of excerpts and re-presentations of the forums and a small number of the exhibition projects (especially those centering on New York City, as noted), along with supporting material. This book could not function as a catalogue for the project, as worthwhile as

that would have been. It is best seen as an accompaniment. Among the projects that have been unfortunately slighted here, because of difficulties of representation and reproduction, were the films and videotapes, each of which had its own argument to make. As a videomaker myself, I am particularly confounded by this.

Many works and many groups, activists, and speakers that should have been included in this project were not; many artists, many community groups, many videotapes and films, many poets weren't included because I didn't know about them in time or for a variety of other reasons. The heart of the project was homelessness, and many issues crucial to a full consideration of the problems of urban life were absent. The project did not, for example, take on issues of architectural design or the conception of the interior directly, especially as they relate to women's lives, a matter of great interest to me. Nevertheless, I hope that the project, which includes this book, plays a small part in assisting the much wider activism that includes artists and that includes complex analyses of the spaces and conditions of modern life and identity.

One of the pleasures of completing a project comes in acknowledging the shaping role played by other people. When I began this project, I had no idea what it would take to see it through, and I owe more thanks than I could possibly render here. I will begin by thanking the artists, videomakers, filmmakers, activists, community groups, and speakers who participated in the shows and meetings, and the many tenants' groups who provided material for the reading room. Above all, I thank Dan Wiley, without whose truly tireless labor, both intellectual and physical, this project would not have been the same and much of it would never have been accomplished.

I also thank Yvonne Rainer for her vision and strong support. I thank Lucy Lippard, Dee Dee Halleck, and Fred Wilson for their formative discussions and leads, and Rich Jackman, an unfailing bridge to many things. I am grateful to Doug Ashford and Group Material for a host of reasons. Thanks to Media Network, Deep Dish, and Louis Massiah for help with video and film. I am grateful to Cenén and to Nelson Prime and Larry Locke of Homeward Bound, whose friendship and good sense were crucial to the project. Thanks also to Mel Rosenthal; Brian Goldfarb, Mario Asaro, and Skylar Switzer-Kohler of Artists/Teachers Concerned; Paul Castrucci, Andrew Castrucci, and Thom Corn of Bullet Space; Rachael Romero; Cabell Heyward; Jamelie Hassan; the women at the Oxford City Council Housing Office; Ray at Simon House, Oxford; Nan Rubin at the Funding Exchange; the Public Art Fund; the Albert Kunstadter Family Foundation; the North Star Foundation; Paul Gorman of WBAI-FM and Listeners' Action on

Homelessness and Housing; Betti-Sue Hertz; Troy West; Craig Pleasants; Rob Neuwirth; Neil Smith; Doug Turetsky and *City Limits*; Betty Lorwin; Met Council; Tom Gogan; Mario Chioldi; the women at the Food and Hunger Hotline; the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services; Annie Troy of Emmaus House; the office of Franz Leichter; and ACT UP. My gratitude to Rutgers graduate students Phyllis Carlin, Lynn Masterson, Stephanie Regen, Donna Stackhouse, and Jim Supanick; and to Winston Robinson, Jonathan Waterbury, and Sandy the Scot.

At Dia, Charles Wright's support was constant. Gary Garrels ran the show and kept it honest, and Karen Ramspacher and Isabel Stude organized everything. Joan Duddy was ever-ready and unflappable. Deb Meehan's presence in the gallery was a wonderful asset. This book owes its form to the hard work and sophisticated understanding of Karen Kelly, Phil Mariani, and Brian Wallis, and to the design abilities of Bethany Johns. It owes its existence to Thatcher Bailey of Bay Press. I am grateful for the assistance of Oren Slor, a photographer of great skill and patience, John Sprague, Eric Bemisderfer, Laura Fields, Margaret Thatcher, Fernanda Araujo, Camilla Fallon, Sarah Rees, and Jim Schaeufele. Rob Constantine, John Shuman, and crew inventively catered our openings. Dee Dee Halleck, with Molly Kovel and Nadja Millner Larsen, additionally provided soup, bread, and good cheer at the "Homeless" opening, while Emmaus House singers nourished us as well.

I dedicate this book to the women around the world who organize their buildings and their blocks and their neighborhoods to secure decent living conditions for everyone and to maintain a sense of place. I would especially like to mention the women of the West Bank and the South African townships such as Capetown's Manenburg, but also the women of Greenpoint, Brooklyn (who know a toilet when they live in it and also how to get it cleaned up).

Here I would like to remember Eleanor Bumpurs, a grandmother who was shot and killed in her home by New York City police who were called to eject her forcibly from her city-owned apartment for nonpayment of rent.

I would also like to remember Bruce Bailey, a contentious fighter for New York City tenants' rights, whose dismembered body was found in the Bronx.

I would also like to remember Mitch Snyder, who led the struggle to recapture the lives and dignity of homeless people; he put moral outrage to work so homeless people could better help themselves.



Door to the entrance of the Dia Art Foundation, 77 Wooster Street, during the "If You Lived Here . . ." exhibitions.



Installation view of "Home Front," organized by Martha Rosler, February 11-March 18, 1989.

## ALTERNATIVE SPACE

"If You Lived Here . . .," a series of exhibitions and panel discussions organized by Martha Rosler for the Dia Art Foundation, was not only *about* but explicitly *in* the city. The project's title appropriated a slogan from real estate advertisements designed to entice middle-class commuters back to the city. "If you lived here," the advertisements say, "you'd be home now." Relocated to an art gallery in the middle of a neighborhood that was itself formed by the "back-to-the-city" movement, the phrase invited gallery-goers to reflect on what it means for art to move into an urban space.

Rosler asserted at once the situated, rather than detached, nature of her activity by referring to the concept of place—"here"—and in this way drawing attention to her project's own concrete location: Soho, geographic and symbolic heart of New York's contemporary art world and model for newly established art centers in cities across the country. Speaking directly to the exhibitions' visitors—"you"—the title thwarted still further the illusion that the show occupied a universal, aesthetic terrain. The mode of address announced, instead, that the project's site included, in fact depended on, the presence of an audience. Yet the phrase, "If you lived here . . ." recognized the audience not by virtue of that audience's existence in absolute space, but by its position within a spatial system formed through relationships—"here" as distinguished from "there." The title thus suggested two key factors that constitute physical terrains as social spaces: difference and use. Differentiation from other sites, rather than intrinsic characteristics, endows social spaces with distinct identities and values. In addition, members of particular social groups perceive and use these spaces: they visit them regularly, carry on interrelations there, and interpret reality in their cultural settings.

In Soho the most conspicuous group of users is, of course, the "art world" whose attendance at "If You Lived Here . . ." was hardly conditional: it *does* live here, defining, not simply inhabiting, the neighborhood as a social space. Art institutions, Rosler's title implied, are integrally connected to the spaces they occupy. Exploring the ramifications of that relationship, "If You Lived Here . . ." investigated how space is socially manufactured as well as socially perceived and used. More precisely, through the project's exploration of "the production of space," Rosler sought to transform conventional perceptions and uses of the site, and thereby produce an alternative social space.

With installations and discussions devoted to themes of housing, homelessness, real estate, and urban planning, "If You Lived Here . . ." identified the socioeconomic forces and institutions that dominate the uses of the city in this era of urban redevelopment; the project emphatically challenged the notion that urban spatial arrangements express the unified interests of a coherent society. As the exhibition site was linked to a wider, more complex spatial network, the show demonstrated that, instead, urban organization is a conflictual and uneven process—in short, a political one. Rosler's show identified the broad yet specific circumstances of spatial production as the historical context of an art district. Because, at the same time, it underlined the project's and the viewer's place within those conditions, "If You Lived Here . . ." posed a timely question: How is the city an issue for art?

### Art and the City

Over the last decade, as art, artists, and art institutions have been steadily incorporated into urban redevelopment programs, this question has arisen regularly in specialized art publications as well as in the mass media. It is, however, not completely new. In the history of modernism, especially as it has been translated into art history, the city occupies a central role. Realism, impressionism, cubism, futurism, expressionism, indeed modernist painting in its entirety, are all traditionally linked to the growth of the metropolis. Conventionally, art historians classify all relationships between art and the city according to a taxonomy comprised of four standard categories: the city as subject matter for art; public art or art works in the city; the city itself as a work of art; and the urban environment as an influence exercised over the emotional or perceptual "experience" of artists, an experience, in turn, "expressed" or "reflected" in works of art.

The discursive nature of these categories and of the neatly ordered model of society they invoke is typically dissembled by the discipline's empiricist presuppositions. Art history purports to simply discover, rather than to construct, the objects it studies—art, the city, society. Its description of the relations between art and the city, therefore, appear as *necessary* ones. Yet the fundamental tenets of modernist criticism, diffused throughout art historical discourse, simultaneously sever these links at a theoretical level. Modernist dogma holds that art's principal ontological condition is its possession of a transhistorical aesthetic essence. All connections between art and the city drawn by aestheticist tendencies within art history are, in the end, articulated as a single relationship: timeless and spaceless works of art ultimately transcend the very urban conditions that purportedly "influenced" them, or that are "expressed," "reflected," or "transparently" depicted in

them. By definition, then, art's social function is to remain outside the city.

Social art history departs from such accounts of "city painting" by emphasizing art's reliance on, rather than independence from, the urban "context." However, social art history merely replaces the model of autonomy with one of "interaction" between art and the city, maintaining an essential division between the two. Traditional marxist interpretations, sometimes called "the new social art history," often introduce political categories—such as class—into aesthetic debates. But they, too, posit a fundamental origin and determinate of all meaning, both urban and aesthetic, locating "the political" in a single governing sphere—the economic. Marxist art history thus substitutes an *a priori* separation of art from the city with a predetermined reduction of both to the level of economic relations.<sup>1</sup>

While art historical explanations of the urban aesthetic have remained for the most part committed to aestheticist preconceptions about art, they have also uncritically reproduced the equally idealist presuppositions about the city that prevailed, until recently, within another profession—urban studies. For years this interdisciplinary field (composed of urban sociology, geography, political economy, urban planning) was dominated by concepts that naturalized its object of study—the city—as a transhistorical form. These concepts explained urban spatial organization as the consequence of inevitable biologicistic, social, or technological processes rather than as the product of the historical relations structuring particular societies or as a social relation itself. From this urban studies perspective, the organization of space—at least "good" city form—fulfills a coherent society's "natural" needs or harmonizes its "essential" divisions. Absorbed by mainstream art history and criticism, such naturalizing ideas about the city reinforced an approach to art-city relationships that was already taken for granted within the discipline. Viewing the two elements—art and the city—as fundamentally separate, mainstream art discourse also adopted an essentializing explanation of each individual element. By endowing the concepts of art and the city with intrinsic identities, art discourse ensured that they remained intact as distinct and separable entities.

Modernist criticism, then, predetermines and limits any response to the question, "How is the city an issue for art?" Because modernist critics posit, on the one hand, art's transcendence of social relations and, on the other, the inevitability of existing urban arrangements, their formulations of the problem perform a dual function: they tacitly sanction, as self-evidently beneficial, art's involvement in urbanism and they accept as natural, if regrettable, the conditions of urban life. Given these legitimating effects of modernist criticism, it is hardly surprising to discover that support for current urban policy often accompanies critical support for a cultural policy, which, when it does interrogate the relationship between art and the con-

temporary city, adheres firmly to modernist doctrine. When such criticism questions the relationship, it can always supply conclusive answers.

Surely unsurpassed for the brevity of its inquiry and efficiency of response is Roger Kimball's January 1987 article in the *New Criterion* reporting on several panel discussions held at the Whitney Museum under the rubric "Issues in Contemporary Art."<sup>2</sup> One panelist had suggested that the widespread urban phenomenon of homelessness might constitute an issue in contemporary art, a suggestion predicated on a prior understanding of one type of relationship—an economic one—between art institutions and the city.<sup>3</sup> Since the gentrification of certain city neighborhoods, such as New York's "East Village," has been facilitated by the raised real estate values and enhanced image accruing from newly created art galleries, homeless residents who have been displaced through gentrification form one of the social circumstances underlying the existence of such galleries.<sup>4</sup> "Of course," Kimball nonetheless remarked about the Whitney panelist, "he never specified just what the homeless might have to do with art—how could he have done so, since they have nothing at all to do with art?"

A year later, another neoconservative critic, Eric Gibson, voiced what at first may appear to be a diametrically opposed opinion about the relationship between art and the city. Writing about public art, Gibson applauded a type of sculpture that "accommodates itself to" as opposed to that which "takes over its site."<sup>5</sup> He thus set up a false alternative, a strategy that enabled him to avoid a consideration of the character and function of the urban site itself. While seeming to acknowledge the needs and desires of city residents, this neoconservative formulation actually recognizes no role for residents in the creation of the city, limiting participation to officially sanctioned uses of spaces provided for "the public." Public sculpture that affirms rather than calls attention to (let alone contests) the dominant construction of urban sites becomes, through this sleight of hand, "democratic" art. Gibson especially promoted work that has elsewhere been called the "new public art"—useful objects produced by artists for redeveloped urban spaces or the design of such spaces themselves.<sup>6</sup> "In fact," he asserted, "public art needs to be seen as a function not of art, but of urbanism. It needs to be thought of in relation to, rather than insulated from the numerous other functions, activities and imperatives that condition the fabric of city life."<sup>7</sup>

A superficial comparison of Gibson's statement with Kimball's dismissal of any relationship between homelessness and art may seem to reveal an internal split within neoconservative cultural writing. After all, the first takes for granted art's separation from urban conditions, while the other insists on the primacy of those conditions. However, both seek to remove all human activity—whether urban or aesthetic—from the sphere of social practice. For Gibson, the "functions, activities and imperatives that condition the fabric of

city life" are not socially produced; they are, instead, understood technocratically as "social problems" to be managed by the provision of facilities to fulfill "essential" human needs. From the technocratic perspective, the objective needs that determine the city's character can be met through the deployment of technical expertise. Artists, too, join the ranks of the city's technocrats. Art relinquishes its isolation in order to participate in the urban environment by providing "amenities," by "humanizing" or "beautifying" the city. But the urban environment, like art before it, is removed from the political realm. *Neither*, it seems, has anything to do with homelessness.

Other critics and historians, less driven by overt political agendas, also participate in the "public art boom" by generating scholarly articles that purport to examine the relation between art and the city.<sup>8</sup> Frequently, however, these writers reiterate presuppositions about the essential detachment of art from the urban spaces it occupies—even while exploring their "interaction." Public art, they contend, may be influenced by, even embroiled in, "non-art" issues. Yet pure "art issues" can be extracted from these entanglements. "Art issues have to do primarily with style and artistic intent and their appropriateness to a site,"<sup>9</sup> writes one historian. This statement glosses over the obvious fact that to include site *as* a requisite art issue is to render ambiguous the boundary between the art object and its context—between, in other words, art and non-art issues. Instead, this approach reasserts a faith in the "pure art experience" and perpetuates the conventional and hierarchical division between art and the social, a division maintained by relegating the social world to the status of a backdrop. In the end, this view only legitimates the "new public art" industry while propagating an academic literature.

Even criticism that is discontent with these roles and with the art/society dualism on which they are predicated frequently continues to take for granted that art's sites are separable from the city. Vestiges of this assumption linger, for example, in a favorable review of "If You Lived Here . . ." that nevertheless concluded with the observation that

*the gallery setting, with its preselected audience and social isolation, provided a constant reminder of the continuing gap between art and life. The real problems and the real solutions remained, and remain, out there—geographically only a few steps beyond the gallery door, but in practical terms, on another planet.*<sup>10</sup>

Insofar as it raises the topic of art institutions and their audience, this statement addresses questions that are indeed fundamental to Rosler's project. But its resignation about art institutions' rigid separation from "real" social problems endows these poles with a remarkable stability. Like the aestheticist doctrine it so clearly rejects, this criticism ends up preserving a classical op-



Installation view of "Home Front," organized by Martha Rosler, February 11-March 18, 1989.



Installation view of "Homeless: The Street and Other Venues," organized by Martha Rosler, April 1-19, 1989.



Installation views of "Homeless: The Street and Other Venues," organized by Martha Rosler, April 1-29, 1989.

position between pure culture and social engagement.

Within the terms of this opposition, art can, indeed does, exist outside the city. In its new incarnation, however, as a quality not to be celebrated but deplored, art's categorical isolation stems from a new source. It is no longer that art "possesses" independent and eternal aesthetic essences, since this criticism recognizes that aesthetic institutions are social products. Nonetheless, their unvarying and impenetrable status remains intact, originating anew from a solidity that is attributed to society itself. And, in turn, that solidity no longer derives from humanist notions that posit natural determinants of social arrangements but from a hypostatized image of the social itself as an order fixed by historical forces and governed by a single factor. This order is determinable, composed of stable elements, the lucid sum of equally intelligible parts. This preconceived image of the social—presented not as a representation but as "social reality"—supports an entrenched belief that art's isolated position is both total and irrevocable. But the basis of that isolation shifts from the realm of aesthetic to one of social essences. If such criticism abandons modernist beliefs in aesthetic autonomy, it does so only to bind art to another fixed place, this time a position within a deterministic model of society.

Against aestheticism, this criticism asserts a belief in art's social character, but unfortunately it also draws rather narrow conclusions from the social constructionist thesis that has been developed in recent art theory and closes down certain potentialities this thesis had opened up for art practice. For when, beginning in the late 1960s, art chose "to be worldly,"<sup>11</sup> it did so in order to demonstrate the *fluidity*, not the stability, of aesthetic meaning and institutions. Instead of inhering in self-contained and therefore trans-historical objects that exist in autonomous and neutral spaces, meaning was recognized as a contingent and constantly mutating process of cultural attribution. Arising from a conjuncture of the work, a public, and an institutional frame, meaning was redefined as a function of the social and historical context in which art is produced and received. This understanding subverted the apparent closure of either artworks or institutions. Art was seen not simply as an object, or even, alternatively, as a process or idea, but as a signifying practice. Art was seen as meaning *producing*, not passively expressive or transparently communicative. Only then was it possible to understand how fully embedded in social life art is. Art and criticism could no longer purport to comment on the world from some distanced spiritual realm, and neither could their "truth" be measured by its correspondence to an exterior social reality. Art is social in the first instance. With meaning understood to be geographically, historically, and socially situated, rather than guaranteed by an underlying and stable reality, art may have lost some of the prestige it enjoyed under modernism but it has gained a far greater

potential: to participate in the creation of social life. In fact, there was no choice; art is never really outside the city.

The insistence that art *is* outside—that galleries are irrevocably isolated from real social problems and their audiences always preselected—issues from misunderstandings about materialist criticism's basic premises. It also ignores the amplification and problematization of this criticism over the last two decades. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, for instance, artists challenged idealist beliefs in the existence of a universal art public composed of autonomous individuals unfettered by social constraints. As one component of what eventually became a multifaceted critique of audience and reception, a small group of artists (including Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren, Adrian Piper, and Martha Rosler) revealed that art audiences are a sociologically definable entity, one composed not of "citizens of art" but of privileged subjects of class and race. These investigations also suggested that art museums are not simply sites for the preservation of aesthetic "truth" but are institutions that preserve privilege. In that sense, they are sites of political conflict.

The attention that these and other investigations drew to questions of audience and reception (along with the important complications introduced into materialist aesthetic discourse by psychoanalytic theories of viewing *subjects*) provoked increasingly complex analyses of the exhibition audience's identity. As a result, constituencies for art exhibitions can no longer be assumed, as they once were, to be a clearly intelligible, coherent, or homogeneous group unified by membership in sociological categories anymore than they were once "harmonized" by their universal aesthetic sensibility. Far from being defined by a single determining factor, the identity of individual members of even the "preselected" art audience is not easily determinable. For one thing, individuals occupy positions in a multitude of social relations, and these sets of relations are not automatically ordered into hierarchical levels of importance. Moreover, each plural position can itself never be internally complete nor separable from others precisely because, possessing no unchanging essence, it is established only through relations with other positions. These combinations themselves differ at changing historical moments so that, it seems, no *necessary* relation exists among them.

Increasingly intricate formulations of social identity and of the identity of "the social" steadily erode, all but destroy, lingering essentialist ideas about audiences. Preconstituted audiences for art exhibitions can no longer be presumed to exist. Perhaps the most radical consequence of this statement is the awareness that if a subject's identity, formed through representations, is always in process, it is effected—partially constituted—by the forms in which exhibitions address viewers. But, apart from such questions of subjectivity, the rejection of a belief in fixed audiences also means that when artists who are interested in encouraging public debate take responsibility for

the *creation* of publics as an integral part of their practice, they may actively try to reach new audiences, to bring constituencies with them. For Martha Rosler, the audience is "a shifting entity whose composition depends not only on who is out there but on whom you want to reach with a particular type of work, and why."<sup>12</sup>

When, in addition to overestimating the stability of art audiences, critics accept the isolation of art institutions from "real" urban problems as an equally stable social fact, they forget that the goal of materialist art practices has always been to challenge that seclusion precisely by exposing it as a fiction in the first place. Needless to say, these materialist art practices—site-specificity, institutional critique, critiques of representation—did not aim to abandon dominant spaces for the kinds of institutions that are frequently called alternative spaces (but are often simply alternative conduits either to the marketplace or to a place in the canon of artistic taste). But neither did they posit an alternative to the gallery in the form of a pure and neutral space outside "corrupting" influences. Contextual art practices did not, in short, seek alternative means to fetishize the aesthetic realm. Rather, they sought to reveal and intervene in the social relations that structure all spaces and that are, reciprocally, structured by spatial configurations.

Fusing social and spatial relations, these new aesthetic strategies reformulated the problem of "context," previously considered a "container" or backdrop for art, into a scrutiny of the conditions that *constitute* the identity of artistic texts, subjects, and spaces. Precisely because isolation was understood as a constructed relation of exclusion rather than an intrinsic attribute of institutions, it was also revealed as a fragile, if powerful, identity, one that could only be preserved by continually dividing the aesthetic space and expelling the conflicts and differences that threatened its coherence. If the initial constitution of aesthetic spaces is understood as a process of spatial differentiation, isolation can never be complete. Art practices that directed attention toward their environments and incorporated an ever-expanding network of sociospatial contexts into an artwork's immediate site did so in order to create a genuine alternative space, one that would restore the viewer's ability to perceive relations that had been severed on the register of appearances and in idealist aesthetic thought.

Only with the growth of an aesthetic discourse that explored how socio-spatial relations both constitute the identity of art institutions and are produced within them did it become possible to respond to the question "How is the city an issue for art?" in a way that did not either separate the two elements in advance or reduce culture to an expression of a social reality produced elsewhere. Still, despite such profound destabilizations, the polarity between cultural and social space continuously reconstitutes itself in less recognizable guises. Martha Rosler's exhibition "If You Lived Here . . .,"

which openly challenged this opposition, did not, however, escape it. Rosler's project evinced a pronounced ambiguity in the attitude it adopted toward its site. Rosler installed her project in the middle of an art district and, as we shall see, threatened the art gallery's apparent seclusion by highlighting its relation to urban political conflicts. Thus she not only attempted to reach, by virtue of the project's subject matter and format, people outside the usual art audiences (that is, to construct a new audience), she also competed for the attention of the art press and regular visitors to Soho galleries, encouraging them to view critically the urban space in which they circulate. Yet because the project rejected so emphatically the aesthetic conventions of gallery and media presentation, establishing a relationship of pure opposition to its site, it staked a claim to a certain purity of its own. Just as decisively, though, it rejected this claim. Extending the possibilities opened up by materialist aesthetics, "If You Lived Here . . ." articulated two forms of spatial practice: resistance to the uses of aesthetic space and opposition to the dominant construction of the city.

### **The Production of Space**

"If You Lived Here . . ." combined theories about the social production of art with critical discourses about the formation of the city. These discourses, generated within the interdisciplinary field of urban studies, examine what is called "the social production of urban space." Far from univocal, literature about the production of space is marked by intense debates. But its principal tenets, established in the 1970s, parallel in important ways those of recent critical aesthetics. Materialist urban theory does not seek to understand its object of study—urban spatial form—as an objective entity defined by natural, technological, mechanical, or other inevitable evolutions. Rather, it defines space as an object that is organized and endowed with meaning through social processes and views urbanization as the spatial component of social change. Shaped by prevailing political relations, the production of the city is not, as official explanations hold, the spatial expression of the needs of a unified society or of one marked by inevitable conflicts. But to avoid separating space and society by merely replacing the essentialist models that formerly dominated urban sociology—human ecology and environmental determinism—with a new model that postulates a one-way determination of urban form by an exterior social world, space has been approached not only as the product of social relations but also as an arena for the reproduction of social relations and as itself such a relation. The city is not only formed by society, but can be considered the very material form of society.

Coined by the marxist urban theorist Henri Lefebvre to describe the organization of production and accumulation over vast spatial networks during

the era of late capitalism, the phrase “the production of space” has been steadily elaborated upon—not least, by Lefebvre himself. Continuing to investigate how socioeconomic relations motivate the built form of physical cities, urban studies—influenced by cultural theory—has also begun to consider the production of the city as an idea, a visual image, and a representation, that is, as a signifying practice itself productive of meaning and subjectivity. Not surprisingly, some prominent theorists have responded by attempting to establish a closure in urban analysis at the level of political economy. They utilize the contributions of marxist urban geography to defend a social theory that privileges the economic realm as the objective, unifying foundation of all social relations, cultural mutations, and political practices.<sup>11</sup> The casualties of this kind of totalization are many. They include new social theories and movements that refuse subordination to the predetermined unity, new objects of political analysis—language, vision, knowledge—as well as cultural practices reflecting on the construction of subjectivity. Within urban studies itself, the defense of a traditional marxist position inhibits the development of nonreductive approaches to the city, which, after all, Lefebvre defined precisely by its character as the location of the unexpected. In a Lefebvrian model, meaning does not arise from objective economic structures but from the use of the city in the course of everyday life. The city cannot, therefore, be reduced, either simply or through contrived mediations, to the economic circumstances of its production alone. Obviously, then, there can be no single or comprehensive formulation of art’s relation to the city and certainly no definitive program for unified spatial resistance. How can there be if, just as there is no determinate identity for art, there is no single or fixed city? Forms of resistance or opposition depend on how the city is constructed discursively—whether, to name only one important distinction, it is studied as a visual space or as the object of political economy—and how diverse approaches intersect at given historical moments. They do not *necessarily* occupy a coherent theoretical space.

When it is detached from a unitarian mode of thought, political economy offers invaluable analyses of urban processes. It provides highly developed explanations of the way in which the imperatives of capital accumulation impel the production of distinctive spatial arrangements. By connecting urban redevelopment and gentrification to the global restructuring of late twentieth-century capitalism, political-economic accounts have dispelled prevalent myths about the accidental, natural, or beneficial nature of contemporary urbanization. Because they identify the contradictions inherent in these processes, such theories are necessary to any analysis that seeks to understand the extent to which the production of urban space is a conflictual operation and that hopes to understand the far-reaching political ramifications of its conflicts.

In his 1973 book, *Social Justice and the City*, urban geographer David Harvey identified the central contradiction of capitalist urbanization as that between the social character of land and its private ownership and control as a commodity. As a collective resource, land fulfills needs that facilitate individual profit-seeking activities as well as social needs that surpass those of individual capitalists. Capital's social needs in relation to land include, for one, the use of land to maintain and reproduce a labor force through the provision of housing and services; such requirements are distinct from the demand of real estate capital to exploit land as a commodity for direct profit. Social needs also include capital's infrastructural requirements: transportation services; communication apparatuses; utilities; and a spatial organization that facilitates the production and circulation of capital, commodities, and information. Real estate capital, appropriating land for use as a commodity, also has social needs; it must, for example, be assured that external factors affecting the value of its land will be subject to social control. Given the urgency of its social needs, capital has an interest in socializing the control of land and relies on government intervention to do so. But although the fulfillment of social needs is as crucial to capitalism as the institution of private property, socialization also obstructs the profit-maximizing uses of property. Real estate, for instance, bent on maximizing profits from land as a commodity, is likely to come into conflict with other capital interests or with state interventions in land-use decisions that ensure the fulfillment of social needs. The phenomenon that political scientist Richard Foglesong calls "the property contradiction of capitalist urbanization" arises from the fact that private property both impedes attempts to socialize control of land and needs that socialization for its own profits.<sup>14</sup>

State intervention in the form of urban planning represents, according to Foglesong, an attempt to resolve the contradiction between land's social character and its private ownership. Yet this "solution" only submits the property contradiction to further contradictions: the contradictory nature of the state, expressed in what Foglesong calls the "capitalist-democracy contradiction." This capitalist-democracy contradiction springs, first, from the property contradiction which creates the original need for government regulation and, then, from a conflict between the economic and political structures of a democratic-capitalist society. The state under capitalism "reconciles" conflicting roles: it both facilitates capital's ability to maximize profits and attempts to maintain legitimacy as a democratic entity. "More specifically," in Foglesong's analysis, the capitalist-democracy contradiction "is a contradiction between the need to socialize the control of urban space to create the conditions for the maintenance of capitalism, on the one hand, and the danger to capital of truly socializing, that is democratizing, the control of urban land, on the other."<sup>15</sup> It follows from such an analysis that the



Installation views of "City: Visions and Revisions," organized by Martha Rosler, May 13-June 17, 1989.

struggle to democratize the control of space by “decommodifying” it—to appropriate it, as Lefebvre has proposed for the purposes of everyday life—is the best defense against capitalist domination of space for purposes of exchange.

But relationships between urban space and democratic struggles are more complex than this formulation suggests. Foglesong’s analysis utilizes, or at least implies, a clear polarity between two kinds of democracy. Understood in the classic bourgeois sense as the protection by a representative government of the private individual *from* society, democracy functions ideologically. It naturalizes individualistic conceptions of human beings and, as Marx maintained, by falsely dividing the political and private spheres, it legitimates the structure of domination inherent in the private property relation. The social goals that constitute traditional socialist ideas of democracy—equality and advancement of the interests of the majority—are suppressed. Foglesong thus identifies a contradiction between, on the one hand, bourgeois democracy, and, on the other hand, an economic system based on the denial of the principle which forms the basis of “true” democracy—economic equality.

Recent urban events demonstrate the continuing relevance, if insufficiency, of this analysis. Last year, for instance, in *Seawall Associates v. the City of New York*, the state court of appeals, overturning New York City’s Local Law No. 9, upheld the right of landlords to demolish, warehouse, and convert single-room occupancy hotels despite the devastating effects of such actions on the availability of housing for the poor and mentally ill. The city’s ban, the court contended, constituted a “physical taking” of property because it violated landlords’ fundamental right to exclude others from their property. According to the majority opinion, the ban unconstitutionally required landlords to accept occupation of their property by strangers and third parties without providing “just compensation.” Conflating state protection of the rights of real estate to maximize profits with the defense of individuals from intrusion in their homes, the decision justified and disavowed the massive development-caused eviction of SRO occupants from *their* homes. The inclusion of private property under the rubric of individual rights, asserted against the right of city residents to housing, exemplifies the suppressions inherent in the “capitalist-democracy contradiction.” Dividing the public and private realms and thereby denying the dependence of private profit on conditions that are publicly provided, the court’s decision, in effect, represents economic equality—access to spatial resources—as undemocratic.

Without, then, discarding the critique of bourgeois rights embedded in Foglesong’s analysis, urban discourse must also recognize the complicated nature of debates about democracy. Admittedly, theorizations of democracy are not Foglesong’s principle topic. Still, by limiting his discussion to two democratic options and associating true democracy with social ownership of

resources, he gives the impression that economic equality is no mere component, but the very basis, of democracy. This idea harbors its own authoritarianism. The bourgeois/socialist opposition fails to address, for example, the undemocratic character of a phenomenon frequently presented as the alternative to bourgeois democracy: the socialist state, which, overcoming “false” divisions between the civil and political spheres, embodies society’s “real” interests. Such an identification of the state with society rests on the belief in an objectively existing foundation of social unity. Simultaneously, it posits a position—occupied by the good state—whose legitimacy is ensured because it represents “the people,” an entity understood as an objective social totality. The position of the totality and its corresponding conception of society can, however, only be constructed through exclusions. Other political theorists—most notably, Claude Lefort—have redefined democracy as, precisely, the challenge to any institutionalized power or discourse that claims to represent “society.”<sup>16</sup> Democracy, according to Lefort, is the recognition that power, no longer believed to derive from absolute origins but only from an unstable source called “the people,” becomes what he calls an “empty place.” Beyond either a government institution or social ownership, democracy is an ongoing social practice, continually extending the creation and right to a public space that opposes, to be sure, the rights of privately owned land but also any power claiming the right to exclude by harmonizing diverse interests or by representing true social interests. Democracy, in this sense, is the “right to the city,” the right to the construction of the social itself.<sup>17</sup>

Commodification, too, has broader ramifications for democratic struggles than is generally supposed. It spreads beyond the treatment of land in the capitalist city to other privately owned parts of the built environment, such as housing. Moreover, the provision of housing for the purposes of producing or guaranteeing private profit—the commodification of housing—involves sectors of capital other than those directly engaged in providing housing. It includes all capital sectors interested in reproducing the workforce.<sup>18</sup> In order to comprehend the nature of urban struggles during the present era of capitalism, it is crucial to perceive the full scope of housing commodification. The housing question demonstrates more vividly than any other social relation another contradiction of capitalist urbanization: the conflict between capital’s social needs and the social needs of city residents; that is, between the capitalist city and a democratic one. When in the capitalist city residents are no longer required in the economy, a condition observable in the homeless populations of today’s restructured cities, the need for those residents and for the conditions of their survival—capital’s social needs—disappears. The right to housing, affirmed against the right to com-

modify housing and evict people from the city, proposes the production of a democratic social space.

### The Right to the City

"If You Lived Here . . ." also envisioned a democratic social space. It brought together critical art practices seeking to create alternative spaces in the institutions of art with urban discourses that project an alternative city. In some ways, this combination represented a culmination of themes that have informed Rosler's past work. Participating at an early stage in the shift from normative to functional analyses of art, Rosler specifically explored the functions of institutionalized art practices in historical urban circumstances. Her influential phototext piece, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974–75), and the related 1981 essay, "in, around, and after-thoughts (on documentary photography)," asked the same question that was later posed by "If You Lived Here . . .": What does homelessness have to do with art? In these earlier works, Rosler examined the representational conventions of liberal documentary photography, a popular artistic genre whose practitioners frequently take for their subject matter poor urban neighborhoods and city residents, especially homeless men. Rosler analyzed the depoliticized messages about urban poverty that such photographs convey. These meanings, she suggested, do not emanate from the photographs alone but from their relations with viewers; they also depend on the institutional contexts within which photographic images circulate and which mediate between them and the public. The hierarchical relations of looking inscribed in the act of constituting bums as images—objects of vision—are heightened, Rosler concluded, when such pictures are made for exhibition in museums and galleries or when they are transferred to these spaces. In the museum, they are produced as "art photography." Since art institutions define art objects as creations of artistic sensibilities that can redeem wretched subject matter by transposing it into the universal register of art, the photographer's and viewer's positions of privilege in relation to their subjects is reinforced even as it is concealed by the museum's pretension to be a universal and coherent space. Just as Hans Haacke's 1971 "real estate pieces" depicting Lower East Side sites were intended to clash with the pristine interior of New York's Guggenheim Museum,<sup>19</sup> Rosler's *Bowery* project dramatized the manner in which contrasts between photographs of impoverished urban landscapes and the pristine "landscapes" of art institutions are "reconciled" (that is, suppressed) by museological conventions of display. *The Bowery* thus suggested that aestheticized representations perpetuate these spatial contradictions.

"If You Lived Here . . ." amplified Rosler's earlier explorations and inflected them in several new directions. Among other things, it scrutinized the art world's direct socioeconomic impact on conflicts in contemporary cities. Rosler's installation of the project as a whole, as well as many of the individual works shown, documented the redevelopment of metropolitan centers around the world, particularly New York City. In contrast to depictions of redevelopment in government documents, or real estate advertisements, which attempt to conceal the political nature of current struggles over urban space, Rosler's project defined redevelopment as a contested terrain. Viewed as the historical form of urbanization in advanced capitalist society, rather than as a stage in an inevitable progression of urban growth, redevelopment was, throughout the 1980s, a comprehensive transformation of the environment driven by the need to facilitate capital accumulation and enhance state control. This massive transformation has generated what might be called a crisis of inequality: New York's redevelopment, like all urban growth under capitalism, proceeds through the domination and subordination of people and territories. In late twentieth-century capitalist society this process of domination occurs within a worldwide spatial reorganization that *requires* the deterritorialization of entire groups of residents.

Sanctioned by prevailing interpretations of the "fiscal" crisis of the 1970s and, less overtly, by reactions to urban ghetto uprisings in the late 1960s, New York has been largely restructured into a center for the executive headquarters of international corporations and related business services. Forming only one component of a new international division of labor and new international urban hierarchy, this restructuring includes attendant changes in the nature of employment within the city as manufacturing jobs are moved elsewhere, frequently overseas. The loss of traditional blue-collar jobs is accompanied by a rise in unemployment and in poverty-level wages in low-echelon service sectors or new manufacturing jobs. As city planning policies, together with the exploitation of land by real estate for superprofits, help create the physical conditions to meet the needs of the new economy—luxury housing, corporate headquarters, office towers, services, entertainment and recreational facilities—housing and services for the cities' redundant workforce are simultaneously destroyed through the steady gentrification of New York's residential areas into upper-middle-class neighborhoods. Because public resources—land and money—have been systematically channeled toward the subsidization of corporations and real estate, they have been increasingly withdrawn from social services, generating a crisis in public finance. And because land-use decisions have been bureaucratized and privatized, they have become largely immune to public control. The tens of thousands of homeless residents whom government policy attempts to contain in intolerable and marginalized shelters or peripheralized, segregated,

and inadequate housing are refugees from New York's transformation—the product of evictions from jobs, homes, neighborhoods, parks, health care, and ultimately, from the redeveloped city itself. Evicted residents are the most acute symptom of an urban restructuring that also creates a built environment that is hierarchically differentiated, dominated by the demands of profit, ghettoized and exclusionary, and composed of pseudo-public spaces, pseudo-communities, pseudo-historic districts.

The creation of Soho, the site of "If You Lived Here . . .," announced Manhattan's redevelopment in the 1980s. The area's transformation during the two preceding decades into a neighborhood for luxury residential and consumption uses has consistently been portrayed, like most urban gentrification projects, as an aesthetic metamorphosis with two dimensions. Cast iron buildings were repaired and "beautified" so that the wrenching changes set in motion by redevelopment proceeded under the aegis of movements for historic "preservation" and cultural "stability." And Soho became an art center, emerging into public consciousness as a cohesive social space through "artistic" alterations which both facilitated and concealed socio-economic changes.

The highly touted conversion of Soho lofts from manufacturing to residential uses was, of course, only an individual moment in broader spatial patterns. Lofts are, however, emblematic of redevelopment since the precondition for Soho's creation was the deindustrialization of urban districts. "The residential conversion of lofts," writes urban sociologist Sharon Zukin, "confirms and symbolizes the death of an urban manufacturing center."<sup>20</sup> Soho, the heart of the New York art world, once formed, instead, the core of New York City manufacturing. The death of the manufacturing district was hardly natural. Rather, it resulted from specific economic relations and from government policies that created a supply of urban spaces available for new uses. The loft-conversion process was not uniformly beneficial for city residents, either. Whereas lower-middle-class business owners and their blue-collar workers were the principal victims of loft conversion, the socio-economic status of Manhattan loft residents in 1977, according to a City Planning Commission report, was in the top 20 to 25 percent of the New York City population.<sup>21</sup>

Soho emerged in 1970 as the appropriation of space by forces benefiting from redevelopment. Legitimated by the notion that this takeover represented the preservation of a shared architectural legacy and the arrival in Lower Manhattan of cultural advantages, Soho's creation was encouraged, despite popular misconceptions, by specific state interventions: the 1971 zoning resolution that legalized loft buildings for residential use; the 1973 declaration of Soho as a historic landmark district; tax benefits, especially the 1975 amendment to the J-51 tax subsidy supporting the conversion of

large buildings; protected access for artists to lofts through “Artists in Residence” (AIR) programs that entitled artists to compete for loft space with small manufacturers. Yet, as Zukin points out, the nature of the loft subsidy eventually changed from a housing subsidy to a direct subsidy for arts production, a mutation that illuminates the nature of gentrification as well as the contradictions inherent in art’s gentrifying activities. The change

*was consistent with the reasoning behind the city government’s switch to support zoning for artists in Soho. But it was also consistent with a general support for real estate development. Subsidies for arts production gave artists no claim to a particular place in the city. So they did not interfere with market forces. After the arts presence helped to revalorize a section of the city like Soho, then the artists could take their subsidies and move to another declining area.<sup>22</sup>*

Displacement of residents, whether they are gentrifying artists priced out of Soho or the poor and unemployed excluded from New York altogether, is no random by-product of gentrification but its structural condition. Decay, disinvestment, abandonment—displacing processes by which land and buildings are devalorized—prepare the way for profitable reinvestment. This, in turn, causes further displacement, direct and exclusionary—the conversion of the city into an area that residents can no longer afford. Redevelopment is uneven development.

Rosler’s title, “If You Lived Here . . .,” transplanted from real estate signs, tied the art presence in Soho to the real estate presence there and to broader processes of redevelopment. It welcomed people to the exhibitions just as the middle class had been welcomed to the city, and artists to Soho. But when visitors entered Rosler’s first exhibition, they encountered a second quotation stenciled across the gallery’s interior wall: “If you can’t afford to live here, move!” This directive, issued by Mayor Koch early in his administration, is, like the project’s title, an artifact of urban redevelopment. Addressed to the poor, however, it reveals that the transformed city is an evicting rather than welcoming one whose exclusions are neither arbitrary nor engendered by callous personalities but structural, produced by the contradictions of capitalist urbanization.

The juxtaposition of the two quotations at an art show also confronted the art world with the reality of its shifting position in the city, a position that entails the enforced mobility of other social groups. Produced by redevelopment, the Soho gallery was only a prelude to the role that art was to play in the new decade’s production of urban space. It foreshadowed, for instance, the gentrifying effects of an “art scene” on New York’s Lower East Side, a scene which, depicted as an alternative to Soho, stayed well within the mainstream of urban development.

Despite appearances, then, the Soho gallery is hardly isolated from "real" urban problems such as housing. Rather, it is a site of the art world's early involvement in the housing market. And since the commodification of housing excludes New Yorkers from the city, neither is it independent of the present space of the evicted. Like all the social relations that art supposedly transcends, housing is one of the historical circumstances of its existence. Expressing and perpetuating an economic and social hierarchy within the city, the privatization of housing—and culture—forms part of the gallery's urban situation.

Today, in fact, aesthetic practices that produce the built environment—architecture, urban planning, urban design, public art—increasingly depend, like housing provision, on the approval and sponsorship of big capital. When they detach themselves from the housing question—presupposed to lie outside aesthetic concerns—and simply help fortify social divisions, they ignore the very forces that simultaneously threaten the development of a public culture. In contrast, by encouraging a critical spectatorship of the gallery and the city and by supporting the right to housing, "If You Lived Here . . ." created an alternative space out of the situation in which it inevitably found itself. The profoundly undemocratic nature of contemporary redevelopment, built on principles of eviction, compels the growth of such alternatives. They will proliferate in diverse and unpredictable ways, but share the project of creating a public space. For public space, as defined by Lefort, "has the virtue of belonging to no one, of being large enough to accommodate only those who recognize one another within it and who give it a meaning, and of allowing the questioning of right to spread."<sup>23</sup>

## Notes

1. The most well-known art historical treatment of the city from a marxist perspective is T. J. Clark's *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986). See Griselda Pollock's important response to Clark, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in her *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988). See also Rosalyn Deutsche, "Representing Berlin: Urban Ideology and Aesthetic Practice," in *The Divided Heritage: Themes and Problems in German Modernism*, ed. Irit Rogoff and MaryAnne Stevens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and, for a preliminary critique of contemporary urban-aesthetic analysis, see Deutsche, "Men in Space," *Artforum* 28 (February 1990): 21-23.
2. Roger Kimball, "Sundays in the Dark with the Whitney," *The New Criterion* 5, no. 5 (January 1987): 84.
3. For a more detailed account of this incident, see Maurice Berger, "Introduction: What Does Homelessness Have to Do With Art?" *New Observations*, no. 61 (October 1988): 2-4.
4. Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," *October*, no. 31 (Winter 1984): 91-111.
5. Eric Gibson, "Public Art and the Public Realm," *Sculpture* 7, no. 1 (January-February 1988): 33.

6. For a critique of the "new public art," see Rosalyn Deutsche, "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City," *October*, no. 47 (Winter 1988): 3-52.
7. Gibson, "Public Art," p. 32.
8. See, for example, the special issue of *Art Journal* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1989), entitled "Critical Issues in Public Art."
9. Harriet Senie, "Richard Serra's 'Tilted Arc': Art and Non-Art Issues," *Art Journal* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 300.
10. Eleanor Heartney, "Martha Rosler at Dia," *Art in America* 77, no. 11 (November 1989): 186.
11. I am borrowing this phrase from Jonathan Arac's description of postmodern criticism in his introduction to Arac, ed., *Postmodernism and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. ix.
12. Martha Rosler, "Lookers, Buyers, Dealers, and Makers: Thoughts on Audience," *Exposure* 117, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 10-25; reprinted in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York and Boston: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and David R. Godine, 1984), p. 323.
13. For a criticism of this tendency, see my "Men in Space."
14. Richard E. Foglesong, *Planning the Capitalist City: The Colonial Era to the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 21.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
16. Claude Lefort, "Permanence of the Theologico-Political?" in *Democracy and Political Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 213-55.
17. The phrase, "the right to the city," is of course Lefebvre's. Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968).
18. See the important discussion of housing commodification and proposal for "decommodification" in Emily Paradise Achtenberg and Peter Marcuse, "Toward the Decommodification of Housing," in *Critical Perspectives on Housing*, ed. Rachel G. Bratt et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), pp. 474-83.
19. For a discussion of Haacke's work and the controversy it provoked, see Rosalyn Deutsche, "Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate, and the Museum," in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York and Cambridge, Mass.: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 1986), pp. 20-37.
20. Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1982), p. 3.
21. New York City Planning Commission, "Residential Re-use of Non-residential Buildings in Manhattan," 1977, pp. 100-106; cited in Zukin, *Loft Living*, p. 6.
22. Zukin, *Loft Living*, p. 118.
23. Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, p. 41.

## THE PUBLIC SPHERE

*This discussion is taken from an interview with Alexander Kluge by Klaus Eder, published in New German Critique, 24/25.*

**Alexander Kluge** If we are discussing the term *oppositional public sphere*—and by this we mean a type of public sphere that is changing and expanding, increasing the possibilities for a public articulation of experience—then we must very resolutely take a stance regarding the right to intimacy, to private ownership of experience. For example, a group of people is faced with imminent eviction from an occupied building—in the Schumannstrasse no. 69 in Frankfurt where four houses were actually demolished. We know already in November that it is going to happen, and they know it as well. They have lived in this house for three years and have always had the plan to return something to the community in exchange for occupying the house: a tenants' counseling service and all sorts of other services. That plan never worked out. Shortly before the eviction, their political energy finally takes shape: they would like to make up for whatever they did not do in the previous three years. We wanted to film the eviction and we could assume that it would take place at a time when the entire city was celebrating carnival. We told the house-occupiers that we wanted to start shooting before the eviction because only then could we really work together. They said however: this is *our* fight and we will not allow our fight to be filmed by anyone who does not live in the house and fight with us. To which we responded: our working schedule does not allow us to live here, but we can at least join you, we can be there with our camera when the house is cleared out; granted, in such a case we would be house-occupiers only in disguise because, having places of our own, we are not house-occupiers. To which they replied: all the less reason to allow you to film us since this is our struggle, it belongs to us. We continued to argue, although without success, and said: you can't claim private ownership of your struggle like an entrepreneur claims private ownership of his factory and would therefore order his security force to prevent us from shooting. Don't you realize that this is the same position with regard to the public sphere? Don't you see that you are copying something that the other side can do much better, namely producing a nonpublic sphere, producing a relationship of property and exclusion? It may be that you consider us prostitutes who exist everywhere and yet nowhere: to this we adamantly

respond—exactly, that is our job: it is not our business to live everywhere at once. If we were to make a film about farmers, the situation would be the same: we are not farmers and even if we lived like farmers for half a year we still would not be farmers. Just because we work in factories does not make us factory workers. We are always aware that we have another profession and can leave if we want to. A public sphere can be produced professionally only when you accept the degree of abstraction that is involved in carrying one piece of information to another place in society, when you establish lines of communication. That's the only way we can create an oppositional public sphere and thus expand the existing public sphere. This is an occupation that is just as important as direct action, the immediate on-the-spot struggle.

**Klaus Eder** Would it not be appropriate to stop using the term oppositional public sphere—which dates from around May 1968—since what you mean is a public sphere in the authentic sense of the term?

**Kluge** We mean the opposite of a pseudo-public sphere, that is, a representative insofar as it involves exclusions. Television, for example, following its mandate of providing a universal representation of reality (a concept which its monopoly and its pluralistic authority are based upon) could never afford to show films that go so much against the grain that they would call attention to whatever scope of reality television does not include. This would destroy the façade of legitimacy on which the public sphere of television is based. If a pseudo-public sphere only represents parts of reality, selectively and according to certain value systems, then it has to administer even further cuts so it won't be found out.

This type of public sphere has recently met with competition from a public sphere appropriated by private enterprise. Within the latter, the Springer corporation is to some extent only a novice, retaining an element of personalism that sets its own limits: the reactionary attitude of the entrepreneur in fact reduces the sales figures. This will be technocratically corrected at some point, eliminating the personal aspect of Springer, and thereby realizing the private appropriation of the public sphere. This is a great danger—if all forms of the classical public sphere have the tendency, as representative public sphere, to reduce themselves automatically. In this respect, the conception of a public sphere that is neither privately owned nor simply the classical type is of fundamental importance: the very conditions of politics depend upon it.

The public sphere is in this scene what one might call the factory of politics—its site of production. When this site of production—the space in which politics is first made possible at all and communicable—is caught in a

scissors-grip between private appropriation (which is no longer public in the authentic sense) and the self-eliminating classical public sphere (its mechanisms of subtraction and exclusion); when this public sphere threatens to disappear, its loss would be as grave today as the loss of the common land was for the farmer in the Middle Ages. In that period the economy was based on the three-acre system: one acre belonged to everyone, one belonged to the lord, and one belonged to the farmer. This system can only function as long as there is this common land, the public ground, which is the first thing that the lord appropriates. If he owns both the common land and his own acre, then he has superiority. No longer dependent on fighting with the sword, the lord can now also control the third acre and will soon have serfs. The loss of land also means a loss of community because, if there is no land on which the farmers may assemble, it is no longer possible to develop a community. The same thing is happening again, on a historically higher plane, in people's heads when they are deprived of the public sphere. This creates the phenomenon of the rubber wall: I sit in my room and have enough reasons for protest and for wanting to break out, but there is no one to whom I can communicate these reasons, there are no proper addressees. So instead I turn to substitute addressees by writing letters-to-the-editor, for example, to which nobody pays any attention. Or I support a politician who helps me out of my impasse by shifting concrete problems into the arena of world politics, which I in turn mistake for my own interests believed to be realized via this displacement.

For these reasons, this use value, this product, which is the "public sphere," is the most fundamental product that exists. In terms of community, of what I have in common with other people, it is the basis for processes of social change. This means I can forget about the concept of politics if I neglect the production of a public sphere. This is a claim to legitimacy that we must carefully insist upon and oppose against the many private needs—despite the fact that disappointment with the bourgeois public sphere, its failures, betrayals, and distortions, has led many leftist groups to reject a public sphere altogether.

**Eder** The promotion and production of documentary films would thus in the end be a political question—all the more, since in general only that which stabilizes domination is possible.

**Kluge** Yes, but it is not the case that the domination that confronts us is a conscious one. All methods of domination and those of profit (which do not want to dominate but rather to make profit and thereby to dominate) contain a calculation of marginal utility. This means that the fence erected by corporations, by censorship, by authority, does not reach all the way to the

base but stops short—because the base is so complex—so that one can crawl under the fence at any time. Even television producers and board members can be examined in light of this calculation of marginal utility. In the hierarchy, a producer is subordinate to the manager, who is in turn subordinate to the television board, which is again responsible to still others: the producer must obey orders or he will be fired. This, however, is only true for half of his soul, so to speak; another part of him may be very curious. While in the course of time he may become resigned, nevertheless, in terms of his labor power, he is more than just the functionary who is employed there. This means that in every television producer there exists a conflict and no system of domination in the world can reduce the producer completely to the functionary. We can count on the fact that no oppression is total. The issue then becomes the learning of proper ways of dealing with people.

We must produce the self-confidence that is necessary to discover the objective possibilities of production underneath these fences, and we must take the offensive in fighting for this position. It is just as important to produce a public sphere as it is to produce politics, affection, resistance, protest, etc. This means that the place and the pacing of the struggle are just as important as the struggle itself.

On the other hand, in order to envisage a public sphere—of which we know very well that there is all too little—we need an almost childlike feeling of omnipotence. When, for example, the summer vacation begins, I vacillate as to whether one can express oneself publicly at all: I don't believe in a single product that I could make and so I withdraw and write my secret texts, that is, literature, of which I know that it will remain essentially marginal to the public sphere. Since I will not incite any large masses of people through the medium of a book, I can write whatever I like, knowing that it will never engender attack. I even had the idea—in a mood of resignation—of hiding a print of my next film in the Munich Film Museum and waiting to see if any film philologist would discover it there ten years later. This merely out of frustration about the incredible struggles and compromises involved when one wants to see a film through to the public sphere.

Only among ourselves as filmmakers could we attempt to create a self-confidence that considers everything possible. In this we will only succeed, however, if we recognize the importance of producing a public sphere. We must consider the degree to which it is essential that people live with one another in a society, and that community is not something alongside work for special occasions and future hopes, but rather that community is itself an element of social change.

## SYMPOSIUM ON HOMELESSNESS

*Using Jonathan Kozol's book *Rachel and Her Children* as a starting point, the four pieces here represent a variety of perspectives on the causes of homelessness as well as on possible solutions to the problem.*

### **The Chronic Calamity**

**Kal ErIkson**

The publication of Jonathan Kozol's important book, *Rachel and Her Children*, brings back into focus a problem we as a nation do not seem to be able to concentrate on for very long. Countless people in this most blessed of lands are hungry and cold and miserable. We all know that. Somewhere between 2 and 3 million of them are without homes. We know that too. But before our eyes glaze over again from the weariness that such knowledge brings, we should take the public moment that Kozol and his book seem to have given us to consider what it means to speak of human beings as "homeless." What can a sociologist familiar with other forms of disaster say about the long-range effects of homelessness?

This, certainly: To be without a home is to be cut off from the rest of the world. "A place to live" means exactly that—a place to be alive in, a place to be a real person in, a place to connect one to a larger human community. So even if our society could devise comfortable ways to shelter and nourish and tend to the needs of the homeless, which it is pitifully far from doing, it would still be a terrible thing to be without a place.

How does such a thing happen?

One of the prevailing wisdoms, of course, is that the homeless cut themselves off from the rest of humanity, retreating for reasons of their own into fogs of psychosis and alcohol. It is impossible to know how many people fit that description, but surely less than half the homeless drifted into their present state suffering from some kind of diagnosable disorder. These are the loners we encounter on city streets—crouched in the shelter of doorways, curled into the pockets of warmth made by sidewalk grates, muttering endlessly about old indignities to companions no one else can see.

We tend to view such people as the victims of random acts of ill fortune or malice, not as the victims of some systemic flaw in society itself. For each individual, a personal hard luck story. They are all sad, these stories, but they are idiosyncratic, local to a time and place. They make it hard to speak

of underlying causes unless one uses the language of psychiatry and thinks in terms of case histories.

The other portion, though—newer, younger, growing at a frightening rate—were simply *set* adrift by the workings of the market and by the indifference of the government. It is made up in large part of families, hundreds of thousands of them, including half a million children. These families are the subject of Kozol's book, and they require us to think quite differently about the way things came about.

"The cause of homelessness," Kozol declares, "is lack of housing." That may be something less than profound logic, but it is certainly the right place to begin. The new homeless were evicted from the places in which they lived as a result of condominium conversion, fire, demolition, abandonment, runaway rents, or some other calamity. So a simple calculation is all we need: as long as housing costs as much as it does, and as long as funds in the hands of the poor are as meager as they are, many millions of people are fated to be without homes. That is bad enough, but the pains of being without a home are compounded by the extraordinary hardships people must endure when they move into public shelter. Those assigned to welfare hotels—which cost every bit as much as the most luxurious of housing—can live with constant danger and anxiety as well as rats, raw sewage, festering garbage, faucets that draw no water, and radiators that emit no heat.

Kozol deals in some detail with these matters. A large portion of Kozol's book, however, concerns the effects of being without a home. What does prolonged homelessness do to the people who fall from whatever grace the rest of us are fortunate enough to enjoy?

It feels a bit wrong to draw a profile of the people Kozol describes, particularly when one is reminded of personalities as distinct as the people he calls Rachel, Doby, Raisin, Christopher, Richard Lazarus. The sociologist's habit of merging people into groups, essential for understanding the patterns by which they live, seems cold and unfriendly here—all the more because the homeless are so easily submerged into stereotypes and because those whose job it is to care for them cannot help but be engaged in a form of herding.

Still, virtually all of the people Kozol met at welfare hotels and along the bureaucratic corridors of the welfare system can be described as numbed by what happened to them and afraid of what the world has in store for them. They are drained of whatever reserves of confidence and self-respect they once had, and they see the world around them as brittle, precarious, dangerous. They are depleted, demoralized, apathetic, depressed. They are in mourning for places and persons and times now gone, and they wander the spaces they now occupy—a grotesque, cruel, surreal wonderland that would try the soundest of souls—in a state of almost continual bewilderment and

disorientation. They have few bearings, few ways to measure who or what or where they are.

Now, Kozol has no way of knowing what kind of shape these men and women were in before they were set adrift, and indeed they might not have been the hardest and most resilient of those whom fortune put to the test. But what is clear to Kozol, and he makes clear to us, is that homelessness *itself* damages the people who experience it, no matter what resources they bring to it. "It's like there isn't any bottom," says the man called Richard Lazarus:

*It's like a black hole sucking you inside. Half the people I know are suffering from chest infections and sleep deprivation. The lack of sleep leaves you debilitated, shaky. You exaggerate your fears. If a psychiatrist came along he'd say that I was crazy. But I was an ordinary man. There was nothing wrong with me. I lost my wife. I lost my kids. I lost my home. Now would you say I was crazy if I told you I was feeling sad? I was a pretty stable man.*

Maybe. Maybe not. But the experiences a Richard Lazarus must go through would supply explanation enough for a galaxy of disorders. He loses his purchase on the world and then finds himself sleeping in parks and subways, in shelters marked by the smell of urine and the sound of men weeping in their sleep, in special quarters presided over by guards who wear gloves in fear that they may have to touch a resident—all the time, says Lazarus, feeling like "trash," a problem of "waste disposal."

And then there are the children. Whatever the frailties of mind and spirit that may have predisposed the adults to homelessness, the children are something else. They were carried to the world in which they find themselves by winds of another making; the effects of homelessness on *them* are being etched on an untouched surface. The evidence is plain, too, not only from the reports of observers like Kozol but from the research of psychiatrists like Ellen Bassuk, that the experience takes a terrible toll on them.

Let me just say, then, that homelessness is a disaster in every sense of the term. It batters the people who are exposed to it in much the same way as catastrophes of a noisier and more immediate kind, and the frames of mind that it produces can be clearly recognized as the symptoms of trauma.

We usually reserve the word "disaster" to refer to a sharp eruption of some kind that does considerable harm and then comes to a close. An alarm sounds. A period of destruction and terror follows. And then the event is over: the flood waters recede, the smoke clears, the winds abate, the bombers leave, and an announcement is made that the danger is past. The pain of the event may remain, of course. Dreams may continue to haunt.

Wounds may become infected. But we will call this "aftermath." "In the wake of the flood," we will say.

But chronic conditions as well as acute events can be responsible for trauma, and sustained homelessness of the sort Kozol describes must belong at or very near the top of the list of social conditions that traumatize. If one looks carefully at the faces of the homeless as well as at the dossiers that welfare agencies assemble, one can scarcely avoid seeing the familiar signs of trauma—a deep numbness of spirit, a susceptibility to anxiety and fear and depression as well as to sudden flashes of rage, a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, an inability to concentrate, a loss of various motor skills, an apprehension about the physical and social environment, a retreat into dependency, and a general loss of ego functions. One finds those feelings wherever people have been battered by the force of some powerful calamity. But one also finds them in places where people feel left out of things, abandoned, separated from the flow of human life, treated like a form of refuse. That, too, is a form of battering.

Kozol is not exaggerating when he writes:

*Knowingly or not, we are creating a diseased, distorted, undereducated and malnourished generation of small children who, without dramatic intervention on a scale for which the nation seems entirely unprepared, will grow into the certainty of an unemployable adulthood.*

We are running the risk of crippling great masses of people, and we are doing it in ways that are wholly unnecessary. "We aren't going to get away with this," Kozol quotes Daniel Patrick Moynihan. "We are *not* going to get away with this."

**Put 'Em Where We Ain't**

**Robert Fitch**

If you get evicted and can't raise the money for another apartment, you may wind up spending a couple of years in the Holland Hotel, the Martinique Hotel, or the Prince George Hotel, city residences that charge homeless families up to \$3,000 a month but are no longer recommended by Duncan Hines. If so, you will actually be a lucky winner in Homeless Jai Alai, the addictive game New York City loves to play, in which the homeless are the *pelotas* and the odds are against staying in any one place for very long. The aim of the game, it seems from reading Jonathan Kozol's *Rachel and Her Children*, is to throw the homeless against the walls of the city's sleaziest and most dangerous shelters, keeping them bouncing back and forth until they drop out and go away.

Demonstration against homelessness, Washington, D.C., October 7, 1989. ►



This is an extremely expensive sport. Last year [1987], the city's emergency shelter program cost about \$274 million. For the approximately 5,000 homeless families like Rachel's, the city pays over 60 hotel operators in excess of \$100 million yearly. For sums like these you could put mortgages down on Trump Tower, the Helmsley Palace, and the Plaza, and still have money left over. How are we to understand a policy that spends so much to reduce so many to such a low level of subsistence?

Kozol jolts us into demanding an answer. His naturalist method deprives us of our usual defenses against the homeless, prevents us from stepping around them or paying the customary 25-cent "toll to the trolls" who block our path. Seizing us firmly like the ancient mariner, he drags us inside the hotels and compels us to listen to Gwen, a former private-duty nurse; Terry, an ex-lab assistant; Richard, an erstwhile data processor; and, most of all, Bible-reading Rachel and her children. "Mr. Rat came in my baby sister's crib and bit her," six-year-old Raisin tells us. "Nobody felt sorry for my sister. . . . I started crying. All of a sudden I pray." These are people whose stories are so unrelievedly depressing, whose fates are so arbitrary and prospects so bleak that you feel forced almost at the cost of your self-respect to try to make sense of their tragedies. This is Kozol's strength.

His weakness is also a result of the naturalist method. By slicing the lives of his characters so thinly, peeling them down to talking heads in the single rooms of the Martinique, he denies us the information we need to figure out precisely what has happened to them. We lose any sense of the connectedness of Rachel and Raisin to the rest of society. We are made to feel the pain and humiliation of the homeless within the hotel walls, but we are desensitized to the forces outside that are reshaping the city's neighborhoods: the rationalization of space that puts high-rent people in the old inner cities and low-rent people at risk. Evidently, the homeless are people with no place. But where exactly were they before? What is happening to those places now? And to whose benefit?

Kozol wants to combat the new mean-spiritedness that stigmatizes the poor as undeserving. But his slice-of-life method leads him to do so by producing a uniform sample of "deserving" poor. For example, he gives us Richard Lazarus, an apparent victim of a plant shut-down. A Vietnam veteran with an information-age occupation, Lazarus is well educated, well mannered, responsible. Indeed, he is so principled and considerate, he worries that the author might not be able to afford a dollar handout. "Listen, yuppie," the author seems to say, "There, but for the grace of God. . . ." Kozol's choice of subjects lends a superficial plausibility to an explanation of homelessness that fades into tautology: "The cause of homelessness is lack of housing." It also props up Kozol's notion of an effective political remedy for

homelessness: self-help. Just give these unlucky, formerly industrious people some building materials and a little capital, he says, and all will be well. Lost in this treatment is the hard-won distinction established in the last century between poverty and the poor.

It was Charles Dickens who showed how the urban poor were the objects not merely of misfortune, but of urban policy. Few of his characters react to immiseration as nicely as Richard Lazarus: Dickens avoided sentimentality precisely because he saw how the chaos and deprivation of poverty obviate the fine calculations of reward and punishment so beloved by the middle classes. At the same time, he was able to show that the Victorian poorhouse wasn't just the product of a dismal lack of caring that had somehow crept over the country. It was a conscious creation, a social machine designed to reduce an entire class to the smallest, most manageable and disposable proportions. When Kozol tells the story of a homeless man who climbs into a dumpster and is ground up by a trash compactor, the incident is treated simply as another hazard of homeless life. Dickens knew better.

The modern industrial poorhouse was created by the British House of Commons in 1834, at the prodding of a Benthamite commission of inquiry. The commissioners had discovered, as Dickens observed in *Oliver Twist*, that the old Georgian workhouse

*was a regular place of public entertainment for the poor classes; a tavern where there was nothing to pay; a public breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper all the year round; a brick and mortar elysium, where it was all play and no work. "Oho! said the board . . . we are the fellows to set this to rights; we'll stop it all, in no time." So they established the rule, that all poor people should have the alternative (for they would compel nobody, not they) of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it.*

How close we are to stepping twice into the same river of urban misery and calculating cruelty! The new prophets of welfare reform—Charles Murray, Thomas Main, George Gilder—make the same criticisms of the present welfare system that Benthamite critics made of the 18th-century Speenhamland system: that it discourages work; it encourages large families; it maintains the poor in one place. Indeed, all their wisdom can be derived from Bentham's "less-eligibility principle" of administering relief: "That the condition of the recipient should not on the whole be more eligible than that of any laborer living on the fruits of his own industry." Today's corollary, articulated by [former] New York City mayor Edward Koch and others, is that shelter for the homeless can't be "more eligible" than that enjoyed by rent-paying workers. Thus the Martinique, the Prince George, and the Holland:



Nancy Linn, *Children at the Prince George Hotel, 1988*. Left: Tasheema, 2 1/4 years; right: Cynthia, 4 years.

no matter how much the city pays for homeless upkeep, the actual conditions of the homeless must not rise above the horizon of the most dilapidated South Bronx tenement.

If Benthamism is back, it is because a new cycle of urban poverty has once again brought with it the need to upset an equilibrium of rights and comparatively humane treatment established in more prosperous times. Today's homeless form the lowest ranks of a new reserve army of labor that has gathered in American cities. Its predecessor coincided with the Industrial Revolution, when the destruction of traditional agriculture, the introduction of rational cultivation, the expropriation of common land, and the replacement of peasants by sheep coincided with declining mortality rates. From 1800 to 1850, London's population increased from less than one million to 2.3 million. Philadelphia grew fivefold from 81,000 to over 400,000, and New York tenfold from 62,000 to 660,000. Industrial capitalism needed these masses, but it did not need all of them all of the time. It suited the needs of the capitalist system for there to be large supplies of labor available on irregular, seasonal, or cyclical bases, so that labor could be bought from the warehouse instead of bidding up its price on the shop floor.

The new postindustrial reserve army is the product of a spatial reorganization of the city rather than the countryside. Urban capitalism is carrying out its own clearance of people and enterprises. What the departing tenants, workers, and industries have in common is that they pay far less rent than the arriving residential tenants and commercial users collectively known by the acronym FIRE: finance, insurance, and real estate. The mass of today's urban industrial workers have as much chance at the new FIRE jobs in programming or financial consulting as the peasants had at herding sheep. Birth rates are falling rapidly and urban populations generally stag-

nating, but the surplus population grows nonetheless and serves the same function as its 19th-century predecessor: to control and depress wages.

To call this process "deindustrialization" is misleading. Industry is not disappearing but merely relocating on the suburban periphery or in the cities of the newly industrializing countries. Just across the Mexican border, or in the great Third World cities, the traditional industrial reserve armies have formed again. The huge surplus populations of Mexico City, Seoul, and São Paulo provide an irresistible attraction for capital, leading to further im-miseration of the new reserve army at home.

In cities like New York, San Francisco, Atlanta, Boston, and Dallas, where the number of FIRE workers exceeds the number of manual workers, the size of the reserve army is governed increasingly by fluctuations in the growth of finance and real estate capital. While financial and real estate booms tend to reduce the size of the reserve army as a whole, the need for more stockbrokers, clerks, runners, analysts, etc., increases the demand for offices and living space for elite workers. Conversion pressure on industrial and residential space within the commuting zone accelerates the pace of evictions, secondary displacement, and unemployment. This helps to explain the apparent paradox of homelessness: the number of the homeless has grown exponentially, not despite but because of the local Koch boom that began in the late 1970s, as well as the national Reagan boom.

The policy of urban capital toward the homeless is the same as ever: to shift the burden onto the working and middle classes. While the Democrats and Republicans argue over whether the cost of the poor and homeless should be absorbed at the local or the federal level, urban elites are seeking to shift them from their own space to the space where the working and middle classes live. This is the meaning of Mayor Koch's "Project Help." When Joyce Brown ("Billie Boggs") was forcibly transferred last year from the streets of the Upper East Side to Bellevue Hospital, the controversy centered on the question of her sanity; the specifics of the Koch administration's contract on the homeless were largely ignored. Those who were mentally ill, mentally retarded, crippled, or alcoholic were to be taken off the streets "without regard for age or sex." But which streets? "On the East Side, from Fifth Avenue to the East River, South of 96th Street; on the West Side, from Fifth Avenue to the Hudson River, South of 110th Street"—an area corresponding closely to planners' definition of New York's central business district (CBD). Of the families in emergency shelters in 1986, less than 10 percent came from the neighborhoods covered by the contract. Why don't the needs of the 90 percent outside the CBD have priority?

Together with Bentham's "less-eligibility principle," the rationale for the Koch administration's policy toward the homeless can be covered by the maxim: "Put 'em where we ain't." Ten years ago, New York City had less

than 1,000 homeless families, typically victims of fire or temporary misfortune. The fivefold increase of the 1980s caught the Koch administration with no place to put them save the hotels. But in January, just as *Rachel and Her Children* was being serialized by *The New Yorker*, the city announced its five-year plan to close down all the Manhattan welfare hotels. While the number of homeless families increased from 800 in 1978 to over 5,000 in December 1987, the city expects the number to fall to just under 4,900 by 1992. But, however the totals actually turn out, Manhattan's share is planned to fall. With 55 percent of the homeless family population today, Manhattan will house only 24 percent in 1992. The Bronx's share will increase from 8 percent to 28 percent; Brooklyn's from 18 percent to 34 percent. Meanwhile the predominantly white borough of Queens will see a decrease in its share of the homeless from 16 percent to 9 percent.

The problem with the debate on homelessness is its relentlessly middle-class terms. It is hard to generate true compassion for beings whom we suppose to be too distant, too weak, or too alien to reciprocate our feelings in any way. Overwhelmingly, the homeless come from the urban working classes. It is among those people, white and black, that organization against homelessness must chiefly be located. The problem of homelessness is not simply the lack of homes or even the lack of jobs. It is the lack of an understanding of the situation of the working class as a whole: the housed, ill housed, and the homeless; the employed, the unemployed, and those who are left out of the labor force altogether. Only when American working people understand that these various groups are one, only when recognition of that unity becomes the basis of their self-activity, can the still-vexing spirit of Jeremy Bentham be put, finally, to rest.

#### ***Give Them Shelters***

**Theresa Funicello**

In the 19th century they were called poorhouses. By the early 20th century they were called flophouses. Today, the Union of the Homeless calls them concentration camps and the Coalition for the Homeless develops them and calls them shelters. The union is a membership organization of homeless people. The coalition represents, first and foremost, the interests of the shelter industry, whose members dominate its board. Most people, including Jonathan Kozol, confuse the agendas of the two.

Kozol's moving book effectively uses the homeless to describe their own plight. However, he falls into the same trap that he warns others against: he can't quite hear what they are saying. He refuses to rely on them for prescriptive measures, instead choosing to derive political definitions primarily from the professional "advocates." He seems unconscious of the fact that the

atter have a fiduciary and institutional interest in shelter development that makes them less than objective advisers for his book.

Let's start at the beginning. I'm not objective either. I have been a homeless mother and a welfare hotel resident in New York City myself. More important, for several years I organized other welfare mothers in a grueling and largely unrewarding effort to insert our point of view into the debates on poverty policies that affected our lives. Many of our members lived in welfare hotels and shelters at one time or another, but we conceived of our problems there and elsewhere as a function of poverty, not a matter of location.

In fact, the label "homeless family" was in many ways more destructive than helpful in the long run. As it came into fashion, it redefined a population largely to suit the advocacy imperative of the social-welfare professionals. This distorted any accurate picture of the real problem—poverty (coupled with the meanest welfare system New York City has seen in at least half a century). Kozol could have written virtually the same book of nightmares about very poor families who don't live in shelters, in welfare hotels, or on the street. That includes most of the welfare population and some of the nonwelfare poor, who exceed one million in New York City alone. The homeless represent only a fraction of that total and even they command attention only when their case fits the city's or the advocates' official designation. Not infrequently, families are delivered from a welfare hotel by one government agency, only to be evicted six months later because the building is condemned by another. While no longer officially homeless, these families have as many needs as before.

And so the problem of being without a habitable home was turned into the problem of emergency shelter provision—more contained for government, and more lucrative for social welfare interests. Under the rubric of "helping the homeless," social welfare empires were expanded and strengthened, careers were boosted, and media stars created overnight, diverting scarce political and economic resources that could have been devoted to solving the real problems. While Kozol shakes his head over the vast sums of public money wasted on temporary accommodations in hotels, he seems oblivious to the comparable sums being siphoned into the pockets of providers and advocates through "not-for-profit" shelters.

Many of these advocates, in their other role as shelter developers, have worked ceaselessly to roll back the clock on housing codes in their quest for the most lucrative of shelters. Plumbing, electricity, and other construction codes have been waived to make the physical structures cheaper. Space requirements have been all but abolished in order to cram as many bodies into as small a space as possible. By such terms of art as "self-help evictions,"

some prospective tenants have been made to sign a statement agreeing to evict themselves if the provider feels they have transgressed some rule (for example, by feeding the kids in the room). All this and more has been done quietly, behind the scenes, while publicly advocates seek an end to the welfare hotels, whose business they wish to take over.

Take the Coalition for the Homeless. I first met its founder, Robert Hayes, eight years ago, when he was making a presentation to a potential funding source. He clearly had no experience in poverty issues. When he finished, I approached him in a futile effort to persuade him to shift the direction of his advocacy away from shelters. He couldn't and obviously didn't know that the very thought of the shelters sends shivers down poor people's spines. I told him that expanding them would be a disaster, not only for the homeless males of whom he spoke but also for homeless families. He dismissed the discussion, saying, among other things, that to his knowledge homeless families didn't exist. Ironically, the first mention in Kozol's book of this "saint or martyr" of the homeless movement reads as follows: "Hayes . . . said that three fourths of the newly homeless in America are families with children."

Today the coalition can barely rake the funds in fast enough. Even its own board members have no idea of the amounts and sources of their money; according to one of them, Hayes maintains that since he raises it, he can do with it as he sees fit. Hayes is also chairman of the board of the Association to Benefit Children, which sponsors the East Harlem Family Center, until recently the most expensive shelter in the country, charging the welfare system more than \$150 per family unit per day, whether or not it is inhabited. Andrew Cuomo recently topped Hayes with an even pricier set of toy apartments called HELP 1, which opened its doors in December. Privately, many advocates assert the absurdity of HELP 1, but most have their fingers too deep in the state's till to challenge the governor's son in public.

In 1983, I worked with Nancy Travers, New York's reigning queen of shelter development, on a temporary assignment from my job as special assistant to the State Commissioner of the Department of Social Services (DSS), Cesar Perales. (It's worth noting that remarkably few of the public policy stars in this field are women, almost all are white—the reverse of the population "served.") Within DSS, Travers headed the newly formed Homeless Housing Assistance Program (HHAP), which was to distribute funds for the construction or rehabilitation of units for the homeless. Thoroughly inappropriate funding proposals, always for shelters, got her approval. As I began to know the players, I became aware of how many of them were personal friends of hers, well-to-do ex-flower children playing power games with poor people's lives. Travers and Kim Hopper, co-founder with Hayes of the National Coalition for the Homeless, were married shortly thereafter.

Jack Doyle, who headed the Red Cross's shelter development team, shared a cooperative with the duo. Fortified with philanthropic dollars, these "experts" and a long list of HHAP grantees engaged in psychological warfare with the dragon mayor Edward Koch while courting the gallant governor Mario Cuomo. Before you knew it, the shelter industry and its soul mate, the food distribution business, had become New York's growth industry. A joke went around our office: "How many homeless people can you pack on the head of a pin? Answer: As many as you can get DSS to fund you for."

One proposal from the Henry Street Settlement (given honorable mention by Kozol) had a ratio of more than one staff person for every adult in the household, but only 81 square feet of space for each family—less than the legal minimum for a jail cell. Jack Doyle at the Red Cross proposed taking a 29-room SRO and turning it into a shelter for 84 people in families—without expanding the space one inch. Like nearly all those requesting funds, both groups wanted not only hundreds of thousands in capital grants but also ongoing "per diems" to pay for service staff, "depreciation," debt service, etc., as well as standard operating and maintenance costs. The poor were caught in the stranglehold of helping hands righteously dishing out soup here, providing a cot there, offering every conceivable form of counseling to fix them and looting the treasury in the process.

Along the way, there were sensible, concrete options. Of the dozen or so steps that could still be taken, these are a few:

1. *Converting Resources from Shelter to Housing.* In New York State alone, over \$1 billion from combined sources will be spent on welfare hotels and shelters in 1988. Government officials, shelter providers, and advocates have led the media (and each other) to believe that federal regulations prohibit these funds from being more wisely spent on permanent housing. The fact is that with a modicum of ingenuity and a dose of political will, these dollars could be redirected. Last year, I inserted myself as a "fellow" into New York's legislative process. Working closely with several women legislators, I produced a relatively simple blueprint for that conversion. The plan was finally examined by a hearing on the homeless cosponsored by a half-dozen different legislative bodies in June. By the end of the discussion, most of the naysayers were convinced the cat was out of the bag: it can be done. That remains true, though new political obstacles are raised at every turn.

Consider the current system. As much as 90 percent of the payments to not-for-profit shelters are for expenses not associated with the physical operation and maintenance of running a building. Instead, these funds pay for a battery of "services" ranging from social workers to administrators. In this sense, we are using social workers to treat what is primarily a housing problem, which is akin to hiring a plumber to treat appendicitis. At an average of \$75 per family per day (less than half the sum for either Hayes' or An-

drew Cuomo's shelters), it costs \$2.7 million to run 100 units each year. Over a 20-year period, factoring in a conservative 3 percent inflation rate, it will cost \$73.6 million to run this kind of shelter, of which as much as \$66.2 million could be spent on nonshelter items. This figure represents a substantial "hidden" budget. No legislative body votes on these expenditures. Instead, they are appropriated by administrative fiat of state DSS and the city's Human Resources Administration, which run the welfare system. The patronage conduit thus afforded to the "welfare department" is formidable.

2. *Restoring Responsibility to the Housing Authority.* An even speedier solution is through existing public housing. However, this runs counter to the current discriminatory practices of housing authorities around the country. For instance, between 1980 and 1983, the welfare population in New York City's public housing units was covertly reduced from 25 percent to 23 percent—which means that 20,000 fewer children were housed in the city's public housing in 1983 than in 1980. It is a matter of public record that the 1970 welfare hotel crisis in New York City was alleviated primarily by increasing the intake of homeless (welfare) families into public housing by 100 families per month. In spite of the relatively low vacancy rates, this could be done again.

3. *The Pre-Homeless Syndrome.* By a process known as "churning," the welfare department knocks tens of thousands of eligible people off the rolls each month. One Human Resources Administration worker maintains that three out of five families entering the shelter system would not be there but for the failure of the income maintenance program to sustain their benefits. A touch of administrative accountability on the part of the welfare department would seem to be in order here, but advocates who don't benefit from mentioning the problem can't be expected to raise it with much fervor.

These are only three of the relatively obvious things that could alter the homeless horizon but aren't in political vogue. Actually, Kozol's homeless families say repeatedly what they think could be done. They rail against the insane welfare bureaucracy; they point out the absurdity of spending money on hotels and shelters when they could be housed permanently in real apartments. But when Kozol comes to discussing solutions, in the section of his book, "Facing the Year 2000," he goes straight to the advocate/providers for answers. First on his list is the expansion of the shelter system, primarily by converting the dollars spent on welfare hotels not to permanent housing but to not-for-profit shelters. This brutalizes the homeless while postponing the fight for permanent housing—which Kozol addresses only briefly, in the weakest and worst thought-out section of his book.

It is because we tolerate a form of imperialism in our internal affairs that this nightmare has gotten so out of hand. We have made it all but im-



Kristin Reed, *Who Can Stop the Developing Invasion? The People United Can*, billboard on the roof of Gas Station Space 2B, New York City, 1988.

possible for poor people to represent their own interests in the political forums that could benefit them, telling ourselves instead that the poor cannot or do not know what's best for them. The result of this bigotry is that we render unto the fox the responsibility to advocate for the chickens. The true costs are incalculable.

*The House of Ruth*

Jacqueline Leavitt

Homelessness is a lot more than houselessness; homelessness involves the loss of connections with an entire community of other people. *Rachel and Her Children* is a powerful and accurate description of the daily lives of homeless families, but for the most part Kozol fails to get beyond the conventional view of housing as the cause and solution to the problem of being without a place to call one's own. In two pages of an appendix and in his "Notes," Kozol branches out briefly to discuss the crucial relationships among living arrangements, social connections, leadership development, job training, jobs, and child care, but these concerns don't make much of an impression next to the persistent cry for more housing.

Kozol is not alone in his reluctance to go beyond the obvious. Housing policymakers and analysts frequently fight for increased production of units but do not push for the services that would enable people to become independent, to be more than passive objects of administrative action.

The debate over housing and/or services has long been an issue in public housing. Public housing tenant leaders like Bertha Gilkey in St. Louis's Cochran Gardens project and Kimi Gray in Washington, D.C.'s Kenilworth Parkside have fought to retain their units rather than see them demolished or sold; they have also fought to reinstate the community facilities that early public housing reformers like Edith Elmer Wood, Catherine Bauer, and Mary Simkhovich originally envisioned. Rather than being simply bar-

rackslike permanent units, public housing was originally supposed to answer to the needs of everyday life; it was meant to be a place where poor people could put down roots, become leaders, maintain ties with friends, and have access to childcare centers and meeting rooms. It was not supposed to be a punitive storage area for social discards. Current discussions of homelessness and affordable housing remind us of how far we have moved from the original intent of public housing as formulated in the 1930s.

Looking on people as advocates and tenant leaders, not only as victims, is central to reformulating the issue and solving the problem. Most low-income residents in public housing and city-owned, landlord-abandoned buildings are women. In a study I did with Susan Saegert of tenants in New York City's abandoned buildings, we found that women (and some men) have rescued buildings that lacked heat or hot water; they have endured the miserable conditions Kozol describes in the *Martinique Hotel*—broken elevators and rat- and insect-infested apartments. The prospects before these people were not very different from those confronting the *Martinique's* residents—they all faced the loss of their housing. But a combination of several factors helped the people in our study to survive: they were able to form limited-equity cooperatives because they employed community pressure to improve their building; their resolve was strengthened by their sense of community and attachment to place; they pooled their limited resources from work as domestics, civil servants, and in low-paid service positions; they relied on networks of neighbors and citywide and neighborhood technical assistance groups. But they never could have achieved as much as they did without public funding and their persistence in threading their way through a maze of city programs.

These stories helped us to understand why the leaders in these buildings were almost always women. Tenants' activities have a lot in common with the repetitive, practical tasks of housework. Budgeting, housecleaning, and conflict resolution skills were transferred from the individual home to the collective household. Women operated and maintained the building; women identified funding sources for capital repairs; women formed committees that counseled tenants with rent in arrears; they screened new tenants, and visited the sick and infirm. Male leaders acknowledged women's capacity for attention to the physical upkeep of the home and the maintenance of the social world of the building. Saegert and I call these new settlements, where women's skills extend out in ever-widening circles from the individual household to the building and community, "community-households." They are powerful models for helping the homeless to help themselves.

Of course, homeless people's lives are more disrupted than those of tenants in buildings abandoned by their landlords, but both groups draw attention to the basic units of society—the family and the household. Even in the

most abject of the circumstances Kozol describes, women struggle to care for their children and for others who need their aid. If we look closely enough, as Kozol does only intermittently, we can see the seeds of their potential survival in this struggle. Since he gives few examples of successful solutions to homelessness, Kozol reinforces pessimism about the political likelihood of small-scale alternatives. But there are a number of successful, modest-sized refuges, primarily run by nonprofit organizations, which draw on women's strengths to offer the homeless a range of services that will help them toward independence. One of these is the House of Ruth in Los Angeles, which was established nine years ago by the Sisters of St. Joseph Carondelet. Money to run the House of Ruth comes from government grants and individual donations. The board is made up of women, and the three coordinators who collectively run the emergency shelter are also women. The paid staff includes part-time employees responsible for childcare, counseling, and job training. The two-story house has a homey feel—guests eat and watch television in the old living and dining room; on the same floor four senior aides supervise children who range in age from infants to five-year-olds. On its upper floor, the emergency shelter has four rooms for guests. Usually a woman and her children are in one room, but there are instances when unrelated people share a room. A live-in staff woman occupies a fifth room; three nights a week, another staff woman sleeps in an alcove that also provides a secluded place for counseling.

Guests, who are without resources of any kind, arrive at the emergency shelter by referral or by word of mouth. The shelter staff becomes the guest's support network. The staff shops for food, prepares meals, distributes clothing, negotiates with schools about children who may be in the district for only a short time, spars with the welfare bureaucracy to insure that checks arrive in time, intervenes with immigration, handles problems with the Department of Children Services, provides transportation, and counsels guests about jobs and about finding permanent housing. There is a fine-grained attention to detail that eases the pain of dependency and aids in gaining independence. If guests have to make many calls, for example, they can use the office telephone rather than the one pay phone in the public hallway. Phones are answered with "hellos" that do not identify the shelter, a way of avoiding discrimination from prospective landlords and employers wary of renting an apartment or offering a job to a homeless person.

Though the scale is very small, the House of Ruth is impressive and instructive. Support does not stop when someone finds a permanent home. People are counseled about their skills and helped to find jobs. The staff holds classes to bring women's domestic skills to a professional level, identifies jobs, and follows up, insuring that the women receive a fair wage and are not exploited or mistreated. Recognizing that emergency shelter is insuffi-

cient, two years ago the House of Ruth rented a nearby house for transitional housing (the step between destitution and independent permanent low-income housing) for four women and their children; this year they purchased an adjacent house, also for transitional housing.

If we are to respond to homelessness we must, like the House of Ruth, have more than one strategy. Funding for housing, even in the best proposed legislation, is insufficient for people with no income. There must be companion funds for job development and childcare. Feminists have helped draft model legislation that addresses the complex needs of low-income women. In California, the Family Housing Demonstration Program is one piece of Senator David Roberti's Housing and Homeless Act. The act authorizes a \$450 million general obligation bond issue to be placed on the November 1988 and 1990 ballots. The \$15 million Family Housing Demonstration Program will offer incentives to private developers to build multi-unit rental or cooperative housing with job training and childcare services. The New York State Women's Housing Coalition brought the Family Housing Demonstration Program to Assemblyman Pete Grannis' attention; they hope that similar legislation will be introduced in New York to create a fund to finance housing with on-site childcare facilities, community rooms, and laundry facilities. Representative Joseph Kennedy II has introduced the Community Housing Partnership Act, which will provide \$10 million to support expenses and training for the staff of nonprofit community-based organizations, and for the administration of education, counseling, and organizing programs for tenants eligible for affordable housing. It also proposes to provide \$500 million in grants to subsidize the development of affordable rental housing and homeownership.

Homeless people understand the need for a broad perspective on their problem. One of Kozol's interviewees, Kim, a former preschool teacher, wants people to realize that there are gifted people in the Martinique, that they can be taught to read, that they need day care and a place to meet. Implicit in what Kim says is a vision of how people can live in a community; she does not see improving the conditions at the Martinique as a solution, and she is right. Rachel and her children also have some insight into what they really need. Rachel knows that she is poor; her children know that they are treated differently from other children in school. Rachel may seem to express herself naively by talking about her desire for four plates, four glasses, and four spoons for her children, but she understands that with those simple tools they could eat as a family and gather individual strength from a more cohesive social unit.

If we read Kozol's book closely we can hear more than despair; we can learn about people's strengths and needs, and through these we can learn how to help them. If we listen to what these people are saying, we can see what to do about poverty. But we also need to know more about modest



Michael Belenky, photograph of old West Side Highway, New York City, with Intrepid Sea Air Space Museum in the background, 1988.

projects around the country like the House of Ruth. A housing policy rooted in the experiences of the daily lives of women will also reach the men and children connected to them. A woman in a low-income cooperative in Harlem told me about wanting "to invest in our stores and eventually take over all our stores and make some kind of work for people that's not able to go to work, for when I get tired of doing my job, I'll have somewhere to come. When Ruth gets tired of doing double shifts in the hospital, she can just sit down for a while." A strategy for homelessness has to be based on making these broader connections.

*Kai Erikson is a professor of sociology at Yale University and editor of The Yale Review. Robert Fitch recently taught in New York University's Metropolitan Studies program. Theresa Funicello is co-director of Social Agenda, which works to insert poor people's points of view into policy debates. Jacqueline Leavitt is acting associate professor of urban planning at the University of California, Los Angeles, Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning. Her book with Susan Saegert, From Abandonment to Hope: Community-Households in Harlem, was recently published by Columbia University Press.*





**HOME FRONT**

# Open forum



## HOUSING:

### *Gentrification, Dislocation, and Fighting Back!*

**Tuesday, February 28,  
6:30 PM**

- **Oda Friedheim,** Housing Justice Campaign
- **Jim Haughton,** Legislative Chair, National Tenants Organization; director, Fight Back
- **Bienvenida Matias,** filmmaker (El Corazón de Loisaída, Housing Court, and others)
- **Irma Rodriguez,** Task Force on Housing Court
- **Neil Smith,** Rutgers professor of geography; co-editor, *Gentrification of the City*

Moderator: **Lori-Jean Saigh**

*These speakers will begin the forum, and then the floor will be open to all—  
**please come speak out on the issues!***

155 Mercer Street NYC between Houston & Prince

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## HOUSING: GENTRIFICATION, DISLOCATION AND FIGHTING BACK

**Moderator, Lori-Jean Saigh** My name is Lori-Jean Saigh. I'm a performing artist and I'm involved with the Clinton Coalition of Concern. The first person I'll introduce is Irma Rodriguez. She is president of the board of directors of ANHD, the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, and she is also associate director of the Forest Hills Community House in Queens.

**Irma Rodriguez** Actually I am here tonight as a board member of the City-Wide Task Force on Housing Court, and my first question to the audience is, who's been there? That gives me an idea of who I'm talking to. So who has been there? . . . Housing court is unlike any other kind of court you might encounter as a citizen of this country. Like me, you were probably raised on Perry Mason, but housing court is about as far removed from Perry Mason as you can get in terms of what justice looks like. Generally it's in horrible quarters. In the Bronx, it's in the basement of a civil court building. It's smoky, it's dirty, there's no place to sit, and it's extremely crowded. Housing court is the battleground where the right to own property and do what you will with it and the rights of tenants get played out. A lot of other things that we talk about—policy, gentrification, displacement—those struggles are played out in housing court. What happens there to tenants is an important if very focused little piece of the whole housing picture.

The City-Wide Task Force on Housing Court is a coalition of over a hundred groups and individuals who represent four task forces in four boroughs: Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn. There is no task force in Staten Island, primarily because there isn't much of a housing court there. The task force started about ten years ago as a group of advocates in the Bronx, and since then we've spent a good deal of our energies in two areas. One, providing information to tenants who by and large are unrepresented by attorneys in the actual court system, and two, monitoring the court and making recommendations for reform.



Above and opposite: two images from the series, "Demolished by Neglect," a project organized in the late 1980s by the Urban Center for Photography, a coalition of photographers in Detroit. Photographs were blown up to minibillboard size and attached to the fronts of abandoned buildings, often the very buildings whose interiors were depicted.

In 1986 we issued a report culminating a three-year study. The report is called "Five Minute Justice: There Ain't Nothing Going On But the Rent." We took a systematic look at nearly 3,000 cases, as unbiased a look as a bunch of tenant advocates could take. In fact, we worked with a research professional who kept us honest. We wanted to look at the court system, which is not much more than 14 or 15 years old itself, and see whether it was working. The court was established around 1973, with a mandate to preserve New York's housing stock. But the mandate seemed to have shifted from preserving housing stock to collecting rent. We wanted to see why that had happened and what effect it was having on individuals in court. When we looked at the demographics of tenants brought into court—tenants are almost always the defendants—we found that 66 percent were women, almost 54 percent were black, 26 percent were Hispanic, and 18 percent were white. The largest single group of tenants were the 56 percent black, Hispanic, and Asian women. We found that fewer than 20 percent of tenants were represented by attorneys; other studies have shown that the percentage could have been as low as 10 percent. Conversely, about 90 percent of all landlords were represented by attorneys. When we looked at women and minorities, who we felt were the most vulnerable, a much lower percentage was represented by attorneys, and the percentage went up for white male tenants.



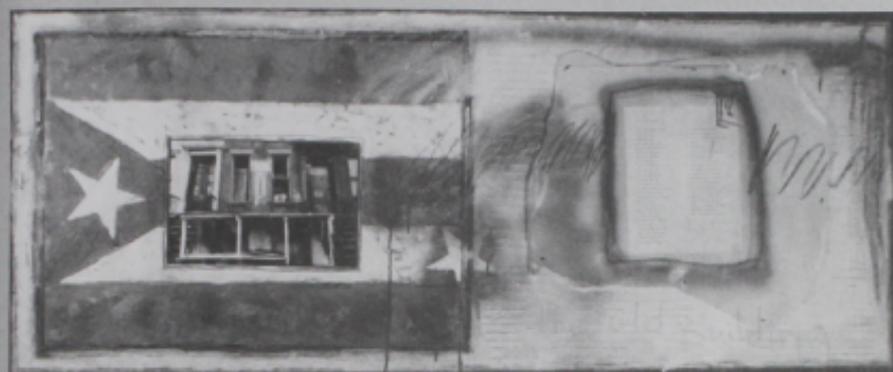
We also looked at the buildings involved. We did a small sample study out of the 3,000 cases. Part of that study was an intensive look at what violations existed in about a hundred buildings, what violations existed in the buildings in 1983, when the cases were being observed, and what violations existed in 1985, two years later. We wanted to see if those violations had been corrected as a result of court action. Over all, we found that the number of violations per unit in 1983 was twice as high for cases where tenants said they needed repairs as for cases where tenants didn't mention repairs, but that in both kinds of cases, violations were much higher in the buildings that were involved in housing court cases than in other buildings. What that said to us was that poor, minority women were being evicted from some of the worst housing in New York City. Bringing those buildings to the attention of the court didn't mean a thing, because in fact their condition had worsened by 1985.

You don't issue a report without a big chapter of recommendations at the back, and we had a slew of them, but I can distill them down to two.

First, tenants in housing court need the right to counsel. We found that about 50 percent of the tenants in housing court had some form of public assistance, so we are talking about a poor population that can't afford legal help. So our Number One recommendation was free legal assistance. Our second recommendation, though, is one that doesn't get talked about a lot outside of housing court reformers. It's what we call the "clean hands" requirement. Why should a guy like Leonard Spodek—the famous Dracula Landlord—why should he get to use the court system we all pay for with our tax dollars to evict poor people for a month's back rent, when in fact he has so many violations and owes the city so much money that he really shouldn't have the right to use that court system? So we developed a plan for a legal system called "clean hands," which is that a landlord can't bring a case against a tenant unless he can prove he has a decent, habitable building. Also, I should say, there is a legislative drive to get the right to counsel for tenants and for plain-language forms. We need the help of folks like you to push some of that legislation.<sup>1</sup> Thanks.

**Lori-Jean Selgh** The next speaker is Jim Haughton, the legislative chair of the National Tenants Organization and also the executive director of Harlem Fight Back.

**Jim Haughton** The court system never works for poor people. It puts you on the defensive, and after a while you become so defensive you are practically on your back. I think we have to develop a perspective that sees the housing question as essentially revolutionary. Revolutionary in the sense that you have to go up against the entire system if you are fighting for housing for the poor and working poor in this city and in this nation. If you look at government's role in housing, you'll find that back in the '30s when there were mass movements, government came up with a number of programs to placate people. One of those programs was public housing. It has served the interests of poor people well, notwithstanding all of the negatives and the ugly characterizations about public housing and people who dwell there. It has been a good program, even though the buildings should have been constructed better. I'm talking about public housing because it seems to me that only the government can supply the quantities of housing the poor and working poor need. The government must subsidize and provide housing for people who cannot afford housing on the private market. There is no other way—there is no other way for people who are homeless, for people who can't keep up with the skyrocketing rents. We won't solve any of the problems unless we are able to exact that kind of program from the federal government.



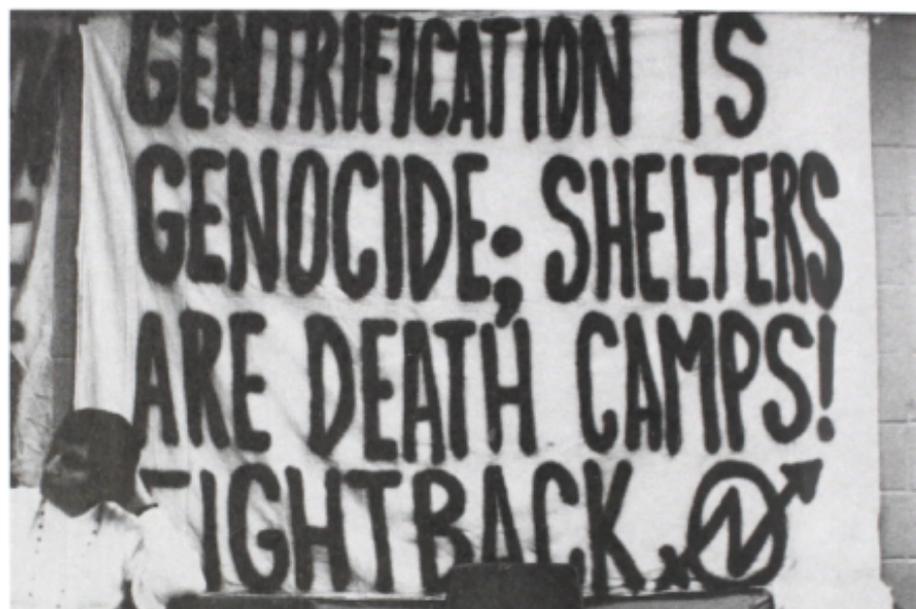
### The Old Buildings

(1422 amsterdam avenue)  
 everybody knew  
 everybody else  
 everybody respected  
 & loved everybody else  
 unity was happening  
 whenever somebody  
 cooked pasteles  
 everybody in the building  
 was invited to eat  
 this is how together  
 everybody was in  
 those days (city hall  
 saw this harmony happening  
 and got intimidated  
 because there is nothing  
 that frightens  
 this government more  
 than seeing people  
 living and loving  
 and breathing together  
 so they decided to  
 demolish the buildings  
 that could have been  
 saved by renovation

& eliminate the unity)  
 everybody was moved  
 away from each other  
 to so-called better places  
 where you do not know  
 anybody when you move in  
 & you do not know anybody  
 when you move out  
 dead or alive or in  
 a straightjacket  
 the system tailored  
 especially for you and  
 all your close relatives  
 who came here looking  
 for better days and  
 finding worse nights  
 of their existence as  
 they went from funeral  
 parlor to funeral parlor  
 looking for coffins  
 that were not too expensive

**Pedro Pietri,**  
 from *Puerto Rican Obituary*

Juan Sanchez, *Banderas Series: The Old Building*, oil and mixed media on canvas, 1982, with poem by Pedro Pietri.



Clayton Patterson, still from *Fight Back*, color videotape, 1989.

Now, why is there an acute shortage of housing? Why is homelessness growing? Let's look at the heavy expenditures this government has made over the past 40 years on military hardware. In Seymour Melman's very important book *The Demilitarized Society*, these expenditures are put at \$8 trillion. That is reflected not only in inadequate housing, in homelessness, but in many of the other ills we have in this city. We must look, too, at how the wealth is distributed in this country and in this city, how the rich get richer and the poor get poorer; that kind of basic inequality is also a major factor in the housing crisis.

But now for the particulars: how does the housing shortage really take place? We will hear more about gentrification from Neil Smith. But in the 30 years I've been active and around Harlem, I have seen the total demise of that community. To have seen Harlem in the '50s or '60s and to see Harlem today is to see two totally different communities. Today, the gentrification is at the periphery; as it moves into the center it is speeding up. In Harlem we find abandoned buildings, vacant lots, very much like the South Bronx not too long ago. The failure of the government to provide adequate funding not only for maintaining the existing stock of public housing but also for expanding it is a clear demonstration of the housing policies of the Reagan administration.

Maybe some of you are old enough to remember the rent strikes back in the '60s, when masses of people withheld their rents, not only in public housing but also in private housing. That is the mood we have to recapture, and we'd better recapture it quickly, or else we're going to be in trouble—not only the poor and working poor, but middle-income and upper-income people, too.

The government is mounting an attack on public housing that has taken several forms. In 1983, Jesse Gray, one of the champions of public-housing tenants, showed me a feasibility study that in effect said that the government could get out of public housing. I understand that a private research outfit produced the study. Of course, I didn't believe it because it didn't sound reasonable—it sounded insane. Shortly thereafter, though, the government came up with the voucher idea: if you lived in public housing you could use a voucher to get subsidized housing on the private market for a certain period of time. But the tenants were smart enough not to fall for that, because they knew that maybe that voucher would be withdrawn and they would be in trouble. But the government pushed vouchers as a way of undermining the public housing program.

Then there were demolitions. You have heard about demolitions taking place all around the country—most recently in Newark, where several big developments were torn down. That comes about when buildings aren't adequately maintained and fall into a state of disrepair. Then they become an eyesore, and it's justifiable to demolish them. Rather than renovating these structurally sound buildings, they demolish them or they promote tenant management: you can manage your own building and ultimately own it. As an alternative to holding onto those buildings, the government has been pushing privatization as a way of getting out of public housing.

All of this occurred while the Reagan administration was drastically cutting the budget from something like \$33 billion to less than \$8 billion. I understand that in the budget proposed by President Bush, there is a call for a 25 percent cut in public housing, and that includes a number of public programs that come under the rubric of public housing. All in all, there has been a heavy attack on the cornerstone of housing for poor and working-poor people, the public housing program.

Other than the National Tenant Organization there has not been, to my knowledge, much of an organized struggle to reverse that trend. About four years ago, we saw the handwriting on the wall. We moved to get a bill underway and talked to a number of local congressional representatives. Many of them felt that Congress was not in favor of spending more money because of the budget deficit. Fortunately, we ran into one congressperson in Washington who supported us, John Conyers of Detroit. We got a big bill into the



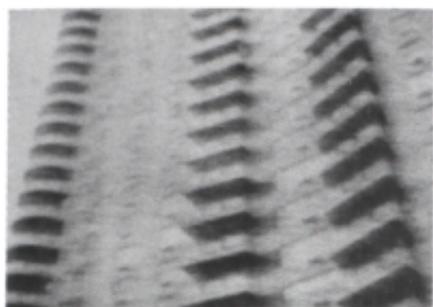
Max Bechet, *Network Landmarks: Establishing Shots from TV Series (Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, Star Trek, The Jeffersons, Dallas)*, color photos shot from television, 1988.

congressional hopper that year. Every year it is reintroduced—it was reintroduced just a couple of weeks ago. It is called HR 969, the Jesse Gray Housing Act<sup>2</sup>; its passage would give us a legislative goal for people to organize around. The bottom line is that the money has to be there in the housing program if the housing needs are to be met. You could go to court, but if the money is not there to build housing, no housing results. Build housing—that's how to deal with homelessness.

The local fight is also important—the Koch administration has been a lackey for big real estate—but I don't think that the fight on the local level could be answered unless we are dealing with a national fight. If we are to exact the programs we need, not only for housing but also for health, education, the environment, and so on, the people are going to have to take to the streets again. I view it as a revolutionary fight. It's going to require a massive involvement of people all over this country, including those who may currently dwell in comfortable and safe housing. They have to identify with those who may not be so fortunate and throw their weight behind the struggle.

**Lori-Jean Saigh** The next speaker is Bienvenida Matias. She is a filmmaker.

**Bienvenida Matias** I'm a filmmaker, and a number of films I've done deal with housing. I did a film with Marci Reaven called *The Heart of Loisaida: El Corazon de Loisaida*, which is about Latino tenants taking over buildings in the late '70s. Then I did a film (finished on video) called *Housing Court*, with Billy Sorokin. We finished it in 1984. I used to work for Channel 13 on a local program called "Metroline"—I was the "poverty expert," and my specialty was the three Hs: housing, homelessness, and hunger. I did a program on hunger in New York City called "A Million Meals." The connections between homelessness, hunger, and housing are very tight, and you



can't really discuss one issue without the others. There are a lot of good people on this panel who can tell you about housing, but what I want to tell you about is why I make the films that I do.

I live on the Lower East Side in a sweat-equity building that was featured prominently in *The Heart of Loïsaida*. Back in the late 1970s, the tenants in the building saw that the landlord was going to abandon the building. He really couldn't get any more profit out of it, and it was very run down. There were a couple of empty apartments, so some community activists moved in and started a rent strike. Within a very short time they convinced the landlord to sell the building to a group of the tenants; which he did for \$2,000—no mortgage, no back taxes. The boiler wasn't working, though, so the first year they had no heat or hot water. The tenants had no managing experience, very little construction experience or anything like that. There was a lot of fighting. People thought, "Why should we pay rent now that the building is ours?"

I was doing a film about the situation, and since it takes a long time for an independent filmmaker to make a film, over a period of two-and-a-half years I had a good opportunity to get to know who these people were. They would always say, "There's an apartment available, you can come in." And I always said, "Oh no, not me. I don't have time to deal with stuff like that. I don't know anything about construction. I have no money." During that same time I was constantly moving from apartment to apartment because my landlords always increased the rent at year's end. I finally ended up living in a city-owned building, and I came home one day to find a note under my door saying I had to move because they were going to demolish the building. Well, I started working with the other tenants in the building. The Met Council [Metropolitan Council on Housing] came in, everyone came in. Long story. Anyway, they finally saved the building, but I realized how precarious my situation was, and that if I wanted to do my work I needed to



Emma Amos, "And the dish ran away with the spoon," acrylic and fabric on linen canvas, 1987.

live in a place I could afford. So I moved into Coqui (as the building at 219 East 4th Street is called) and a new experience opened up for me.

Every two weeks, I found myself taking part in bi-weekly meetings about what we were going to do with this building, and about what our skills were. "Can you tape and spackle? Can you pour concrete? Do you know how to change the beam in the basement that is sagging because of a fire ten years ago? Do you know how to clean the boiler?" Well, I said no to all of these questions, and everyone said, "It's OK, you'll learn."

In the beginning there weren't too many women in the building, so it was quite a contest of wills. I wanted to show that I was just as strong as

these six-foot-four-inch guys slinging buckets of joint compound around. We worked every other Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., with 45 minutes for lunch. I've been doing this for six years now, and every time I finish working I still have to take a nap. But in the beginning I really wanted to show the guys that I could be one of them, I could really do this. They were mostly Puerto Rican, so they wanted to show me it wasn't very polite for girls to be doing this—but there I was. Now, after six years, when I see something very heavy to move I really like to ask the six-foot-four-inch guy, "Oh, Louie, could you move this for me?" And he will say, "No, you can do that." So we've really come around, and we are still working on each other's apartments.

I also realized very early that part of the reason it was so important for me to be in this building was that it gave me a real sense of being connected. It's not just a place where I live, it's not just an address, it's a building with a life of its own, with an incredible energy of its own. The people care for each other. I know that even if I'm walking home late at night and people are selling crack a couple of buildings down, the minute I go through my front door, I'm in a safe and protective environment like very few people have in this city.

I know that as long as I'm healthy, I can continue to work in my field and continue to work on my building. But I always wonder about all those "what ifs": what if one day I can no longer freelance at my job? What if I get ill and can't work? What if I can't pay my rent or buy food? I feel that living in this situation, there will always be a solution, because I'm living with a group of people. They are not my family. I don't even have to see them every day, but I know that they care enough about me that no one would just evict me.

When the tenants bought the building, they did not become a low-income co-op because no one had the money, and everyone was afraid that the rents would become exorbitantly high, so for about ten years, from about 1976 to '86, we were a real estate company! As a real estate company the building could have incredible numbers of violations and city agencies would do nothing about it, but if we had wanted to be a low-income co-op, we would have had to really fix up the building. In the almost 12 years we've been together, all the work has been done out of our own rent rolls, which is about \$1,500 per month—if you have a large apartment you pay \$300, if you have a small apartment, you pay about \$150. We have never had to take out any loans; we still don't have a mortgage. We have done major work on the building. We have redone the basement, we've done the roof, we've overhauled the boiler. There is always something that needs to be done. I feel very privileged to be part of this group, but I think that it's a solution that will work for under one percent of the people in our city. I think

we need a lot of other solutions to make sure that people have a safe and decent place to live.

**Lori-Jean Saigh** The next person is Oda Friedheim, the associate director of ANHD, the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, with which Irma Rodriguez is also associated. She will talk about what has blossomed out of that: the Housing Justice Campaign.

**Oda Friedheim** It isn't surprising that a lot of what we have been talking about so far has focused on the public sector, the government, and the state, rather than on villains of gentrification like the Trumps and the Skydells. This is because the public sector has been our main arena of struggle. We don't think we can change Trump or Skydell. But we can try to influence the government to do what is right, to mitigate the effects of the private sector. When you look at the issue of gentrification in New York City, you see massive dislocation, and much of it can be traced to the public sector. This displacement escalated in the last decade, which coincides with the reign of Mayor Koch, but which is also the period after the fiscal crisis, after the city restructured itself and set out on a course of squeezing out poor working people and remaking the city as a major financial center. During that time, something like one million low-rent apartments were lost. An even more conscious policy promoted by the city was a program of fat tax abatements to real estate developers, resulting in the loss of over 100,000 SRO [single-room occupancy] units. And that is probably just the tip of the iceberg. We could go on all night with examples of similar kinds of destruction, both at the neighborhood level and citywide.

What I want to talk about is the Housing Justice Campaign. The HJC is a broad coalition initiated by ANHD to bring together diverse constituencies—housing groups, religious institutions, labor, tenants, etc.—around a common agenda that integrates three important strategic goals: the protection of tenants, the preservation of affordable housing, and the production of affordable housing. A particular focus of the last two years has been housing production, and more specifically, how the city is using its resources, mainly its city-owned buildings and its land, to help meet the desperate housing needs of today.

You probably have been reading, especially since the beginning of the year [1989], a lot of laudatory articles about the city's Ten-Year Plan, which makes it seem as though we have finally turned the corner, we are really producing, we are really developing all these buildings, and we are doing it primarily for low- and moderate-income people. Unfortunately, this idea is largely a fiction that has been promoted through press conferences, press releases, little picture books with pretty charts and big apples, and all very



Willie Birch, *Every Saturday the Men Play Dominoes*, gouache on paper with relief frame, 1987.

colorful. But if you look a little closer, a much different picture emerges. The resources unfortunately are allocated to more middle- and upper income groups whose housing needs are still met by the private market. At ANHD we have tracked some 26,000 units that are more or less "in the pipeline," and we've found that the vast majority go to people earning quite a bit more than \$30,000; that isn't to say that people in that income range may not need some help, but the need is still enormous at the low end.

Just today there was a newspaper article about the increased number of families and households at the poverty level. The recent housing vacancy survey still cites \$16,000 as the median income for a rental household. That means that 50 percent still earn below \$16,000—a fact that is often conveniently forgotten. Equally forgotten is the fact that there is a vast number of poor working households in the city—retail clerks, clerical aids, homemakers, people who work in hospitals, people who are essential to the functioning of the city. Housing is not being created for these people. The very little low-income housing that is being created—and there is very little—is for those people who have "done time," who have been forced into the inhumane shelter system for one or two years, sometimes even more, in



Cindy Feldman, *City Planning*, detail, altered postcards, 1988-89.

welfare hotels, transitional housing, and shelters. Other low-income individuals or families who are not yet homeless but who are at risk are not eligible for housing under the Ten-Year Plan.

What is contemplated for the homeless population? You have probably read that Mayor Koch is finally accelerating the relocation of homeless families out of the welfare hotels unfortunately to new housing, that is primarily homeless-only housing or other transitional shelters. The recent closing of the Martinique Hotel resulted in the relocation of families from there to another hotel, the Brooklyn Arms, which is itself now slated to be closed. The relocation process is really nothing but a shell game, with families, especially homeless families, being moved around through this very inhumane system, while the newly-created housing is going to middle- and upper-income people. Out of 20,000 units of low-income housing, approximately 1,000 will go to families earning below \$13,000. Let me add that the reason that we have these thousand units is primarily the function of their small size. These thousand or so apartments going to low-income people are mostly studios and one-bedroom apartments. Obviously you need those too, but there are hardly any two- or three-bedroom apartments for the very low income. If you have a big family and are poor, you might as well forget it. Or you might take advantage of the latest offer to get people out: a one-way bus ticket.

That brings us back not just to the global issue of dislocation, but also to the issue of gentrification at the neighborhood level; the Ten-Year Plan will have an enormous impact on reshaping the city not only as a whole but

at the neighborhood level because at its core is the city's *in rem* building stock—the buildings the city took over for failure to pay taxes. Until recently there were about 6,000 or so vacant buildings with about 50,000 to 60,000 vacant units, and another 4,000 to 5,000 occupied units. Of course, this is a constantly changing picture, since buildings are demolished by the city and other buildings are added to the *in rem* stock. But these buildings aren't equally distributed throughout the city; they are highly concentrated in particular neighborhoods. The same neighborhoods that over a decade ago were threatened with planned shrinkage now have a large block of city-owned property. The city holds the fate of these neighborhoods in its hands. That has prompted some neighborhood groups to band together, and some of these neighborhoods are actually developing their own plan. The Lower East Side is one such example. It has been enormously difficult to get the city to work with these groups. It took a lot of demonstrating and a lot of struggle, but some of those plans, in much reduced form, are going forward.

When neighborhoods haven't been able to organize, the city is coming in and literally redoing the neighborhood. To cite one example: Bushwick has a median income of \$11,900—let's say \$12,000; 50 percent earn less than \$12,000, and yet 94 percent of the units in Bushwick under the Ten-Year Plan will be available only to people earning above \$30,000. What does it mean to a neighborhood if you have a very poor population and the city comes in and takes the buildings and redevelops them? And of course they are being turned over to the private sector, so not only are they redeveloped for middle-income people, but long-time affordability is not in any way guaranteed. The neighborhood impact will be tremendous. The housing needs of people in particular neighborhoods aren't being met; that also will have an impact on the surrounding neighborhoods.

Again and again over the past decade, we have seen cases where the city has picked a neighborhood and decided to put money into it—Washington Heights is a good example of that. The city granted many loans there to rehab privately owned buildings, leading to huge rent increases for the mostly low- and moderate-income tenants. This kind of public subsidy flooding into one neighborhood has been a major force in helping that neighborhood gentrify; it has driven up rents significantly and accelerated co-op conversion. When we look at the Ten-Year Plan, we are not only worried about the misallocation of public resources, we are also concerned about secondary displacement that may result from building middle-income housing in otherwise very low-income neighborhoods. It is shocking to realize that we've just been through a decade of similar policies from which virtually nothing has been learned. Now we have to fight all over again, and this time on a much more massive scale.

People have been organizing in many different ways. The Housing Justice Campaign has developed something we call “the equitable land-use policy.” This plan calls for the city to develop a comprehensive program for the distribution, use, and redevelopment of city-owned property and land so that it is targeted to low- and moderate-income families and promotes economically and racially integrated housing, and so that neighborhood plans are worked with and respected. Finally, city-owned property that is currently occupied should remain in public hands; that doesn’t necessarily mean the city has to run it—there are many other nonprofit forms of social ownership that can be developed. That fight is going on, our brochures will lay out this policy in more detail. We encourage your participation in the Housing Justice Campaign. Thank you.

**Lori-Jean Saigh** The last person I want to introduce to you is Neil Smith. He is a housing activist and a theorist. He has written numerous articles on the homeless and has also put together a book called *Gentrification of the City*. He teaches geography at Rutgers University.

**Neil Smith** When the Tompkins Square police riot took place last year, one of the first responses from Mayor Koch and from the head of the Police-man’s Benevolent Association was to blame what they referred to as the “frontier violence” on a group they identify as anarchists, social parasites, druggies, skinheads, and communists. If Tompkins Square was the “frontier,” then it was a frontier of the gentrification process. Even people who understood that it was a police riot, and who defended the people in Tompkins Square fighting gentrification and homelessness, resorted to Custer-like imagery—the idea that there was a final showdown, a last stand at Tompkins Square. I want to try to go into this popular imagery for gentrification, so we can begin to see the lies embedded in the frontier notions of the society, but also the truth within it.

First, I want to offer an example from the real estate industry which will suggest who is served by the frontier imagery. This ad appeared in the *New York Times* about five years ago. It refers to the Armory, which I suppose is a condo, and this is a full-page ad, which must have cost something like \$40,000. It reads, “The Armory celebrates the teaming of the Wild Wild West with ten percent down payment and twelve months’ free maintenance. The trail blazers have done their work. West 42nd Street has been tamed, domesticated and polished into the most exciting, freshest, most energetic new neighborhood in New York.” The neighborhood they’re talking about is the area most of us know as Hell’s Kitchen, since renamed “Clinton.”

NYT 23/12/85

# IS GENTRIFICATION A DIRTY WORD?

There are few words in a New Yorker's vocabulary that are as emotionally loaded as "gentrification."

To one person, it means improved housing. To another, it means unaffordable housing. It means safer streets and new retail businesses to come. To others, it means the homogenization of a formerly diverse neighborhood. It's the result of one family's drive for home ownership. It's the perceived threat of higher rental costs for another family.

In simple terms, gentrification is the upgrading of housing and retail businesses in a neighborhood with an influx of private investment. This process and its repercussions, however, are rarely simple.

## Neighborhoods and New Missions.

Examples of gentrification are as varied and distinctive as New York itself and reflect the city's enduring vitality. That vitality is expressed in terms of change...for neighborhoods and people. We see immigrants from Asia transforming the Flushing community in Queens with their industriousness, while recent arrivals from Russia are bringing new flavor to the Brighton Beach area of Brooklyn. Over a decade ago, painters, sculptors, and budding dance companies looking for loft space moved SoHo, then a manufacturing "ghost town" on Lower Manhattan's northern border, into a world-renowned artistic center. Today a new generation of artists is creating a similar colony in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Elsewhere, middle class pioneers have bought brownstones in dilapidated areas and civilized their districts—such as the portion of Columbus Avenue north of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts—with energy and style.

Different neighborhoods throughout the city have undergone similar changes at different times: Park Slope, Chelsea and the Upper West Side, for example. In each case, neighborhoods that were under-populated and businesses closed by war or disaster were turned into desirable addresses by families and merchants willing to risk their savings and fortunes there.

## Who has to make room for gentrification?

The greatest fears inspired by gentrification, of course, are that low-income residents and low-margin retailers will be displaced by more affluent residents and more profitable businesses.

The Department of City Planning's study of gentrified neighborhoods in Park Slope and on the Upper West Side concluded that some displacement occurs following a community's decline as well as after its rehabilitation. The study also found, however, that residential rent regulations gave apartment dwellers substantial protection against displacement. In addition, the study pointed out that the mix of retail stores and service establishments has remained the same in both areas since 1970.

In this regard, it should also be noted that tenants of residential rental buildings that are converted to cooperative ownership remain protected by non-eviction plans if they decide they don't want to buy their units. A survey conducted by the Real Estate Board of New York found that 86 percent of such tenants thought the conversion process had been a fair one.

## A role for public policy.

We believe that whatever displacement gentrification causes, though, must be dealt with with public policies that promote low- and moderate-income housing construction and rehabilitation, and in zoning revisions that permit retail uses in less expensive, side street locations.

We also believe that New York's best hope lies with families, businesses and lending institutions willing to commit themselves for the long haul to neighborhoods that need them.

That's gentrification.



The Real Estate Board  
of New York, Inc.

What is going on here, when we talk about the frontier and pioneers? About homesteaders and urban cowboys? The real-estate industry employs people whom they call urban scouts, and you won't be surprised to learn that their job is to scout out neighborhoods that could be "flipped over" for gentrification. But they are also supposed to check out how restless the natives are. This frontier imagery is part of a pacification campaign meant to convey to us what a jolly old process gentrification is. In the Sunday supplements, we are given lots of case studies of individuals, lawyers and architects, doctors and professors, executives and so on, who move into newly chic neighborhoods and who are seen as the "new urban pioneers." My favorite example is the lawyer earning about \$250,000 a year who moved into the Marcus Garvey Park area in Harlem; he was interviewed by the *New Yorker*, and he was quite outraged that his house had been broken into twice that year. In the language of gentrification there is a very deliberate borrowing from the 19th century. It is the myth of the rugged individualist, the brave soul going where (presumably) no white man has ever gone before. But there is an underside to this imagery that is politically disgusting: not only does it draw upon the kind of humorous, culturally resonant ideas of the frontier, but it also treats today's urban natives—if you want to put it that way—the same way that Europeans treated the nonurban natives on the frontier in the 19th century. Native Americans were seen as virtually part of the existing landscape, and they could be displaced or wiped out, and it is exactly that mentality that is being incorporated in describing the contemporary urban setting.

Second, and maybe even more important, the language of the urban frontier is utterly untrue. We are fed all this piffle about how these rugged individualists, the John Waynes, went out and settled the West. The truth is that wherever these John Wayne types went, a substantial amount of capital had gone before. The banks were there first, the railroads were there first, or the state was there dividing up and parceling out the territory. In the spirit of this imagery, I like to think of James Rouse, the founder of the company which developed the South Street Seaport among many other projects, as a John Wayne of gentrification. The reality, though, is that he is more the Wells Fargo of gentrification. And the truth is that there *is* a frontier, but it's economic, not cultural.

New York's Lower East Side has been the focus of much of my recent research. In considering levels of investment and disinvestment of capital by landlords, we might look at the cycle of when landlords allow their buildings to go into arrears on taxes and when they pay up. There is a threshold of arrears above which the city will take the building. If the landlord lets the building go into more than twelve quarters of arrears, he is essentially saying he doesn't care about the building. But if he keeps it under 12 quarters of

arrears, he is making a clear economic choice to hold onto it. You can use this information on tax delinquency by landlords to figure out when landlords in any one area are deciding to reinvest. You won't be surprised to learn that on the Lower East Side what emerges is a graph of lines that go north and south, up and down, and they spread from west to east. And as an apt title in *Art in America* put it, it was a process of "Slouching toward Avenue D." Except the fact is, it was no slouch; it was more like a dramatic end run by landlords.

What was most surprising about the real-estate takeover of the East Village was not the geographical pattern from west to east but the speed at which the process took place, and how soon it was all over. By 1980—although you can't see it in terms of individuals or population figures—the reinvestment had covered all but a few pockets of the Lower East Side. The frontier line was already gone by 1980 or 1981. Now, that wasn't always manifested in redevelopment of individual buildings, but the speculation and the heating up of land prices had already started. The importance of this is that it begins to suggest—and here I go along with Jim—the depth of the problems we face in fighting gentrification. Gentrification, as we know, involves the reinvestment of capital, but actually all the problems of gentrification begin with the *disinvestment* of capital. Capital does not reinvest idly or randomly. Capital always reinvests where the disinvestment has already happened. The sad but obvious truth is that our economic system supports and rewards disinvestment. It supports destruction of housing through disinvestment. It creates economic rewards for that kind of activity, based as it is on the private ownership of housing for profit—opposed to the belief that housing is a right of all.

The system destroys housing in a number of ways: it provides tax breaks for people whose housing can be undervalued or written off in various ways in the tax system; and it supports and encourages windfall profits from the process of what is called "milking" of properties—doing no repairs and no maintenance and turning the property over every few years. So if you actually take a building and follow its path through from construction to decline to gentrification, there are many actors involved. Many landlords, many bankers, many developers. But there is only one class involved, and that is the crucial thing: although there are many actors involved (and they can hide behind their differences), we have to understand the class basis of the whole process. In the end, it is the land that is important in the gentrification process, not the buildings. By the time the disinvestment process has taken place, what is left is the shell, and whether it is useful or not, is not important; it is the land and location that are important. Whether the building is knocked down and rebuilt or whether it is rehabilitated really becomes academic.



What is the result of all this? One result is that people's neighborhoods and communities are disrupted, people's daily lives are suddenly wrenched out of their contexts. This situation is much as it was in the 19th century, when those lives, those neighborhoods, those communities, were suddenly converted into a frontier, not as a result of anything done by local people, but as a result of more abstract economic and political forces. The corollary is what is happening in the inner city, where the system is shifting people geographically, dispersing people, particularly minorities, from the central cities to older, poorer suburbs. The legislation against redlining passed in the 1970s was in one sense a good thing but in another sense, a cruel hoax.<sup>4</sup> It came just at the point when money was going to be made by reinvesting in the center city. Likewise, the legislation that opened up the suburbs to working-class people, but especially to racial minorities, was an especially cruel hoax. The dream was that minorities were now going to gain access to suburban areas; the truth was that minorities were steered quite deliberately into the poorest, oldest suburbs, to help replicate the same process of disinvestment that went on in the inner city.

In contemporary academic literature, in popular newspapers, and so on, the blame for neighborhood decline is always visited on the people who live there. That is a fundamental misunderstanding. Capital always leads, just as on the old frontier. You can't see the decision to disinvest from a house; what you *can* see is a black family moving in next door one year. You can't see a landlord having earlier made the decision not to invest but rather to let the house decay so that it becomes cheap housing. So the fundamental issue is the movement of capital. If that is what we focus on, we are witnessing the same process: poor people being relegated to the poorer, ghettoized areas, so that the suburbs will become the new reservations of the poor, of minorities, of single women.

How do we take on a system that controls the press enough to create the images by which we understand what is being done? It seems to me that Jim's statement about being revolutionaries is exactly it. We can't only take on gentrification. If we take on gentrification, we have to take on homelessness, because people are displaced. If we take on homelessness, we have to take on questions of social welfare. If we take on gentrification, we have to take on housing. If we take on housing, we have to take on private property. It means we are taking on the system as a whole and that of course means—as everybody on the panel has suggested—making links with all sorts of parallel and related struggles. The slogan in Tompkins Square Park was about as good as you could get: "Gentrification equals class war."

People don't stand idly by, watching their homes and neighborhoods being converted into frontiers. People fight back. Although this frontier is defined economically, there is a political definition of a frontier too. The

◀ Sophie Rivera, *Aftermath of a Fire in New York City I*, 1977.

direction the housing movement needs to take is to decide how to define that frontier in political terms. For me, the question is how do we organize politically to make sure that when certain technical and policy proposals are on the agenda we have the power to determine which ones are chosen, and how they will be implemented. It comes down quite fundamentally to a question of political power on the frontier.

**Lori-Jean Saigh** Thanks. Now we'll open the discussion to the floor.

**Faith Steinberg** People don't realize it, but there is something called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, written by Eleanor Roosevelt. Article 25 says, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate to the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing [not "shelters"], medical care and necessary services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." This country prides itself on human rights and is always censuring other countries for human rights violations, so I have written to the Human Rights Commission in Geneva, and I would like to see our own violations brought to the attention of the world community so that this country can be held accountable.

**Audience** It's very unclear to people what our relationship is to the homeless. I don't think we can attack the problem of homelessness as individuals, and I think it's very wrong to perpetuate the myth that individuals are responsible for the homeless. I think that the approach has to be more than just creating homes. The attack has to really be at the whole political, the whole philosophical, the whole value system that is out there in the mainstream. Coming from Sweden, I am amazed at how this country gets away with the notion that it is the supreme concerned country in the whole world about human needs and human rights.

**Robert Ellsworth** I live in Hell's Kitchen. I wanted to ask Oda Friedheim, you casually mentioned bus tickets, could you elaborate a little?

**Oda Friedheim** Every so often there seem to be references to sending the homeless away by giving them bus tickets.

**Audience** There was an article in *Newsday* today called "The Great Absolution." The writer said bus tickets were being offered to people who have families, to go where they have relatives, anything to get them out of New York.

**Lori-Jean Seigh** I help organize in Hell's Kitchen, and I think it's important to get together with your neighbors and to get a support system, so you don't have to leave. You can stay and fight for your homes.

**Robert Ellsworth** I agree. I've received help and support from the community in Clinton, for which I'm very grateful. It's been a long struggle for me: five years in court, civil court, and the state supreme court. The judge didn't even read the brief before he ruled on the case. You come home one day to find false charges against you and your neighbors, everybody in the building. You have to go down and answer them. It's a big deal for you if you've never even been to traffic court, and now you are on trial just for sleeping in your own bed at night. The landlord's lawyer doesn't even come—it's just a small event for him. He is going to move for a postponement or something technical, so you are going to have to come back two weeks later. It goes on and on and on. Even if the landlord may have perjured himself in filing these documents, if you, the tenant, miss any one of these court dates, the next step is the city marshall and eviction. They took my neighbor away screaming. The landlord came and chainsawed down the door. Sad to say, it has been eye-opening.

**Rich Jackman** I'd like to make a comment and an invitation. I'm with the housing caucus of ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. Neil Smith talked about disinvestment, but primarily he talked about private disinvestment rather than city disinvestment. There is a form of city disinvestment that involves taking away services—the fire stations, the police stations, the hospitals in a whole area—that coincides with private disinvestment. But there is something else, too. There is a social disinvestment that results in the epidemic of crime and drugs that we see. And the epidemic of AIDS in this city is affecting poor neighborhoods the worst. They may not have to drag people out of their doors anymore; they can just wait for them to die. The housing crisis is intimately related to the drug crisis and the AIDS crisis. The city government is not just passively irresponsible but actively responsible in withdrawing funding. It has been cutting hospital funding, as incredible as that seems at this time of medical crisis. Right now the Partnership for the Homeless estimates that in New York City there are 5,000 to 8,000 homeless people with AIDS.<sup>6</sup>

Now, I'd like to make a couple of invitations to everybody. First, ACT UP is having a demonstration on March 28 at City Hall, about the city's criminal neglect of the AIDS crisis. Second, the housing caucus is having a teach-in specifically on housing, homelessness, and AIDS next Thursday at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center. I mention this because I know you are all concerned about housing, and this is a very special part of



Paul Schreder, still from *People's Firehouse #2* (Brooklyn), black and white film, 1979.

the crisis in New York City where these two horrifying issues, AIDS and housing, come together.

**Audience** State interests are trying to convince the City Council that they should deregulate any apartment renting for \$600 or more. That means that the average rent will shoot up to \$1,500 to \$2,000 per month. There is going to be a hearing at the City Council this Thursday. If you go out to look for an apartment these days, \$700 is considered a reasonable rent. Well, the real estate interests would like to see that become "fair market value," whatever that means. I woke up the other day to find out that morning had come to Chelsea, where I live. The *New York Times* had a full page ad for a monstrously ugly luxury building by Philip Palevsky that took down a whole block of 19th-century houses that should have been land-marked. Meanwhile for at least three years, people have been trying to get a bill passed, #369 in the City Council, that makes it illegal to keep apartments empty for reasons of sheer greed. At the end of March and April there is going to be a massive action to get this bill out.<sup>6</sup>

**Audience** Private property is the be-all and end-all. That's the line no one dares to cross. So folks, just get active. I want to thank the people who put this thing together. When I went to that opening [of "Home Front"], I never saw a Soho opening so packed with people from all over the place.

**Audience** In the South Bronx or Harlem or on the Lower East Side around the corner from where I live, there are complete blocks that are empty. I think what people should be doing is *getting* the frontier spirit. I think that if women can live on the streets with their kids, they can certainly live in abandoned buildings. I think that people who are homeless and live on the streets need to organize and take over those properties, because really they belong to the people, they are owned by the City of New York.

**Audience** I think Neil brought up something very important about the frontier idea. I just want to highlight what I think is a central dynamic of politics and that is racism. I think that racism, the idea of an excluded group, is very deep in American culture.

**Jim Haughton** I didn't have time to get into the class character of the struggle, but that is the function of racism: to divide people and therefore make us prey to the big financial and real estate interests. As for the politicians, to put any trust in them is to make a bad mistake. Nevertheless, tactically you have to use them. It is really a question of how we build a mass struggle. How do we put this city under rent strike, all over this city? How do we even think about taking those city buildings over and developing them for the people who live in them and those who need to live in them? The politicians will respond to a mass movement.

**Audience** I agree with Jim, but there are nevertheless some groups who have actually come together out of the Housing Action Week, groups that saw the need to try to combine forces, at least in relation to the mayoral election, and to define a housing agenda and housing demands. We want to create an atmosphere where mayoral candidates have to respond to housing issues.

**Lori-Jean Saigh** I'll respond as a community activist. What the Clinton Coalition of Concern did in our neighborhood was to have a public forum on the issues. The question was not whether you like or dislike the candidates, but what are they going to do to put people into the empty city-owned apartments in our neighborhood. Neighborhood organizing on a local level, as Jim said, and demonstrations on a local level, has had everything to do with making "warehousing" a word people know. Fighting back is banding together and organizing and writing press releases and getting hundreds of people out marching. That is really what brings issues to the forefront, and politicians have to pay attention because the people are the voters.



Clayton Patterson, still from *Fight Back*, color videotape, 1989.

**Audience** I think it's important to underscore not so much the playing of partisan politics—the politicians will come to community forums and lie to you there too—but mass mobilization and constant education, getting folks involved and educated about what is happening to them. Where I work we run a very small project for homeless families, and we found that a lot of homeless families buy into the idea that it's their fault they're homeless. The first struggle we encounter with them is talking about homelessness as political. It's a very empowering experience for them to go out and help to solve their housing problem in a different kind of way.

**Audience** The system right now is so pervasively corrupt that I don't think we can get the people "in power" to do what needs to be done by any kind of philosophical appeal—though I believe we must continue to make them. The only thing that is going to make it happen is if they understand that we've got the numbers, we've got the votes. And the only way that's going to happen is for everyone in this room to recruit across class lines, across race lines, across age lines, across special-interest lines, so that when the politicians go to talk at a rally there are enough people demanding the same things for their various different reasons. People have to fight for their neighborhoods, they have to fight for this whole city. They have to fight for a roof over everyone's head because anything else is a barbarism.

IT'S YOUR  
**RIGHT  
TO  
FIGHT**  
FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING



Cover of brochure distributed with *Right to Fight*, a color videotape by Nettie Wild and Headlines Theatre (Vancouver, B.C.), 1982.

**Audience** I would like to extend this idea of direct action. I've been part of the squatters movement and the homesteading movement in the Lower East Side, and I think it's a strong solution to the problems we're talking about. It's really pretty bad to say this about your community board, but the experiences I had with the homestead I've been involved in for three years underlines that these community boards aren't elected by people, they are picked by city politicians. It's just part of a process of controlling their policies. A good example of that is Tompkins Square Park: the community board was connected with the police riot because they supported the enforcement of the new curfew.

Another big problem that is making life very difficult for us, especially as homesteaders, is the drugs that are infesting our neighborhoods. Drugs are a tool to wipe us out. It's hard enough to keep a building running without the added problem of people selling drugs in the buildings. The politicians are making this very difficult for us, because it's quite obvious that they're at least partly responsible for this infestation of drugs in our ghettos.

One last thing: I found a growing hatred among community board members for artists. I think a lot of artists aren't conscious that they are being used in the gentrification process. But there is a group of artists in the community who are very strongly involved in social and political issues.



Gerald Pagano, *Frustration Fireman*, woodcut, 1988.

**Lori-Jean Saigh** I think you're right that not a lot of people talked about drugs. But I think maybe in public housing in my neighborhood, it becomes easy for gentrifiers to go into a drug-infested neighborhood. A lot of people think that if the neighborhood is full of drugs, big, new buildings are going to cure the problem. That's what is happening with the Times Square development project.<sup>7</sup> They say, "Times Square is seedy and full of porno now, but our plan for big buildings will sweep that all away. Then the slimy, slummy people will all just disappear."

**Audience** If you are caught selling drugs you get kicked out of your apartment which is kind of a contradiction because the people are given the drugs to sell, and then it's a way for a lot of poor people to make a living.

**Jim Haughton** I think you've got to be careful on that, because drugs are all over the city, not just in the projects or in the poor community. But the politicians discredit public housing that way. Under the guise of attacking the drug problem, they came up with new rules which would make evictions unappealable. They claim that if they had to go through legal and judicial processes to get rid of dope pushers it would take too long. So they want to evict them right away. But it doesn't stop there; they are really evicting the tenants they want to get rid of.

**Audience** I agree with you. On the Lower East Side it's not just the projects but half the buildings that are affected because they are city-owned.

**Lori-Jean Saigh** I want to say something briefly about community boards. It's true that the people on them are appointed by the borough president. But community boards are very important in that they make recommendations to the Board of Estimate, and the Board of Estimate ultimately makes decisions on housing policy in every neighborhood. When community boards see organized people, they may be encouraged to look at your side of the issue.

We've talked about the many fronts on which to fight. This is the first forum in a series, and I'd like to know what people see as the main issue tenants can unite around to create change.

**Audience** Regardless of color or gender, we all can come together and fight for housing. There has to be some vehicle, which I don't think currently exists, where all of us can come together. A bill was mentioned that is pending in Congress, the Jesse Gray Housing Bill, that if enacted would create 5 million units of housing and renovate a million more over the next ten years. It calls for a roll-back of public housing rents from 30 percent to 25 percent of income. I had a hand in working out that bill with Congressman John Con-

yers. We'd like this city, with the biggest public housing program in the nation, to take the lead in this very important fight. We're marching on May 10, Safe Public Housing Day in Washington, D.C. On the local level there are nothing but hard organizing tasks before us, and not just in public housing but in all housing.

**Nell Smith** I agree that housing is an issue that people can unite around, it's an issue that has always been on the local agenda in a city like New York. Housing is about to appear on the national political agenda in a way it never has before. That presents opportunities, but also dangers. The key is to organize at the grass-roots level. The housing movement has always been very conservative about taking on issues beyond housing. Trying to put together housing issues with workplace issues, for example, where people are not only kicked out of their homes but they are kicked out of their jobs (whether they are industrial jobs, service jobs, or garment district jobs) is difficult, even though they often go together. Often the same banks giving money to the landlord are giving the money to the guy kicking you out of work. Those links are absolutely crucial to define. Going to the national level and making a socialist argument becomes more and more difficult, and it can only be sustained to the extent that you have a strong base willing to stand up to the elected officials. They are supposedly elected in our name, but they can turn around and tell us to shove it.

**Bienvenida Matias** As a media person, I think we have to be in control of our images, and we absolutely must be on top of the media people who portray low-income people as low-lives. When the media stopped portraying the drug problem as a situation limited to poor neighborhoods and started connecting drugs with middle-class communities, for example, the drug education efforts improved. You have to keep stressing to people that they can't be complacent just because they can afford the \$700 or \$800 rents, because tomorrow they too could be out on the street.

**Audience** At the city level, at least, there seems to be some coalescing of groups in the Tenant Unity Coalition. I live in the North Bronx, and recently there was a mass meeting of tenants there. Most of them live in somewhat dilapidated buildings, some of which are being rehabilitated, which has brought large rent increases. Five hundred mostly working-class tenants got together, and their target was Freddie Mac [the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation], which in essence was encouraging the overfinancing of buildings. It was amazing to see these tenants suddenly become very conversant on what this particular attack was doing to their buildings and neighborhoods, taking on the guys from Washington or the local office—who

were of course completely stunned. That took a lot of organizing to develop an issue that had practical meaning on a broad scale. We had to show that it was not just a Bronx issue. Each and every neighborhood, and each and every building, has to define the issues that can mobilize people.

**Lori-Jean Saigh** Thank you. Obviously, the work that we have done tonight is just a tiny step in the work that must be done in the housing movement. I want to thank everybody for coming and sharing their expertise. Fight back.

#### Notes

1. Legislation concerning tenants' right to counsel is still being transferred back and forth between the appellate and state court systems. However, at present there is a bill being drafted in the state assembly which will include provisions for plain-language forms and code-enforcement.
2. No action has yet been taken on the Jesse Gray Housing Act. The Bush administration, like the Reagan administration, has continued with success in its efforts to privatize public housing.
3. *In rem* housing is housing owned by the city, which was acquired through repossession (for example, because of tax delinquency). An *in rem* proceeding occurs when a property, rather than an individual, is taken to court.
4. Two pieces of legislation designed to guard against redlining were passed in the 1970s: the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act and the Community Reinvestment Act.
5. The current estimate of homeless people who are HIV-positive is 8,000 to 10,000.
6. Bill #369 was effectively blocked in the City Council in 1989; and has not been re-introduced in 1990.
7. On April 18, 1990, the New York State Urban Development Corporation took title to two-thirds of the property in the 42nd Street Development Project area, initiating the largest urban renewal project in the state's history. Construction is scheduled to begin in early 1991, after tenant relocation and demolition of buildings.

## **THE TENEMENT: PLACE FOR SURVIVAL, OBJECT OF REFORM**

In the mid-19th century, hundreds of thousands of European immigrants began to enter the United States through New York City. It was a time of volatile growth and change in the history of the city.

When they first arrived, immigrants tended to stay with friends and relatives. But often they found there was "no place to go," and they ended up staying in the neighborhoods where they landed, in downtown industrial areas like the Lower East Side and the Five Points District (present-day Chinatown).

Housing was scarce, and living conditions in the immigrant neighborhoods quickly became crowded and unhealthy. It would be very hard for a middle-class American citizen of today to even imagine sharing a dark, cramped apartment with only a hole in the floor as a toilet with ten other people. Or to imagine walking out the front door into a neighborhood with slaughterhouses, pigsties, tanneries, and horse stables scattered among the tenement apartment buildings.

In spite of terrible physical conditions, immigrant neighborhoods were a haven of familiar languages, customs, and social traditions for the new residents of the city. People suffered and disease took its toll of lives, but the majority of immigrants succeeded in building a new life in the United States.

Native-born, middle-class New Yorkers often felt threatened by the rapid waves of European immigration. Their old way of life began to disappear, and in its place came a faster, more chaotic industrial society. People were particularly distressed by the wretched conditions of the tenements, and a "reform" movement developed. Reformers approached the problem with a variety of motives and plans, all sharing the common belief that they could "morally uplift" the immigrants. Fearful, they felt the need to control and assimilate the immigrant. Their efforts resulted in changes to tenement design, but generally failed to improve living conditions.

*By all odds, the most vicious, ignorant and degraded of all the immigrants . . . are the Italian immigrants of Mulberry Bend. Though the Italian settlement in the Bend is perhaps the worst, it is hard to place below . . . the great tenement house district east of the Bowery, inhabited by Polish and*



Pell Street immigrant community, c. 1895 (photographer unknown). From E. Idell Zeisloft, ed. *The New Metropolis* (1899).

*Russian Jews and that non-descript medley of Slavonic and Teutonic races who know no religion and can hardly claim any fatherland.*

**The American Magazine, IX (1888)**

*... we must, as a people, act upon this foreign element, or it will act upon us. Like the vast Atlantic, we must decompose and cleanse the impurities which rush into our midst or ... we shall receive their poison into our whole national system. American social virtue has deteriorated ... through the operation of influences connected with the influx of foreigners, without corresponding precautions to counteract them.*

**New York Assembly Documents, No. 205, 1857**

In order to survive, tenants adapted their living space as best they could. For example, when more space was needed, they expanded out onto the fire escape. If bedrooms became unbearably hot during the summer, they slept outdoors. Sometimes families would "double up" and share apartments to be able to pay rents which were as high, per square foot, as fashionable apart-



Jacob Kist, Room in a tenement flat, 1910.

ments uptown. Middle-class New Yorkers simply did not comprehend the economic pressure in the tenements, and they misread the survival strategies of the immigrants. A quote from the *New York Times*, December 3, 1876: ". . . young girls are found sleeping on the floor in rooms where there are crowded men, women, youths, and children. Delicacy is never known; purity is lost before its meaning is understood."

Efforts to reform immigrant neighborhoods increased in the late 19th century. Reformers focused primarily on tenement design, ignoring other complex social issues. One highly publicized plan was "the model tenement movement." Backers of this idea rejected the concept that the government had a responsibility to provide housing for its citizens. They believed in an "enlightened capitalism" in which private building developers would voluntarily sacrifice profits to create decent housing for the poor.

One notable, prizewinning tenement design was an 1865 experiment called the "Workingmen's Home" and then later "Big Flat." This tenement was built by the Association for Improving Conditions of the Poor, an organization established by wealthy businessmen. Covering six city lots, the building extended from 96-98 Mott Street to 47 Elizabeth Street. Despite



Children of sweatshop workers posing on fire escapes for unknown photographer, c. 1890s.  
From E. Ickell Zenshuf, ed. *The New Atlantis* (1944).

the intentions of these reformers, the design worked no better than the worst tenements in the neighborhood. It was demolished in 1890.

Another attempt to design a model tenement, the “dumbbell,” had a more lasting impact on the urban landscape of present-day Chinatown. Similar to earlier designs, it packed as many apartments as possible into a 25-by-100-foot lot. However, like its predecessors, the dumbbell suffered from poor ventilation, little light, and inadequate sanitation. And the great innovation of the design, the air shaft, became the most complained-about feature of the tenement.

Ironically, many of the changes that resulted in better conditions for the tenements were a result of technical innovations, not design ideas. For example, the medical discovery of airborne diseases contributed to a better awareness of sanitary issues. Another major improvement was the advent of subways. As horse-drawn carriages and stables disappeared, there was less refuse from horses.

The people who lived in the tenements were left out of the reform attempts of the 19th century; they were regarded as “victims” by the middle-class reformers. However, by 1904, tenement residents had learned from



The Workingmen's Home, erected at Mott and Elizabeth streets, 1855, and occupied exclusively by black workers. First "model tenement house" in Manhattan. From James Ford, *Slaves and Housing* (1958).

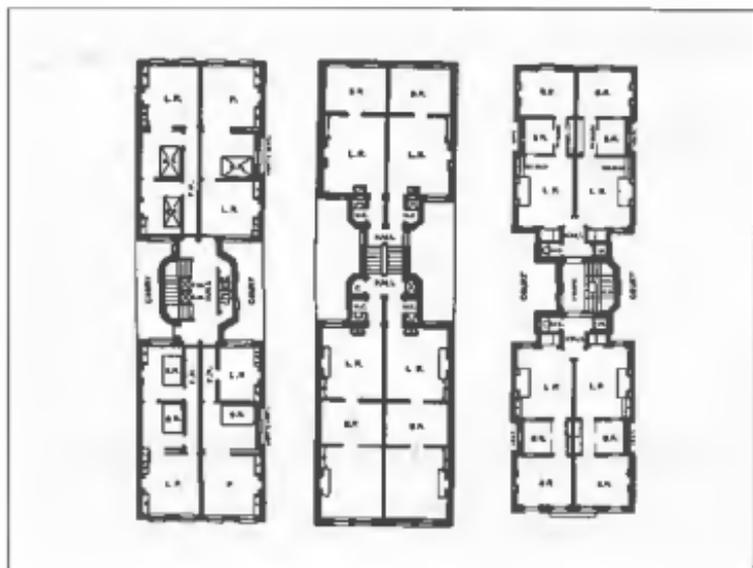
their ongoing struggle to form labor unions. For the first time, immigrant tenants, most of them Jewish, organized themselves against rising rents and unjust evictions in the Lower East Side. Fighting 20 to 30 percent increases in their rents, tenants conducted strikes similar to ones used in labor organizing. Though successful in dealing with the particular buildings they struck against, tenants were unable to establish a broad political base to ensure decent and affordable housing for the whole community.

A century later, the legacy of the 19th-century tenement exploitation and reform continues to shape the lives of current residents. Tenements remain the predominant housing form in today's immigrant working-class Chinatown neighborhood, and present-day proposals to "improve" the neighborhood through gentrification and urban renewal pose new challenges for tenement residents. Are there parallels between the failed reforms of the 19th century and current proposals? Is there a subtle strain of racism in the gentrification that is rapidly changing many neighborhoods in New York City? And, most importantly, are planners and developers listening to tenement residents any more than they did a hundred years ago?

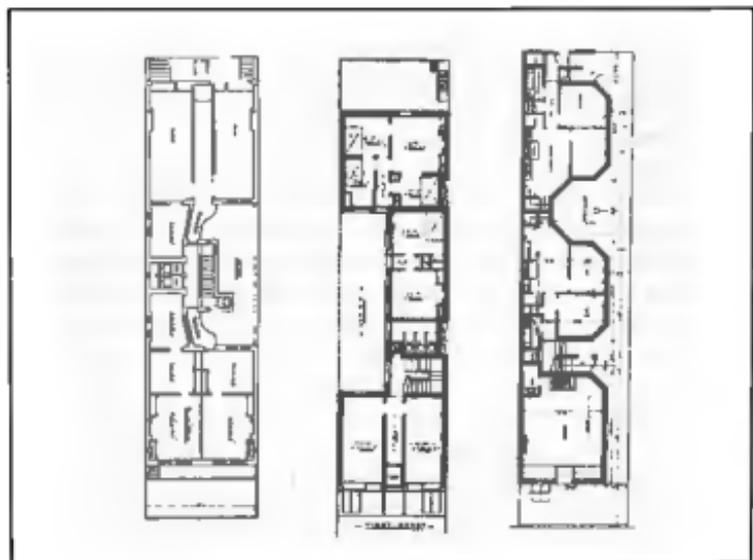
## STRANGE FRUIT: THE LEGACY OF THE DESIGN COMPETITION IN NEW YORK HOUSING

The architectural design competition has never occupied a place of great importance in architectural discourse in the United States. By comparison, in Europe, the competition has emerged as a principal device for awarding commissions of all kinds, especially public work and social housing. In the United States, the devices for selection of architects are less public, responding more to the exigencies of the private marketplace. Competitions for housing have been even less frequent. The first was held in 1879, and it launched the critical period when New York came to be regarded as the American Metropolis. Since then, only 11 housing competitions in as many decades have been organized in New York City. Most New York competitions have occurred during a period of crisis in housing production, and have been tied to major reform efforts. Usually lurking beneath this equation has been the threat of social unrest as an outgrowth of poor living conditions. Within this pattern, the competition has frequently been used to reinforce reform efforts that have been too little and too late.

The first New York competition in 1879 provides an archetypal case. It occurred at the conclusion of a violent decade in United States history, focused primarily on labor rights. There were fears of even greater insurrection should the urban condition reignite the fuse. Housing conditions were a key catalyst. In New York, a practically uninhabitable housing stock had been newly constructed for the low-income population, which was to say for well over one-half of the population. As early as 1865, a report stated that of a population of over 700,000 in New York City (not including Brooklyn, which remained a separate city until 1895), a total of 480,368 persons lived in 15,309 tenement houses of substandard condition. The most ubiquitous of this new housing was the "railroad flat," named after its plan organization, which strung rooms from front to rear like a train, such that only two or four rooms out of 16 or 20 received light and air from the exterior. This invention was the best that an uncontrolled marketplace in New York City offered. The housing competition held out the hope of providing relief from this growing affliction by generating alternative designs that could be equally



First, Third, and Fourth Place submissions to the 1879 tenement-house competition sponsored by *The Plumber and Sanitary Engineer*. Left to right: James E. Ware, architect; D. & J. Jardine, architects; William Kuhles, architect.



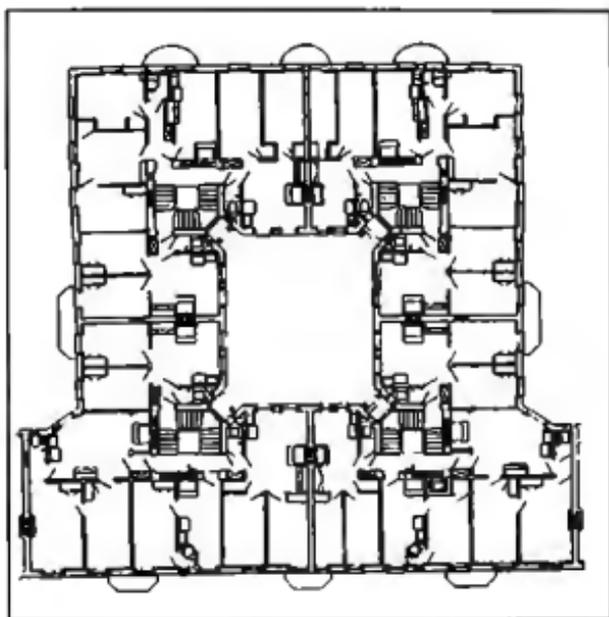
Sixth, Ninth, and Eighth Place submissions to the 1879 tenement-house competition. Left: George W. DaCunha, architect; middle: James E. Ware, architect; right: Robert G. Kennedy, architect.

profitable to the builder or landlord and provide better conditions for the tenant. The competition demonstrated the feasibility of achieving both goals, but only the most profitable schemes were influential. Exposed was a dilemma that has remained an integral component of housing design reform efforts for the poor ever since, which was that within the political ideology of our market economy, housing reform cannot be implemented without enhancing profits. And ultimately those profits must be paid for in one way or another by the same "underclass" that is supposedly the beneficiary of reform.

The sponsor of the 1879 competition was *The Plumber and Sanitary Engineer*, a trade journal and the voice of the burgeoning domestic plumbing industry, which had its eye on a potentially lucrative tenement market. The railroad flat usually had outdoor plumbing in the rear "yard," or in the cellar. The competition, however, required water closets and taps on each floor, an improvement for the inhabitants and a source of expansion for the industry. There were other double edges as well. The winning schemes were those that offered the highest density of inhabitants, in order to meet builders' demands for maximum profitability. They also had to be built on single 25-by-100-foot lots, in keeping with the highly incremental development commonplace to the period. These kinds of constraints virtually guaranteed continued substandard conditions for light and air. Compromise with quality was implicit in the whole conception of the competition. In itself, the requirement for systematic tenement prototypes to replace the less efficient ad hoc development up to that date could only be expected to lead to increased density with its consequent problems, and in effect, a toilet on every floor with a small air shaft had its price, which was greater overcrowding and higher profits to the developer.

First place in the 1879 competition was given to James E. Ware's "dumbbell," with its narrow internal air shaft. The next three of the 12 placing entries had similar plans. This outcome did not mean that other schemes from among the 190 entries did not incorporate greater use of light, air, and space. Many devised very ingenious ways to open up the buildings. These entries, however, were not sufficiently profitable, and given the overriding profit motive, use of the competition as a means of establishing upgraded standards was negated from the start. For this reason, the 1879 competition could only be seen as having a negative influence on standards and was widely criticized at the time.

The Tenement House Act of 1879 (known as the Old Law) followed the competition and legally enforced its results, providing the first substantial housing design control. On paper it set higher standards than those displayed by the winning entries. But in fact the Board of Health enforced the lower level set by the competition winners, and the Ware dumbbell became a pro-



First Place submission to the 1896 tenement-house competition sponsored by the Improved Housing Council. Ernest Flagg, architect.

tototype for tenement construction for the next two decades. This turn of events institutionalized the gap between the written law and its enforcement, a New York subtlety that has reappeared now and then ever since. By 1900 approximately 60,000 dumbbell tenements had been built under the provisions of the 1879 law. Rehabilitation to reasonable standards of this legacy still represents a serious problem in New York City today.

It was not until 1901 that the Old Law was revised to represent reasonable spatial standards for new tenement housing (the so-called New Law). Under the Old Law, tenements could be built along air shafts only several feet wide, with the interior rooms opening onto them. The most significant improvement offered by the New Law was an increase in the minimum size permitted for the air shafts, providing for a space akin to a courtyard. Two competitions preceded the revision, but unlike the 1879 competition, their sponsors were public-interest social-welfare organizations. The first competition, in 1896, was sponsored by the Improved Housing Council; the second in 1900 was sponsored by the Charity Organization Society. The 1896 competition attracted only nominal interest from architects in spite of an important two-day conference on social housing which preceded it. But the 28 entries were exhibited and did generate some public discussion. By contrast, however, the 1900 competition received 170 entries, perhaps because of increasing prospects for reform and commissions, and the promise of a major

exhibition. The entries published from both competitions were more conservative than the wide variety of approaches published from the 1879 competition. On the other hand, the standards were much higher. The program required larger units and a toilet for each apartment. Rather than the single-building lot, emphasis was on the block configuration. The use of a whole block meant that larger buildings could be planned around a larger courtyard rather than around air shafts. The units themselves could be bigger, with more light and air reaching more rooms. This strategy could be traced to a seminal article published by Ernest Flagg in 1894 that outlined the logic of multiple-lot planning. The larger scale permitted economically practical solutions through the expanded design possibilities of multiple-lot tenement organization and proved that such plans could be attractive to the marketplace by creating better apartments at costs which could still permit generous profit.

It should come as no surprise that the entry submitted by Flagg took first place in the 1896 competition. It incorporated Flagg's most generous variation, using four 25-foot lots. Central light courts provided public passage to the stairs for the upper floors. James Ware, the winner of the 1879 competition, took second place with a similar plan, which led to a public dispute with Flagg over the originality of the scheme. Flagg's approach was an inevitable outcome of the practical conventions of tenement production in New York. The winner of the 1900 competition, R. Thomas Sport, used an identical massing approach. The plan was reversed, however, so that the light-slots faced the street and served as the entry space. Flagg's studies and the two competitions paved the way for a smooth transition in the tenement house law; the 1896 and 1900 competitions generated change in the tenement house law of significant and positive lasting value.

Not to be ignored in this important period of revision was the large housing exhibition held by the Charity Organization Society in February 1900. It documented existing tenement conditions and showed the competition results. The scope of the exhibition has remained unmatched since. Other important efforts of the period included such comprehensive housing studies as the research by the Tenement House Committee of the New York State Legislature published in 1895 and another study published in the same year by Elgin R. L. Gould of the U.S. Department of Labor called *The Housing of Working People*. And by 1898, Flagg had completed a model tenement for the City and Suburban Homes Company on West 68th and 69th streets, adapting his competition entry. In the following year he completed a similar project for the New York Fireproof Tenement Association on West 42nd Street. In 1900, Ware completed a building for the City and Suburban Homes Company on First Avenue between East 64th and 65th streets. The directed intensity of that particular moment has never been repeated.

## HOUSING THE HOMELESS MOTHER AND CHILD

### **The Family Housing Crisis**

Public and private resources for urban housing have in the last decade routinely been targeted to the elderly or to the rich. Families with children, and poor families in particular, have been bypassed or even victimized to a dangerous level. The time is ripe for nation, state, city, and private sector to redress the situation. All families raising children in the city now have very limited housing and child-care choices. Those who have no choices left end up in the street. This project illustrates a housing form convenient to any working parent, and vital to the mother who is homeless, jobless, and without child care.

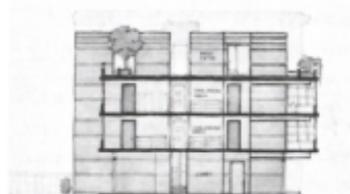
The damages caused by homelessness are most severe and persistent among children. Considering the spiraling effects over time of provisions made (or not made) for children, there is much to recommend giving them priority for appropriate housing. Whether a family is rich, poor, or homeless, every child's needs are similar: continual nurturance, supervision, and interaction. Traditionally, the setting for these social exchanges is the home. Whenever the mother works away from home, the advantages to both child and mother of a home-based type of child care would justify a new housing form whereby a small group of neighbors might pool their resources.

### **Diminishing Welfare Services**

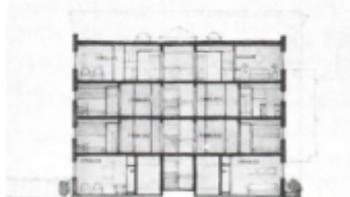
The triad "home/child care/job" has to be addressed comprehensively. Economic supports must therefore include rent, care giver, and job training, then be reduced gradually. All mothers accepting the plan would use child-care hours either at work, job hunting, or job training. Training to become a licensed family care giver may be done on site, and lead to home-based employment. Training in construction skills may also take place on site, and lead to home-based employment. Training may then take place on site if dwellings and child-care space are unfinished. By the end of the first three-year lease, the mother is expected to have (1) gotten beyond the need for public assistance, such as food stamps and Aid to Families with Dependent



STREET FACADE



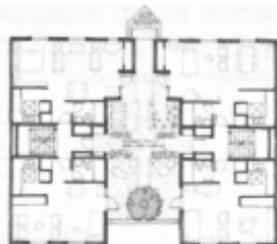
CROSS SECTION THROUGH CENTER



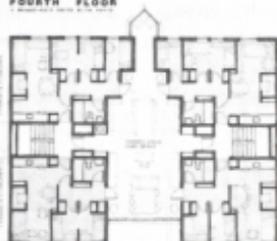
CROSS SECTION THROUGH DWELLINGS



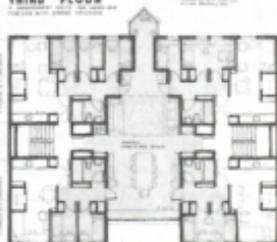
REAR FACADE



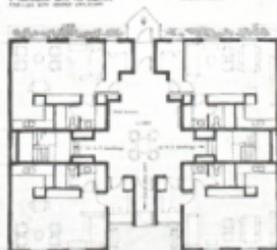
FOURTH FLOOR



THIRD FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR

Children; (2) paid rent for her dwelling; and (3) contributed her share of rent for the child-care area.

### **Mother's Participation**

Beyond any material relief given to the dispossessed family, the primary economic goal is to lessen the likelihood of any child growing into an adult who will be a phenomenal burden to society for a lifetime. Thus, the future of the child is the guide. Essential for success is the mother's participation in all issues concerning her children. The care giver would be licensed by the state but chosen by the four families. Each mother's views on child rearing (discipline, TV, toys, visitors, language, schoolwork, etc.) must be respected in the matchmaking process. Given a furniture voucher and the "quilt plan" for inspiration and discussion, four mothers would be empowered to choose the most suitable layout for their child-care space.

### **Home-Based Child Care Plan**

If children's bedrooms are located between their mother's private quarters and the shared child-care space, children can be looked after at all times either by their mother or by the care giver. When the mother is home, she can close the door to the child-care space and open her own door to the children's rooms. This is an ordinary dwelling. When the mother is away, she closes her own door to the children's rooms and opens the door to the child-care area. The care giver is in charge. School-age children and care giver enter the child-care area with their own keys without going through the mother's personal quarters.

### **Planning Guidelines**

Distribution: for the sake of the community and that of children, scatter throughout neighborhoods. Infills: use vacant lots between row houses and walk-ups; avoid elevators and corridors. Scale: must be small and noninstitutional in keeping with context. Siting: save yard as play area. Stigma: no child should ever hear the comment "She lives in the facility for the homeless." Blend homeless children with others within the building. Ground floor: save it for a use appropriate for that street—retail, offices, market-rate units, elderly, etc. Top floors: save them for dwellings with no children—students, single. Second and third floors: for children.

### **Architectural Guidelines**

**Size:** build individual units of minimum size, but provide a shared space of 50 to 60 feet per child, fulfilling Board of Health requirements for day-care centers. **Bedrooms:** can be very small but must allow privacy according to age, sex, and temperament of each child. **Mother's quarters:** should be equivalent to an SRO, or single-room occupancy room, for singles. **Private kitchen:** necessary for nurturance around the kitchen table. **Private bathroom:** necessary for children's hygiene, toilet training, etc. **Child-care space:** must allow widely different styles of child rearing, marking distinct territories, and creating "special places" meaningful to children.

### **Savings in Construction**

**Smaller units:** very small dwellings, ordinarily intolerable and harmful to a child, become feasible because of the proximity of ample space in the child-care area. **Simpler day-care facility:** no bathrooms necessary (children use their own home's bathroom), no isolation room (sick children stay in their own beds), no nap area (children retire in their own rooms), no "cubbies" (children use their own closets). **Dual-purpose yard:** the outside play area required by the Board of Health for day-care centers may be the same as the rear yard required by building codes. **Fire exits:** through the child-care area each dwelling can reach a second stair.

### **Savings in Management**

**Maintenance:** routine maintenance of the family-run child-care space is part of the lease of each unit. **Latchkey vandalism:** all children in the building are supervised and kept occupied. **Integrated:** an economic mix within the building is workable because children (the chief tenants) are well supervised and expected to rise to the level of their surroundings. **Crime:** the building is occupied all day, thus discouraging burglars and criminals. The child-care space provides surveillance over street, yard, entrances, and stairwells. **Abuse and neglect:** care giver assesses problems in the child's own context. **Mother** may come home unannounced to evaluate the quality of child care. **Transportation:** transportation costs (money, time, energy, pollution, risks, congestion) are no longer part of the daily route to a center.

## 454 ST. NICHOLAS AVENUE

This is the history of a building in Harlem and of the forces that have shaped its present form.



**February 27, 1827** John Delancey sells to Archibald Watt several tracts of land for \$13,000.

**February 10, 1857** After a suit against Archibald Watt, the land is sold at auction to Thomas Watt for \$5,880.

**August 12, 1858** Four tracts of that land are sold at auction after foreclosure to Peck, Peck, Stevenson and Hayman for around \$600. These tracts will eventually be lots 38, 39, and 41 on which 452, 454, and 456 St. Nicholas Avenue will be built.

**1882-1888** William Lesster buys lots 38, 39, and 41 for \$12,625.

**October 23, 1888** William Lesster sells the lots to Thomas O'Kane for \$32,000.

**1888-1890** Thomas O'Kane mortgages the lots for \$171,830.

**1890** The apartment building at 454 is completed.

**1892-1911** The lots change hands four times.

**1914** 454 St. Nicholas (lot 39) is bought for \$15,000 with an existing mortgage of \$26,000 by Frederick and Mina Frenz.

**1924** 454 is sold to Herman Diller for \$26,300. He assumes the existing mortgage.

**1924-1925** 454 changes hands four times.

**May 1, 1926** Hattie Pullman buys 454. There are now three mortgages on the property: one dated 1911 for \$26,000, one dated 1924 for \$19,000, and a new one for \$6,000.

**December 30, 1927** \$21,000 is still due on the first mortgage, which is extended for another 35 years.

**1932** After foreclosure, the holder of the second mortgage buys 454 for \$5,000 and assumes the other mortgage, then sells it to 454 St. Nicholas Corporation.



**February 17, 1961** Beagrove Realty buys 454 with a \$2,250 mortgage and assumes the first mortgage.

**1963** The 1911 mortgage is paid off.

**November 1972** New York City begins a program of withdrawing fire protection service from areas of high fire incidence.

**July 30, 1981, February 10, 1982, January 22, 1983, January 20, 1985** Fires at 454, the last so massive that half of the building is devastated.

**May 29, 1986** Coleman et al. buy 454 for \$36,000.

**October 22, 1986** Coleman et al. sell 454 to 454 St. Nicholas Avenue Associates for \$152,000.

**Spring 1986** The last tenants leave 454 St. Nicholas Avenue.

**1987** 454 St. Nicholas Avenue Associates obtains a \$700,000 building loan from the New York City Community Preservation Corporation.

**September 1987** Interior demolition begins.

**December 1, 1988** 454 St. Nicholas Avenue Associates file a Condominium Declaration.

**December 30, 1988** One condominium unit is sold for \$146,000.

**January 10, 1989** A second condominium unit is sold.

**April 10, 1989** A third condominium unit is sold.





*When the last owner bought 454, after the last tenant left, the building, which had been continuously occupied for 80 years, stood empty for the first time. Prior to renovation, the contents were sold or thrown out. This is what was left.*

## WHAT IS A KILOWATT HOUR? A CON ED PAPER TRAIL, 1988-89

The four buildings pictured here, located on West 53rd and 54th streets, were vacated in 1980 and have been "warehoused" ever since. Over the years the landlord, Drith Corporation, reduced building services. When the tenants organized and reported violations, nothing happened. Drith Corporation didn't pay its utility bills, and Consolidated Edison, or Con Edison, threatened to turn off the electricity. When the tenants tried to find out who their landlord was, the papers of incorporation did not show who really owned the buildings. Through other means, the tenants learned to their surprise that Con Edison was the true owner of the buildings.

The trustees and officers of Con Edison refused to meet with the community. The Clinton Coalition of Concern demanded that Con Edison re-tenant the buildings. But in response to our actions, Con Ed actually tried to enlist us in its effort to demolish the buildings. The special district law has been one of the neighborhood's most potent tools against gentrification. Con Ed is now pushing for a zoning change that would allow demolition. This change would signal the end of the neighborhood as a low- and moderate-income community.

Con Ed found a way to push its demolition plan by hiding behind a senior citizens center: it would allow the center to build housing on adjoining property, but only if the buildings were demolished first. As a result, the New York Foundation for Senior Citizens is lobbying for demolition. The board of directors of this foundation is politically well connected and includes relatives of Senator Alfonse d'Amato, Representative Charles Rangel, and former New York City officials.

City Council president Andrew Stein has been pushing for the Con Ed demolition plan. We discovered that members of the board of the Foundation for Senior Citizens contributed \$3,000 to Stein's election campaign in the last year.



## THE 42ND STREET DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The 42nd Street Development Project was (and may still be) the largest single undertaking of its kind in the United States, involving a record public subsidy of more than \$1 billion over 20 years and slated to raze or renovate every building in a 13-acre area. The developers, further, are to recover from public funds anything over \$88 million in site acquisition costs. Originally formulated early in the 1980s in the midst of an economic slump, the project was intended to spur restoration of the entire "Great White Way," from Times Square westward to Duffy Square. The project has now been whittled down to four building sites where 42nd Street meets Seventh Avenue and Broadway. As the decade passed, subsidies and incentives were shown to be superfluous, since similar developments were being undertaken nearby with no public funding. Nonetheless, powerful city and state officials seem unresponsive to the many criticisms voiced by local leaders and residents.

Opponents of the project agree on the need to remedy blight and crime in Times Square but argue that the project will merely displace these problems rather than solve them. Observers of the city scene, including drama critic Brendan Gill, architectural writer Ada Louise Huxtable, and psychologist Kenneth Clark, have raised serious objections to the project's likely environmental and human effects. Clinton (Hell's Kitchen) residents, learning from the nearby Bryant Park renovation, fear that the project will push crime into their area and push many of them out of their apartments.

Fiscal aspects of the project are shrouded in secrecy, since the city/state Urban Development Corporation refuses to release details of the prospective leases and other particulars of the financial arrangements. Unknown, for example, are such basics as precisely who the proposed developers are, how much the project is likely to cost, and how much in tax revenues is deferred. State senator Franz Leichter points out that at the end of 23 years, the developers will have paid the city a little under \$250 million in rent, but, because of various credits and repayments of excess costs, the city will owe the developers over \$500 million. He offers the analogy that if this were an auto lease, with the developers as the customers and the city as the car dealer, the customer would pay half the normal down payment and get a 50 percent

discount on already low monthly installments, and at the end of the lease the dealer would owe the customer money. Leichter further presents figures showing that the loss in real estate taxes—from which the project is exempt—will far exceed the base rent paid to the city.

The project as currently constituted consists of four oversize office towers, with extremely generous zoning variants, and some cosmetic subway changes; the original plan's hotel, its merchandise mart of wildly varying function, and its theater reconstruction apparently have been dropped, and the theater leases have been picked up by another developer. The towers, of 31 to 56 stories, would darken Times Square Plaza, one of the city's great open spaces, reproducing the sterile canyons of nearby Sixth and Third Avenues. The project would add 4 million square feet of office space (twice what the zoning ordinance allows), in a city experiencing a glut of such space, and bring thousands of new white-collar workers to an already congested area. The additional vehicular traffic would intensify an already horrendous pollution problem. The project would transform the area from a center of tourism and entertainment to a white-collar shopping area, and it would displace low- and middle-income residents.

In response to objections about the loss of character of the square, the major change in the tower plan—architected by Johnson, Burgee, powerful contributors of some of the worst "postmodern" excesses to U.S. skylines—appears to be the bizarre one of adding brilliant lights to the facades to match the neon signage for which the square is famous.

On April 18, 1990, the Urban Development Corporation took title to two-thirds of the property in the 42nd Street Development Project area (comprising 34 properties) through a condemnation order issued in State Supreme Court in Manhattan. The order will allow tenant relocation and demolition of buildings to begin soon. Construction is scheduled to begin in early 1991. **M.R.**

Based on the Committee to Reclaim Times Square, *White Paper: The 42nd Street Development Project* (New York, c. 1988), and other information supplied by the office of state senator Franz Leichter.

“PEOPLE WHO CAN’T AFFORD TO  
LIVE HERE SHOULD MOVE  
SOMEPLACE ELSE”

*I couldn't care less about color if a guy's earning \$20,000 to \$25,000 a year.*

**Member of the Long Beach city planning staff**, quoted in the *Independent Press Telegram*, November 19, 1978

*[Ernest Hahn's] chief fear for his dream of almost \$75 million (the total cost, including public financing, of the mall . . .) is that the poor, the transient, the elderly and the other just plain folk who now populate downtown Long Beach will stay downtown after the fall of 1981, when his shopping mall is finally a reality.*

**Independent Press Telegram**, October 11, 1979 (“Ernie Hahn—Downtown Messiah”)

There's a war going on in Long Beach. This war amounts to one big eviction notice for the elderly, the disabled, for people on fixed incomes, for minorities, for underpaid and unemployed working people of all races. Long Beach's master plan calls for ridding the city of individuals and families who don't have a lot of money to spend. Instead, higher-income consumers are being invited to frolic in a new landscape of marinas, shopping malls, condominiums, racquet clubs, and jacuzzis. This new landscape is evidence of a city economy geared to profits rather than human needs.

Local politicians and business interests would like to turn their so-called “International City” into what could be more accurately described as a “Multinational City,” a city dominated by multinational corporations. Big-time investors, lured into town by spectacles like the Queen Mary and the Grand Prix, are being promised a free rein for profiteering in the housing and real estate markets. Here under the palm trees and the refinery smog, the hustle is on.

The key to the new “sanitized” Long Beach is an orchestrated housing crisis, coupled with the reduction of necessary social services. Escalating rents and deteriorating conditions are supposed to make people disappear.



While rents go up astronomically, available housing decreases as rental units are converted into expensive condominiums. At the same time, public funds intended for low- and moderate-income housing somehow end up paying for a shopping mall that will pay low wages, destroy local small businesses, and be priced above the heads of many local residents. The message from City Hall is clear: "If you can't pay, get out of town."

The Long Beach Housing Action Association (LBHAA) is fighting back against the powerful interests that control the city. LBHAA pushes for rent control, for a limit to condominium conversions, for tenants' rights, for citizens' control of public development funds. LBHAA is working against urban policies that benefit the privileged few and for a democratic and just approach to housing problems.

Suppose you're fed up, angered by the arrogance of the people who rule Long Beach, worried about your future here, and the future of the people close to you. Join the fight. Join with LBHAA.

#### HOUSING FOR PEOPLE, NOT FOR PROFIT

Allan Sekula, photograph and text from silk-screen poster produced for Long Beach Housing Action Association, Long Beach, California, 1979. Production and distribution assistance: Terry Barksdale, Connie Hatch, Barbara Reisman, Ise Whitten. The poster was displayed on construction fences throughout downtown Long Beach in early 1980. A copy was installed with other works by the artist in an exhibition entitled "Long Beach Studios" at the Long Beach Museum of Art in April 1980. The museum's director issued this disclaimer accompanying the work, apparently because the museum was negotiating for subsidized exhibition space in the new downtown Long Beach mall. The title here, "People Who Can't . . ." is quoted from a statement made by a (present) member of the Long Beach City Council in 1979.

## HISTORIC HIRAM MARKET: DECADE UPDATE

*The direction of change is toward a new central city dominated by middle-class residential areas, a concentration of professional, administrative, and managerial employment, and the upmarket recreational and entertainment facilities that cater to this population (as well as to tourists). . . .*

*The momentum of the present restructuring is toward a more peripheralized working class, in geographical terms.*

**Peter Williams and Neil Smith, *Gentrification of the City*, 1986**

The present redevelopment of downtown New Brunswick, New Jersey, was set in motion by Johnson & Johnson (J & J), the multinational medical-products manufacturer, and its related foundations. Based on recommendations made by the Rouse Company's American Cities Corporation, two development entities were formed: New Brunswick Tomorrow (NBT), as the promoter of redevelopment, and the New Brunswick Development Corporation (DevCo), as the city's chief developer. Early on, J & J invited small New Brunswick businesses to participate in downtown redevelopment. Of the 27 businesses that gave \$1,000 or more toward American Cities' consultation fees, 15 have had to relocate outside the city and eight others are now out of business.

Downtown redevelopment projects to date include the \$73 million Johnson & Johnson World Headquarters, designed by I. M. Pei; the \$30 million Hyatt Hotel and conference center; Ferren Parking Deck and Mall expansion, across the street from the Pennsylvania Railroad Station; the \$65 million improvement program for Middlesex General Hospital, in 1986 renamed the Robert Wood Johnson Medical Center; the \$11.5 million Albany Street Plaza office and retail building; the Lower Church Street Mall (which has already been sold, renamed as Kilmer Plaza, and redesigned as an office complex because tenants could not be found for the projected mall); and the \$34 million Golden Triangle Plaza office, retail, and parking complex.

These projects have completely changed not only the form and focus of the city but its scale—away from small-scale buildings with shops and services at street level and above, toward huge, set-back, or enclosed structures with little face to the street.



Although J & J is the principal promoter of downtown redevelopment, New Brunswick's other economic anchor, Rutgers University, has participated in downtown redevelopment projects. Promotional brochures, for example, point to the \$3 million expansion of Rutgers' Jane Zimmerli Art Museum as an important step in New Brunswick's "cultural rebirth." In 1986, the city announced the building of a new welfare office in the southern outskirts of the city—well away from the newly "revitalized" downtown—and in 1988, Rutgers abruptly relocated its school of visual and performing arts (Mason Gross School of the Arts) into the former social services building. The art school's new location makes it part of the city's "Cultural Center," which presently is made up of a few music and drama theaters. Rutgers has also moved its main bookstore off campus and into Ferren Mall.

*The Hiram Market section, once a slum . . . will soon boast upper-income housing and the sort of amenities one might expect in Scarsdale or Bedminister.*

**Mayor John Lynch**, quoted in *New Jersey Business*, April 1988

Downtown redevelopment has displaced not only businesses and city services, but most of the 110 families and 47 individuals living in the four-block area of Hiram Market. The neighborhood housed predominantly Hispanic, working-class, and working poor residents, with some welfare recipients. Evidently, the city felt such residents had to go in order to "bring the city back into the mainstream." In 1985, the city announced plans to build a \$35 million project of luxury condominiums, River Watch, in the Hiram Market district. River Watch is to be developed by a partnership between DevCo and Alan Voorhees. At present, 208 condo units are planned.

So far, Hiram Market has been the most controversial of New Brunswick's downtown redevelopment projects. Not only has it displaced the most residents, but also it has required the destruction of historic properties, violating agreements the city had made with state and federal preservation agencies. According to the nomination form of the National Register of Historic Places, the Hiram Market Historic District contained a significant collection of visually cohesive and historically related buildings that represented the last remnant of the commercial center of 19th-century New Brunswick. The district was placed on the State Register of Historic Places in 1980. At the time, there were 81 structures in the district. State acceptance automatically nominated the property to the National Register. In 1985 the city government requested the deregulation of the district. Although the state and federal advisory board granted the city's request, deregulation is still pending. Of the 81 historic structures registered, eight remain, seven of which are to become part of a redeveloped Hiram Market.

## THE ARTISTS HOME OWNERSHIP PROGRAM

In the early 1980s, for reasons one can only surmise, the Koch administration in New York City proposed allowing artists to purchase, with low-interest loans, units in 16 abandoned buildings in ruined areas of the Lower East Side. Artists were invited to group together to offer architect-prepared plans for the rehabilitation of these buildings into live/work spaces at the lowest possible cost. There was to be a cap on the net income of eligible artists, on the order of \$20,000 a year. The units were supposed to sell for about \$50,000, with maintenance charges of about \$500 a month (both quite low, but the prices weren't guaranteed). Through the ordinary workings of the art world, and because of the thoughtlessness of the elements in the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development responsible for overseeing the project, no artists of color wound up among the 117 accepted for inclusion.

Part of the rationale offered by HPD for the program, meant as a demonstration project, was that the department already had a program to assist craftspersons to purchase small buildings. But these were mostly in the boroughs outside Manhattan or in less contested neighborhoods and weren't gathered together in a visible project like this one.

As the plan moved through channels, a number of community activists became critical of the project, particularly given the financial and social context. First, the recent bloating of Soho provided a horrible example, quite nearby, of how artists could function in the mechanisms of gentrification. It was well-known that the Koch administration and several leading developers, including Helmsley-Spear, harbored intentions to gentrify the Lower East Side. Unofficial plans ranged from Robert Moses-like swaths of demolition (in one version putting in a parklike mall all the way to the East River), to block-by-block reconstruction. A large percentage of buildings were city-owned, acquired through abandonment, and a large number were held by a few real estate organizations that had been buying up the buildings and "flipping" them, selling them back and forth at successively inflated (paper) prices.

As the plan evolved, the city brought in private developers with the right to produce a number of market-rate units. City support for successful



Proposed site for artists' housing on East 8th Street between Avenues B and C (or Forsyth Street).

urban homesteading ("sweat equity") by local people, undertaken at the depths of the area's fortunes, had already been withdrawn. Even more disturbing was that in a period of high mortgage rates and increasing immiseration of the city's poor, the last federal dollars for low-income housing subsidy—"in the pipeline" because appropriated under the Carter administration and before the Reagan squeeze—were to be applied to house artists rather than the very poor people living in miserable conditions on the Lower East Side.

Many of the artists applying for the project were also living on the Lower East Side and considered themselves part of the community. The project did not appear to them to represent gentrification, since they were already living there; they expected to continue to fight gentrifying attempts, along with the other residents. Furthermore, the buildings, modest-sized tenements, stood on separate sites. The plan seemed to artists to represent the city's acknowledgment of its failure to protect artists from eviction from Soho; of the importance of the art world, which generates a tremendous amount of income without the deals regularly offered to large corporations to induce them to stay in the city; and of the need to protect artists who weren't tied into the newly inflated art market. But the powerful symbolic value of the project—both to the city and the developers, should they choose to exploit the analogy with Soho, and to the community, which saw yet an-

other slashing blow from middle-class whites—couldn't be overlooked. In any case, the devotion of the last bit of federal low- and middle-income housing aid to the artists' program alone made the project insupportable.

Community sentiment was so inflamed that at the hearing of the community board, the artists were chased out and threatened, almost physically attacked; the police arrived. The testimony by mobilized residents at the city's Board of Estimate, the ultimate deciding body, led the board to turn the project down (though representatives of some boroughs outside Manhattan affirmed their will to house artists in better-conceived projects—which have never materialized). Some of the testimony offered in support of the artists—and by a few artists—displayed an appalling lack of concern for the area's residents and ignored the political use of subsidies.

The realities of federal and city housing policies—in the one case the highly visible, ideological grinding to a halt of aid to the poor and the underhoused, in the other the obvious grip of banking and real estate interests on the city—made this a classic situation of group against group, of a sector of the white middle class against the poor. The artists' wish to fight gentrification, which was likely to push them out as well, could not compare with the community's desperate need to receive housing aid or simply to win a symbolic victory. A symbolic victory was achieved, an important one, for the grass-roots community showed it would not remain passive under high-profile incursions. It is unclear how the monies slated for the project were actually applied, and the buildings meant for artists have stood vacant, experiencing further collapse.

This discussion has so far left unquestioned the basic premises of the program, which are, first, that art-world artists are the only artists deserving or in need of support and, second, that artists have housing needs different from those of other people. The latter premise tends to discourage artists from allying with others in fighting for decent housing. See the forum on artists' housing for further discussion. **M.R.**

# Open forum



## ARTISTS' LIFE/WORK:

### *Housing and Community for Artists*

Tuesday, March 14,

6:30 PM

- Jero Nesson, ArtistSpace, Boston
- Marilyn Nance, photographer, Brooklyn
- Adrienne Leban, artist, Manhattan
- Joe Giordano, artist, Department of Cultural Affairs

Moderator: **Marshall Berman**, author

*These speakers will begin the forum, and then the floor will be open to all —  
**please come speak out on this issue!***

155 Mercer Street NYC between Houston & Prince



## ARTISTS' LIFE/WORK: HOUSING AND COMMUNITY FOR ARTISTS

**Moderator, Marshall Berman** Any of you who have spent any time in New York in the 1980s knows about the real estate boom and the obsession among artists about living space. Of course, it isn't just artists, but because artists have special needs, they are under greater pressure than many other people. The city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development [HPD] owns most of the real estate on the Lower East Side, and early in the 1980s it tried to develop some of the abandoned buildings there for artists' housing [the Artists Home Ownership Program]. There was tremendous controversy over the proposal. Intense and violent feelings pro and con erupted and eventually the proposal collapsed. But one of the interesting features of that debate was the expression of tremendous hatred for artists: artists are poison, artists destroy neighborhoods, artists destroy community, an artist in the neighborhood is like a virus or worse.

In that period, a lot of the hatred for artists was coming *from* artists. I thought this was strange. Some of you who are artists may want to comment on that controversy, and its lessons—if there were any. Nevertheless, throughout the '80s, one of the artists' primary objects was to try to find a place to live, and in doing that they served as lightning rods for a great deal of resentment and hostility. Many artists have had to think about their place in the world, about their relationships to communities, their relationships to the class system. On the other hand, many nonartists have extravagant ideas about how artists live. These ideas come mostly from images of artists in fabulous lofts that they either see in movies or in advertisements. There are a few artists who have been very successful, but this almost never really happens to us. People imagine artists living luxuriously, hence there is a certain resentment.

This forum will provide a chance to talk about this particular kind of pressure and also for some of you to discuss various collective projects for housing and community. I'll start with Joe Giordano, a painter who has been working for the city Department of Cultural Affairs [DCA] since 1981, in charge of certification of artists for loft legality. Within the department he is also an advocate for individual artists.

**Joe Giordano** For a long time, I've been hoping that artists would get together and discuss these issues and find some way to have political clout. As a matter of fact, the National Art Space Development Network in Berkeley, California is organizing now to focus on artists' needs for space, and there are people here who will talk about that.

Since 1981 I've been the Department of Cultural Affairs' director of artists' certification. The sole reason for artists' certification was the legalization of artists' residences in lofts in Noho and Soho. The city made it possible for artists to live and work in this declining light manufacturing zone where living had not been legal, and acknowledged art making as a variety of manufacturing. The state and city recognized art as having social and economic benefits. The city formed a committee of artists, art educators, curators, and critics, in all the art disciplines, to certify people on the creative end of the fine arts as artists. In order to occupy a former manufacturing space, to convert it into a space where works of art would be created, an artist had to be professionally recognized. (And this was restricted to those who created, rather than those who interpreted, works of art.)

In the 1960s only artists were living in loft spaces, but every once in a while the fire department would conduct a purge, and the artists would be evicted. Between 1961 and 1964, about 2,000 artists were evicted from their lofts, following a loft fire in which several firemen were killed. During that same period, lobbying began on the AIR, or Artist in Residence program. Since then, I've been trying at DCA to get loft enforcement, to get people who aren't artists out of Soho so that artists could occupy the finite number of lofts there. In other areas of the city, lofts have opened up, and they are mixed-use areas. In areas of "super-manufacturing," the city will go after anybody living in these lofts. However, every loft eviction in the city so far, to my knowledge, has been of an artist, not of people who aren't artists.

Since my first day on the job at DCA in 1981, I've been on the telephone daily, from the time I walk in to the time I walk out, with people being evicted from their lofts. There are also some problems among artists who may have bought lofts together—as co-ops—but the co-ops disintegrate over issues such as noise, or one artist has much more money than the others and wants to do something with the place but the others don't. Or non-artists have moved into the building and the artists are being pushed out.

My feeling is that artists have to organize to take care of themselves; they have to develop a political agenda. For example, New York City has as many as 100,000 visual artists. If you add actors, writers, dancers, and people in the other art disciplines, you wind up with enough people to populate a small city of about 200,000. That could amount to substantial clout in, say, the upcoming mayoral election. But I also think we have to organize nationally. In the eight years I've been in New York, I'd estimate that as many

as 30,000 artists have left the city, and I feel that the artists who are coming to New York now no longer represent the broad spectrum of artists. They come from upper-income families; artists from working-class backgrounds aren't coming to the city. We are getting a limited range of what an artist can reflect. There has to be something done to make affordable space available to artists from working-class backgrounds. Many artists who come to the city now have limited-equity corporations or other backers; for instance, a group of investors supports the artist to the extent of paying for the loft or its renovation. Artists who start off poor can't even enter the city anymore; the gates are closed.

Other cities are beginning to pay more attention to their artists; they see that there are benefits to having artists live there, so they offer them space. Artists staying where they grew up, or moving to places other than New York is not necessarily a bad thing—it could be a good thing. But I'm working here, in New York City, and I'm concerned that New York continue to have a certain presence in the art world, partly because I believe that there is a benefit to having large numbers of artists in a single area. In New York fantastic things have happened over the years because artists have migrated to a particular area and found each other. Choreographers, writers, musicians, painters, and so on have been able to develop great collaborations because people have come to live together.

**Marshall Berman** Our next speaker is Adrienne Leban. She's a painter, writer, and media artist. She teaches at the School of Visual Arts. She was co-chair of the Lower Manhattan Loft Tenants Association, and president of the Board of Directors of New York Loft Tenants, which operates a free housing clinic in the offices of the Foundation for the Community of Artists [FCA]. She headed the lobbying effort that succeeded in passing the loft law in 1982.

**Adrienne Leban** I did head the lobbying effort, which entailed two years of trucking back and forth between New York City and Albany and literally thousands of meetings with state and city officials. I was also around for the program that Marshall mentioned called the Artists Home Ownership Program, and I wore two hats—as a tenant organizer/leader and as an artist. I had no trouble vehemently opposing that program. I thought it was a mean-spirited and ultimately very stupid program for artists to support. The Lower East Side, or East Village, community loathed it. Community Board No. 3 Manhattan had perhaps the most crowded meetings they ever had with almost unanimous opposition to the plan. The community board did not support the Artists Home Ownership Program.

**Marshall Berman** Then how did it come up to the Board of Estimate?

**Adrienne Leban** It was killed at the Board of Estimate.

Anyway, the reason I bring that up is the connection to the idea of artists having special housing needs, and the common reaction in communities to artists as virus, or as the leading edge of gentrification. Ultimately, that virus is infecting artists too. It is not so much a matter of artists being anti-theoretical to communities as being a situation where artists are their own worst enemies when they separate themselves from the rest of the human beings who have housing needs. True, artists have special housing needs, but I would bet that among the artists here, our special housing needs are quite different from each other's. And just as artists have special housing needs, so do plumbers, so do families with five children, or single teachers with a cat. I'm quite certain that to organize ourselves around artists' special housing needs will not solve the dual problem of being an artist and having housing. I think "artists'" housing is a mistake if we think of it as one issue. There is the issue of housing, which all human beings share, and there is the issue of being an artist in this society. So we have two issues, and we join them erroneously, and the error compounds and divides us from other people who need dwellings. Only by facing what the problem is can we look at what its real causes are and come up with real solutions.

Therefore, I disagree with Joe that the solution is to have artists organize as artists and lobby the people we elect. It is too easy an issue for politicians to use on behalf of big real estate. The problem we have with housing has to do with housing as a profit-making sphere. Housing is a necessity, for everyone. Where we feel special as artists, is that we want live/work spaces. Martha wrote on the flyer for this discussion the phrase, "Life/Work." That's an interesting aspect of it, but that needn't divide us from other people, either—particularly in this era of info-tech, where more and more people are able to, and want to, do their jobs at home.

Why do artists want to work at home? Two reasons come to mind immediately. One is that our lives and our work are so intermingled that to have a separate place to go to work seems to us odd, inappropriate, uncomfortable. But this isn't true of all artists. There are artists who work with strict discipline, and go to the studio at 9 a.m., and at 5 p.m. they are done. I don't work like that at all; I wander around my house and studio. It may be disorganized, but that's how I do it. The other probably more basic reason is that we simply can't afford to rent. Typically, and this is arguable, artists do their work for some reason other than money: we don't do our work for money, so the idea that we have to concentrate on making enough money to pay two rents is a real obstacle. That goes beyond the issue of housing policy for artists to that of the whole structure of our society, in

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**The Bicycles He Repairs.**



**Is The Need For Life/Work Habitats Special To Artists?  
Who's An Artist?**

Photos and text by Adrienne Leban

which money is number one in the hierarchy of values. By not objecting to it, we perpetuate it. We allow a society to exist which structurally makes it impossible for us to be artists. So I find abhorrent organizing for special “set asides” for artists in housing. I can’t see myself out marching for artists’ housing as I step over people in the street, knowing not only that I am stepping over people whose need is much more urgent than mine, but also that ultimately, if I succeed, I do so as a pawn in the preservation of the system spreading the real virus, the real estate profit-making speculation virus.

I don’t just approach this theoretically, however. I think there are concrete steps we could take immediately to start changing the root causes of the problems we face as artists in this society. For example, we could start with the city-owned properties, because that presents a different kind of opponent, in my experience one more culpable than private property owners. We could insist that no city-owned property be sold to anyone who is not a user of that property—no speculators, no developers. We could say, “Real estate speculation has to stop.” It’s not a very sophisticated task for us to organize to stop that, not as artists, but as human beings. Which means there are a lot more of us than 100,000 or 200,000.

**Marshall Berman** Next is Marilyn Nance, who is a photographer and photojournalist, and also president of her tenants council in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn.

**Marilyn Nance** I’m not going to deliver a treatise on artists’ housing. I am an artist and a photographer, but mostly I am a human being, and I agree with Adrienne—human beings should have decent housing. As an artist, I am someone who has to make art, and I need a space to do it in. I need a workspace, a darkroom, studio space, office space, storage space, space to be by myself and away from the rest of the family. It’s not luxury I’m talking about. Home isn’t just a place where my family eats and sleeps, home is the core of my existence. I wonder how well I would survive if I didn’t have a place to work.

When I was invited to participate in this exhibit as a photographer, I thought of all the photographs I had of housing and related issues, and Martha asked me if I could bring them into the gallery. I said, “Well, you really need to come over.” By the time we met at my apartment, I had gathered a pile of stuff, not only photographs, but documents on my life as a tenant. I spread out the documents and photos on the floor, and there was the story of my building. My building has an interesting history. Martha and I talked about what we would do, and my contribution to the exhibit became a wall display and a book about my building.

I live at 136 Cambridge Place, in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, which is a

historic district now. I moved there in 1977, when the neighborhood was considered part of Bedford-Stuyvesant, though now residents like to call it "Clinton Hill." It was also in 1977 that I began working at Doyle Dane Bernbach, an ad agency on Madison Avenue. On my first day of work, my supervisor welcomed me and asked where I lived. I answered, "Brooklyn." And he said, "Oh, where in Brooklyn?" "Bedford-Stuyvesant." "Oh good. Now that you have a job, you can move." But I was very happy where I lived. I was close to the A train, and people speak to you on the street in my neighborhood. If you can imagine a need for an antidote to Madison Avenue—the A train and Fulton Street was a heavy dose.

My house is a four-story city-owned building of eight apartments, two on each floor. Each apartment is a floor-through. When I moved in, the city didn't own the building, a friend of mine did, and her dream was to have an artists' building, a creative center where people could live and work. The building and its tenants group became known as the Communications Co-op, or CoCo. We hosted parties, open houses, poetry readings, film screenings, and live music. The building was home to African-Americans, Latino musicians, writers, graphic designers, filmmakers, painters, photographers, and educators. We worked cooperatively fixing the place up, painting, cleaning, shoveling, and doing everything you have to do when you have a house. We had fish fries and Thanksgiving dinners. Inside the building there was so much activity; there were darkrooms, a gallery, a boutique, a food co-op, a writers workshop, two music groups, and a recording studio. It was like a creative dormitory and it was wonderful. This was before the city took the building over for nonpayment of taxes.

The building is still not the kind of center it once was; it has a different energy now. Times change. It was wonderful while it lasted. The building went into the red in 1979-80, and the City of New York took it over, and my life as a city tenant began.

**Marshall Berman** How has the city been as a landlord?

**Marilyn Nance** Awful. We had a series of different managers who didn't know the building and who had preconceived attitudes about what a tenant in a city-owned building is like. We had contractors who did really poor work and left materials in the hallways, and we had painting contractors who came in and painted half the hallway brown and half beige—just like you see in welfare hotels. They do a whole thing to your building that makes it look like a city property. They take out all the details. They replace wooden doors with steel ones. If there is stained glass, you'd better sit on it, otherwise they will remove it. They broke up marble sinks, they removed built-in mirrors. They took out as many details as they could. The building



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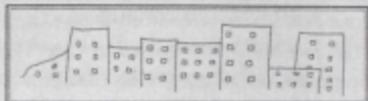
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Above and far right: Marilyn Plance, Documents on a city-owned building in a historic area of Brooklyn, 136 Cambridge Place, 1981-88.

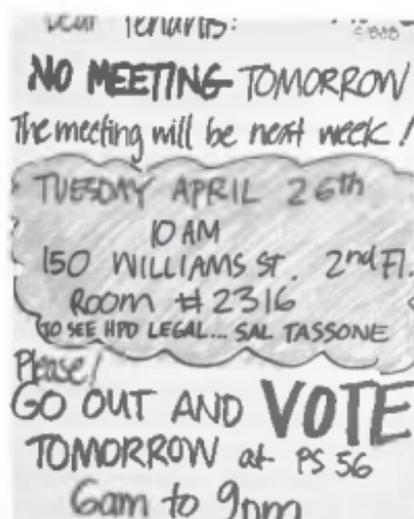
was stripped. We recorded the breakdown of some of the systems: deterioration of the stairs, junk in the hallways, water leaks, you name it.

The city as landlord? My refrigerator was broken through the whole holiday season, from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day. We tried to get the city to repair it. The city said, "No, we don't repair refrigerators. We'll bring you a new one." The doorbell rang one day, and there was my "new" refrigerator, which looked 17 times worse than the broken one. Refurbished, that's the name. It looked like it had been thrown out and then put on the truck. I said, "Keep it." We then wrote to the city; we documented everything. "We're giving you two weeks to repair our refrigerator, otherwise we will repair it ourselves and take the money out of the rent." Which we did. Because of that, we had a couple of dates with the city in court, and we brought in our very fat files. One file was labeled "Testimony," the other, "Photographs," etc. They are scared of us now because we document everything.

There was a fire in another apartment in 1981. The firemen had to put a hole in the ceiling of our apartment just to make sure the fire hadn't spread through the walls. We didn't have windows for about a year-and-a-half after that—we had plastic. One day the city sent us a three-day dis-possession notice, saying we owed \$8,000 in rent. So, again, we went to court and described the conditions that we felt warranted an abatement of rent. We worked that way. But, still, we had no windows, no heat, and no hot water. I had a baby in October of 1981. I was trying to figure out what



Above left: members of tenants association at 136 Cambridge Place, a city-owned building in Bedford-Stuyvesant (now sometimes known as "Clinton Hill"), Brooklyn, photographed by Marilyn Nance.



to do. I couldn't come home—you can't bring a baby to a home with no heat and no hot water. I had the hospital write to the city, saying I needed heat and hot water. That is what finally got the heat and hot water in that building. The city claimed it didn't know we were without. We had been calling, but it's when you put things down on paper that you get action.

By 1985, the city had renovated three apartments and moved in huge families. I kept seeing people coming out of the apartment next door, so I asked how many kids were in the family. The answer was, "Fifteen, but we don't all live here." What HPD does is look at an apartment of say, eight rooms, and figure there should be two people per room. I couldn't move into my apartment now if I tried, since it is city-owned. They would look at our family of three (two artists and a child) and say we don't need eight rooms. I guess that speaks to an artist's need for housing. Now, there are only three "original" (CoCo) artists left in the building. Interestingly enough, many of the new tenants are creative people.

One evening, in the spring of 1986, I happened to walk home a different way, and I saw some real changes in the surrounding neighborhood. Renovation and construction everywhere. I thought "Could this be gentrification?" I walked home with a real sense of urgency, and when I got inside the building, I knocked on every door and talked to everybody about this. I said, "I don't know what is going to happen to us—but this *is* a nice building, and *anybody* would want to own it or live in it." The building wasn't in very good shape then, but I visualized living in a really nice build-

ing, and told them of this vision. Maybe they thought I was crazy, but I figured I may as well try it—it only takes one person to start something.

We formed a tenant association. People were wary, and every time we called a meeting, I had to remind people to come. I was elected president. That was not what I wanted, but I figured I had to follow through. I put different notes up each day to keep reminding people of meetings or tasks. We decorated our doors for Christmas and cleaned up the building; that helped to unify us. It gave us an opportunity to work together. Security has always been a big issue. After a guy with a gun was found in the hallway, we bought a lock; the locks the city put on used to break, and finally the city said they don't put locks on these buildings because the tenants are always breaking them. Well, we bought the lock, and it falls in and out of repair, but nobody breaks it because we all know *we* paid for it.

When the city takes over a building it goes into the Central Management Program, which is like a big pool. The managers have a caseload of 30 to 50 buildings, so you don't get attention unless you really make noise. The managers are overloaded, and the system itself just doesn't work—I'm not sure it was meant to work. Now we are in the Tenant Interim Lease, or TIL, program. In the program, an organized tenant association can lease its building for a dollar a year, collect the rent, and manage the building. After the lease period is over, the tenants form a cooperative and can purchase their apartments at the price of \$250 per apartment.

Everyone in the building is different, but there is one thing that we are certain of: if we were moved out, we would have absolutely no place to go. We couldn't move into the same neighborhood. Our struggle is to maintain our residency and to fight off anyone who threatens it. We realize that the real estate industry is very powerful and greedy. It's up to us as individuals and as unified human beings to realize our power and determine our future.

**Marshall Berman** Our last speaker is Jero Nesson, who is from ArtistSpace in Boston and who is going to talk about artists' co-ops.

**Jero Nesson** I'd like to share with you some experiences of artists in the Boston area who have managed to develop their own cooperatively owned living and working space. I'm the director of a nonprofit organization called ArtistSpace. We're funded by the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, and we provide free technical assistance to artists interested in developing their own cooperatively owned studio space. While we don't work exclusively with visual artists, about 95 percent of the artists involved happen to be visual artists, so I will focus on the space needs of visual artists.

As most of you know, artists often have the same space needs as light-industry users: upper floors of underutilized buildings, often five- or six-

story walkups. Most artists either work on a fairly large scale or work on more than one piece at the same time. Freight elevators and loading docks are important, as are a fairly large amount of space, high ceilings, and a heavy floor-load capacity. Typical is an artist we worked with outside of Boston, in Waltham. She developed her own loft space—a 1,000-square-foot studio with 18-foot ceilings—designed and built to minimize living space and maximize workspace. Shortly after she finished her loft, she was evicted. The good news is that she later got involved with a cooperative project and got a new space, which I'll talk about a little later.

I was the director of something called the Fort Point Arts Community, a neighborhood organization of primarily visual artists in the Fort Point section of Boston. It's an organization run by artists for artists. Our most visible accomplishment was the acquisition of a 72,000-square-foot building. The building was on the private market. We took a look at it from both a financial and an architectural standpoint, and it seemed both appropriate and feasible. For instance, it had many windows, so nobody would have a deep, dark studio. We were able to salvage the sprinkler system and most of the windows, as well as the perimeter steam-heating system. A notice in our monthly newsletter brought out 35 brave artists, each with the \$1,000 deposit. The money was used not only for the down payment, but also for preliminary architectural and legal costs. We met every week for 11 months, and every decision was made by consensus. The artists were the developers, in full control of the project.

We had to do some community outreach. The building is in South Boston, a rather conservative, blue-collar section, and after four or five months of work we had to go to the Zoning Board of Appeals to get a variance to allow us to live and work in this industrial zone. We had support from the governor and the mayor, and 55 artists showed up, but the South Boston community leaders didn't want artists working and living, and more importantly voting, in their district. They were very conservative and afraid of change. By this time, each artist had invested a great deal of time and about \$1,800 cash in the project, and we saw the whole thing going down the drain. But we met with community and political leaders, and we went back to the Board of Appeals a month later and got our variance.

We also needed a loan of over a million dollars, so we put together a very professional business plan and knocked on a lot of bank doors. The typical reaction was, "An artists live-work limited-equity cooperative? That's the most interesting project that has crossed my desk in years. Have you tried the bank down the street?" We went from bank to bank, and finally First Mutual of Boston decided it was a good loan. They weren't doing us any favors, they did an appraisal and evaluated it as a good loan.

Another situation was a group of artists in the South End who were fac-

ing displacement. They organized as Artists of the South End, and were able to get the city to designate them as the developer of the top two floors of a city-owned building. The artists are moving in this week. Once again, they formed a limited-equity cooperative. In limited-equity co-ops, you're restricted on the amount of profit you can make on the resale of your unit. You can sell it only to another artist.

Another project was a surplus school in Newton, a very affluent suburb. A couple of artists had come to me looking for space. We searched and searched and couldn't find anything, but we had heard that this school was going to be for sale. We attended numerous meetings with the Board of Alderman's Re-use Committee, and met with the neighborhood association. This is a neighborhood of \$300,000 to \$500,000 homes. The artists were able to present themselves as attractive neighbors. I think that they were able to break down a lot of stereotypes the neighbors had, but they were also suggesting a very practical, low-density use for the school. This project consists of 14 studios, averaging 2,300 square feet each, with three low-income family units. The condo developers who were our competitors were proposing 35 to 40 units. The neighborhood association voted unanimously to support our proposal.

In South Boston we got together a group of 56 artists who signed a purchase agreement on a 120,000-square-foot building. We had learned our lesson and met with the South Boston political leaders early on. But our structural engineer decided that the building was unsound. This group decided to stay together to find another building. Just about that time, an artist friend and I found a 250,000-square-foot building in Somerville. Everyone was very excited about it, but we needed another 50 artists. In another couple of weeks we had a hundred artists. We purchased the building and got extremely complicated zoning changes because the mayor was supportive. He felt that Somerville has a lousy reputation, and if we could create an instant cultural facility like that at no cost to the city, he would do anything he could to change the zoning and help support it. The building was owned by a man who was using it as a warehouse. He had paid \$175,000 for it, and we paid him \$5.2 million. So he was happily displaced. It is a \$15 million project, and we took out a \$12 million loan to do the project. To make the project work, we had to generate income so the project is structured as a co-op condominium: there are 91 cooperatively owned units, limited-equity units restricted to artists, and 58 market-rate condos on the top floor and part of another floor. The proceeds from the sale of the condos underwrote the co-op space. The condos sold for about \$120 to \$130 a square foot; the artists' co-ops were \$55 a square foot. The building was occupied last April.

We also developed another surplus school in Wellesley, an even more affluent community than Newton. We leased this building from the town for



Brickbottom Artists' Coop, Somerville, Massachusetts, 1988.

ten years, and it provides work space for 40 artists. We are also looking at some buildings in Lawrence, an industrial area about 30 miles north of Boston. We are going to get a 40- to 50-year lease on the top floor of the one building, and the owner is going to provide the financing to convert it to live/work space. Another project involves the new construction of artists live/work space on a city-owned lot in the Mission Hill section of Boston. And finally there is a state-subsidized, partially rent-subsidized artists' building in Boston. The state subsidy with a developer was for 15 years, and the time period of agreement with the developer is now over. The developer is proba-

bly going to convert the space to condos, not necessarily for artists—this, to my mind, underscores the importance of ownership and control.

**Marshall Berman** We've had on one hand a very good picture of how artists can act very effectively as an interest group. On the other hand, Adrienne's talk argued that artists shouldn't do this. Was the model described by Jero acceptable to you, Adrienne?

**Adrienne Leban** It has certain unsavory characteristics. I don't think that handing a factory owner a \$5.2 million check and not considering the displacement of the employees who are also leaving, and without a dime of that \$5.2 million, should be described so blithely. I don't know the whole story, but I'm concerned about the fact of limited equity, which means there is a potential for profit. I think that nonprofit co-ops can be arranged with cost-of-living increases at resale without there being the incentive for profit. I am also unhappy over artists' becoming developers by making part of the building into market-rate condos for people affording what in Massachusetts is probably a pretty high figure, \$125 per square foot—that's not that high here, although maybe it is average in Brooklyn or elsewhere outside Manhattan.

Furthermore, I don't really know that the artists need Mr. Nesson, or what he gets out of it—but that is just ignorance; I don't know what his function is. There are elements I like, including the aspect of being an owner-user. But again, it should be a nonprofit ownership; I don't like the developmental profit-making aspects because they seed the same problem that has caused us trouble and that we need to rise above, to the next level of social organization.

**Jero Nesson** One of the reasons the projects are affordable is that there is no developer.

**Adrienne Leban** The state is paying your salary. The state might use that money differently, for instance, to the direct benefit of the users, the artists. Artists are very capable! When I was lobbying for the loft law in New York City, there was virtually no artist whose space wasn't in contention, and we didn't have to hire you or any other developer to develop that space. We renovated lofts in Soho and Chelsea and Tribeca and everywhere else without a middleman. So perhaps the funds that go to you could be better spent.

**Audience** It's also a question of complicity with the overall speculative development of the area you move into. It's one thing to rent a place in a high-income area, but when you talk about, in effect, establishing utopian facto-

ries with an influx of opportunistic taxpayers in low-income, blue-collar areas, you are talking about the eventual displacement of many people.

**Adrienne Leban** That's right, and I would also want to know if you own any property in the area? Or if you have partnerships which own any other properties in the area that are being improved?

**Jero Nesson** Well, everyone has a point of view. Some artists don't even want limited equity. When it comes time to resell, they don't want to be restricted, because they are afraid they won't be able to afford to go elsewhere. My only answer is that that's what we are doing, and you are welcome to work with us or not.

**Yvonne Rainer** I live in a loft and I am a filmmaker. I was involved in that ill-fated 1980 artists' housing project. I agree with everything that Adrienne said, but I feel caught between immediate self-interest, where extending the loft law in a few years will save the loft I live in, and the larger picture that includes the role artists play in this country. The most dismal ways of describing that are on the one hand, we are the avant-garde of gentrification, or on the other hand, we are scavengers.

But why are these manufacturing buildings empty? Even if we don't displace manufacturers, why are they empty? The picture is of the continuing deterioration of the industrial infrastructure in this country, and I think we have to face this. The problem is not only profiteering in housing but profiteering in other areas that have brought about—despite the Reagan administration's euphoric employment statistics—the destruction of manufacturing and jobs. These vacant buildings in various urban centers that are so tempting for artists to take over with a seemingly clear conscience represent this deterioration and displacement on another level.

**Joe Giordano** I met with a representative of the garment workers' union, who insisted that we at DCA be very strict about artist certification because the garment workers and other people who work in Soho worked very harmoniously alongside the artists while they were there. The problems started when the nonartists began moving in. We had the full support of the garment workers union for artists to remain and work in these lofts. There wasn't a gentrifying problem. Artists are in fact light manufacturers, and they use that space, they create jobs, and they make contributions. I think that artists are special and that we have to look at ourselves as being special and not look at ourselves as not being special. When I came to New York in 1969, you could expect to find a 2,000-square-foot space, for \$2,000 in key money and pay \$150 per month, but those spaces aren't around anymore.

We have to fight for the limited amount of space we have. A recent survey said now artists expect to work in an 800-square-foot space.

**Adrienne Leban** I have the same problem. I feel the same pull that Yvonne feels and maybe others of you too. But the way to stop that is to create great disincentives through the tax structure and through legislation to make real estate speculation and nonuser development of property absolutely unprofitable. Even with the 1986 Tax Reform Act, the tax structure is designed to make real estate incredibly profitable. If we stopped that, we would have a very different situation in terms of affordable housing for all of us "special people."

**Audience** Across the board? No real estate profit for anybody?

**Adrienne Leban** Yes.

**Marshall Berman** Given that we have a democratic country and that things like this would have to be voted on, do you think there really is a mass movement for socialism in the United States now?

**Adrienne Leban** It's not socialism—I'm not talking about the state owning these properties. I'm talking about users' owning their properties and a system of exchange of properties not based on profit. You're shaking your head, but at the height of Reaganism we got a law passed that added a whole new class of housing to rent stabilization, the 1982 loft law. We got coverage for buildings with as few as three apartments, instead of six or more. When we made the demand, everyone from the mayor to the governor to the Republican Senate Majority Leader said it would never, never happen, but it did. If you want it to happen, you'll start thinking about it. You'll come up with creative reasons why it should happen. It's not socialism, not communism, and not capitalism. We don't have any of those *isms* in any country in the world—we have hybrids. The U.S. isn't a capitalist country, it's a hybrid of capitalism and socialism; socialism bailed out capitalism here in the 1930s, during the Great Depression—it was bailed out by Keynesian economics and socialism. I don't want any one of those *isms* to exist alone. I want to make it as we go along because I am an artist; I want to create society to fit the things we need to survive and prosper as happy creative people. If you have a problem, try to solve it in a realistic way. It's realistic to say that housing cannot be for profit any more than we can use the environment for profit—the idea that profit is first is causing us to poison our air, food, and water. Housing is just as critical, and nonprofit housing is not impossible.

**Audience** My name is Jenny Trent and I am now an artist. I have ten years' experience with real estate developers. The days of being Vincent and going to the south of France and living on the hundred *francs* brother Theo sends you are gone. It's time for people to wake up and realize that. Developers know that there are homeless people; they don't need us to tell them. I think the gentleman from Boston should be highly commended for his realistic view of the situation and his attempts to solve it. He isn't sitting around saying the world is a terrible place; we all know the world is a terrible place. I now work where the largest area I have is five feet long by four feet wide, and my paintings are ten feet across. I'm not saying I just want a solution for me, but I think that it is important that artists know what their weapons are and what game they're playing. The developers are winning, we need to change our plan of attack, and that's why I think what Jero Nesson is doing is really wonderful.

**Adrienne Leban** He is using their plan of attack.

**Jenny Trent** Not necessarily. Whatever he is using, he is accomplishing something: people now have space. He isn't theorizing, he's doing something.

**Adrienne Leban** I protected 20,000 units of housing in New York City. Has he created twenty thousand units yet?

**Jenny Trent** This isn't a personal thing—we are trying to find new ways to help everyone now.

**Adrienne Leban** I suggested one new way—that we immediately put a ban on speculation in city properties so that only users can purchase those city properties. That wouldn't be limited to artist users or to any users. That's a very concrete first step, and it's practical and viable.

**Jenny Trent** When will that provide more and better housing for all of us?

**Joe Giordano** At least ten years from now. What Jero is doing is providing action so that it is happening now.

**Adrienne Leban** If you go to the show over at 77 Wooster Street you'll find organizations with literature: get the literature of the Housing Justice Campaign, sponsored by the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development. Subscribe to *City Limits*. This is being discussed and organized for. Columbia University regularly has forums for planners. Dr. Peter Marcuse has been active in them. You can get literature from the Metropolitan Coun-

cil on Housing. There are many well-respected organizations that have a presence in Albany. They need support; they need members; they need you to become informed and active. Martha's show over at 77 Wooster has all the literature right there; it's not just an art show, it's a very practical tool, a resource. Go see that show, get the literature, get on the mailing list. Call up, go to the meetings. It doesn't have to take ten years.

**Marshall Berman** There is a mayoral campaign coming, and I wonder if anybody in this room has any ideas about pressure that artists could bring to that campaign.

**Joe Giordano** The Foundation for the Community of Artists' and Artists Equity are two groups that represent individual artists. Possibly organizing through them might be effective. I go along with Adrienne on that. Her group did a remarkable job and saved lots and lots of artists' lofts. Jero is also working on something. You have to approach it every way you possibly can. Those of you who want to get involved politically really ought to start organizing as soon as possible. If you want to organize as artists I see a good point in that; I also think we can work together with people who aren't artists. But you have to take action.

**Bill Negosec** I'm a Brooklyn artist. I'm a loft tenant, and I'm president of Brooklyn Loft Tenants. Anyone who has come here tonight trying to find out how to find artists' housing and has just moved here with their thousand dollars hasn't heard any news yet. I came here with that amount. I've lived for over ten years in a building with 40 people in 20 units. The first tenant was given three years of free rent to move in because one-and-a-half floors were vacant. Every time I take the subway home I realize there are a lot of people in a lot worse shape than I am, but in 1991 or 1992 when the loft law expires, unless we all get together and preserve it, we can all wind up on the street. I hope everyone here starts at the grass-roots level and figures out whom to elect as mayor. Unlike Boston, the only way we could get our mayor to come to a loft building would be if Donald Trump bought the place and kicked everybody out. We don't have the same cooperation politically, particularly at the higher levels. If in 1987 you had gone up to Albany with me and lobbied for an amendment to the loft law to legalize some of the Brooklyn artists left out because of a loophole, you would have realized that the single person standing in its way was the mayor of New York. This year maybe we can elect someone who understands the seriousness of the situation. Almost anyone who has just moved to this city is in trouble, because most of them don't have the \$100,000 necessary to get a place to live.



I had lived in New York City and I was lost one day. I was trying to take a shortcut, going down the back roads, and ended up on the throughway, and ended up in South Norwalk. I drove around, and having seen the lofts in Soho, I thought: "My goodness, I'm in a miniature New York City, with manufacturing and everything," and saw as I drove around a number of empty lofts, and I contacted my friends and they all drove around and said: "You're in South Norwalk." We found that really this would be a mecca, in terms of utilizing the loft spaces. So we felt, at that time, good: other artists can move right in here. And at that time the rents were very low.

**Karen Santry, artist**

We said that we must make a self-supporting affair out of this neighborhood. Therefore, we had to get the white-collar worker. And also, I think it's true that you cannot mix low- and moderate-income housing with the type of housing and the type of people who live here, who are self-supporting.

**Arthur Collins, developer**

It's nice to revitalize South Norwalk, but not at the expense of poor people. The revitalization should have come along with the idea of helping poor people too. And it could have been done in a nice way. But this way they were just eased out—you looked and they were there and the next time you looked they were all gone! The whites left the inner city and went out to the suburbs and now they don't want to stay there, and they want to come back! So, where are we supposed to go? This is the whole ball game. It's not only happening here in Norwalk, you pick up the paper and the magazines, look at the television, it's happening all over the country. The inner city was left to the poor people and now they want to come back, and where do the inner-city people go? This is the question. Are you going to have a Pied Piper and lead us all out into the water and drown us—that's the only thing I can see.

**Bea Brown, councilwoman**

**Robin Orden** My name is Robin Orden. I feel like I might be stepping out into a mine field; however, Martha encouraged me to speak from the floor. I lived in New York in the late 1970s, and I was in the administration of Parsons School of Design. I'm presently the executive director of an organization called the Emeryville Artists Cooperative. Emeryville, California, is sandwiched between Berkeley and Oakland and the San Francisco Bay. We have two properties with 56 studios; these were developed by the artists when they moved into the vacant buildings in 1974-75. We are a limited-equity housing cooperative, incorporated as a public-benefit nonprofit corporation. Our buildings are single story and contain work studios that vary between about 500 and 2,000 square feet. One building has over 42,000 square feet of space, the other has 28,000 square feet of studios and 6,000 square feet of vacant warehouse, which we are thinking of developing. But in California we have the problem of new earthquake safety codes.

Joe also mentioned the National Art Space Development Network, for which I am presently the acting director. It is a project that has been developed over the past two years. Both Joe Giordano and Jero Nesson are members of the advisory board; I am new to it. It represents a linking up of organizations around the country, including the Foundation for the Community of Artists, the New York Foundation for the Arts, organizations in Minneapolis that have developed art spaces, Jero's organization in Boston, plus organizations in California, Tucson, Phoenix, and Seattle. Studio buildings that are artist-owned or artist-operated are in existence throughout the country. Many of them have come into existence in the past 10 to 20 years. Since these projects share many elements, one of our main objectives at the network is to develop a clearinghouse for information, services, resources, and support so that these artist spaces around the country can continue to develop. Continuing discussion of these housing issues is very critical, including the seemingly mundane topics of codes and zoning. Issues of political power are also critical. Even developing society's view of artists as a disenfranchised group is important in the long run.

One of the effects of artists' long-term ownership or control of their buildings, of their spaces, is the tremendous relief of not having to wonder where you will be in a couple of months. That stability brings about an empowerment that provides a basis for political action. I think this issue is a hybrid. In a larger sense, you are looking not just at a way of securing the buildings for artists. Sometimes artists turn to people like me or Jero because they don't want to worry about how buildings operate, or about how to get a big bank loan. Everybody learns a lot, and the artists have a place to live and to make art. As Jero's presentation showed, artists' going to the community is important, because not only are there a lot of myths about artists in the society at large but also because there is a lot the artists need

to learn about responsibility. If you have a tenant association, like Marilyn's, that is looking at buying their building, they are talking about governance, the nuts and bolts—learning how a heating system works, for example.

In the case of the Emeryville Artists Cooperative, we now hold title to almost \$3 million worth of real estate. We have about \$24,000 of debt service per month; there are loans for over a million dollars on one property that includes a land contract with the City of Emeryville Redevelopment Agency and almost two million dollars in loans on the second property. A lot has to be learned to be able to answer such questions as, is it a good idea to buy a building? Can you get a long-term lease on a building? How can artists protect themselves and help the artists' community obtain fair housing? There are many more issues such as the way that studios can be sold; the meaning of "limited" in limited-equity, which varies from state to state. The limits in our group are tight, because we want to secure affordable housing for the long term. There are a number of older people in our co-op who might like to sell their studios at a full market value to become the basis for retirement, but they can't. What the value limitation provides is that the next person coming in is able to afford that studio, because our co-op requires you to have a low income for admission. There is also a need to educate the financial community, to develop revolving loan funds as sources of money for artists to buy shares in the cooperative. In order to provide the artist community with security, affordability, and relief from being constantly displaced from their living and working spaces, the various participants in the development process will have to share in the education and planning that makes it possible.

**Audience** I want to say something about the fallacy of limited equity. I have helped create five or six limited-equity co-ops for low-income tenants. In one of the buildings, one apartment was sold for \$3,000 because we were a limited-equity co-op. The second one went for \$20,000, and the third, in the same building and with the same layout, went for \$55,000. It doesn't work. The co-op's board sets the top price. Everybody wants to sell their share for the most money, so tenants start making alliances with each other to get a higher price. In another building where I worked, the first apartment sold for \$10,000, the second for \$23,000, the third for \$80,000. And I heard a month ago that someone is selling their apartment there for \$130,000. How did that happen? The board approved the price.

**Marshall Berman** You have to draw up some kind of covenant that limits the scope of the board. There are mini co-ops in New York that do that.

**Audience** One other thing I want to say is about the same community



Wendy Seller's main studio at the Claffin School, a redeveloped artists' live/work space in Newton, Massachusetts.

board that worked against the artists' housing, Community Board No. 3. I didn't like the artists' housing project either, but the funny part is that that same community board has now decided to sell half the housing stock and land in the Lower East Side to developers to be able to afford housing for their own constituency. So they are going to turn over half the publicly owned land on the Lower East Side to luxury housing. A lot of people in the community were very much against turning publicly owned land over to speculation and luxury housing. And we fought hard—we even stopped the voting process three times in the community board, but they won because the board members are appointed by the borough president. We did take over a huge building for artists who want to do homesteading. They fixed up the spaces themselves, but it is illegal. We are going to have a hard battle with the city, but it is part of a national campaign for homesteading. If we want to fight speculation, we should fight hard to keep what is public land as public land, or at least to have it turned over to users, not to developers.

**David La Fontain** I am David La Fontain. I live in Philadelphia. I'm working on a foundation-funded project to develop artists' live/work space on a model similar to the one Jero is implementing. We are looking for vacant industrial space in Philadelphia. I am ready to talk about it with anyone who is interested.

**Blaise Tobia** My name is Blaise Tobia. It's interesting that someone from Philadelphia just spoke, because the way my wife, who is a sculptor, and I solved our housing and working problems is by having a small, cheap, stable apartment in Brooklyn and a workspace in Philadelphia. That doesn't work for everybody. But I am up here wearing another hat, which is that of an editor of *Art and Artists*, a newsletter published by the Foundation for the Community of Artists. The foundation and *Art and Artists*—which used to be called *Art Workers' News*, a title I like a lot better—used to be the best place to find out about artists' housing issues. That all came to an end with the debacle of the Artists Home Ownership Program. Nobody will touch the subject now with a ten-foot pole. Our editorial department is paralyzed on the issue because there are so many positive and negative aspects to it.

**Adrienne Leban** I wrote a long article in *Art and Artists* quite a long while after that debacle, in the April/May 1985 issue.

**Blaise Tobia** I think I can speak for the editorial board and say we would be happy to publish anything well reasoned and maybe even put together a forum issue on artists' housing questions: *Art and Artists*, 280 Broadway, Room 412, New York, New York 10007.

**Dan Wiley** I want Adrienne to address the question of the Lower East Side Cross-Subsidy Program because it seems to be a very complicated issue. I don't know if you know of the Cooper Square Committee which has been pressing the city to make the program more palatable to the community. The city is selling off almost all its vacant land in the area to developers, who will be able to develop a thousand market-rate apartments. The city will then use the money from those land sales to build and rehabilitate a thousand low-income units in its vacant buildings. The city originally proposed the breakdown to be 80-20: 80 percent market-rate housing, 20 percent low-income. The final agreement was 50-50.<sup>2</sup> The Cooper Square Committee and the Lower East Side Joint Planning Council are trying to make sure they stick to that agreement.

**Adrienne Leban** Eighty-twenty, which is the exact opposite of the income breakdown of New York City, where 80 percent of the population earns under \$25,000 per year and 20 percent earns more.

**Dan Wiley** In the 1970s the city was selling off all the land to the highest bidder, but there were great protests, so they stopped that. The question is, when there is no federal money, is it worth it to do what the Cooper Committee is trying to do—to implement the cross-subsidy program and use

profits to go into low-income housing—or should you take the stand that there should be no profit from the sale of this land and it should all go to low-income housing?

**Adrienne Leban** I don't know what the Cooper Square plan is, but I do know the Campaign for Housing Justice's very detailed analysis of these plans. They have a very different approach from the city's proposition, which in my summary reading of it a year-and-a-half or two years ago, when it was first proposed, sounded more substantial. There were nonprofit community development organizations, neighborhood groups which would be, in effect, the developers in conjunction with the user-owners of the properties—community development organizations principally composed of the people who are trying to buy and own their own properties.

**Dan Wiley** The Cooper Committee is one of these community development organizations, and they are also supposed to put together mutual housing associations to run the low-income housing. There would be about a thousand units produced over the ten-year period, but that's still a compromise.

**Adrienne Leban** I don't think the money is not there in New York State and New York City. For the whole time I was involved, there was at least a half-billion-dollar city budget surplus. We don't need to build another luxury housing unit for the next 15 or 20 years. There is, in fact, a huge vacancy rate in luxury housing. We shouldn't be spending a penny on luxury development with tax subsidies or any other kind of incentive—build moderate- to low-income housing or nothing in New York City. All it needs is a political will to institute that, through zoning regulations. The thing that messed up the manufacturing zone tenants in the loft law was another law that the state can't supersede the city's zoning regulation, and the city put in place a zoning regulation in 1981 that prohibited housing and residential use in certain areas. Mayor Koch in New York City is suing New York State for passing the 1987 amendment of the loft law; he is suing to remove legal, residential housing units in the midst of the housing crisis.<sup>4</sup>

**Marshall Berman** He does everything he can for the real estate community; that one imperative explains a lot of what he does.

**Adrienne Leban** Donald Trump sued New York City to get a tax abatement for Trump Tower, and Koch is going to say he opposed Trump and tried to deny him the tax abatement. However, those were purely paper transactions. The law was already in effect, and Trump was going to get that abatement. Tony Gleidman, who was the city's commissioner of Hous-

ing Preservation and Development, which was sued by Donald Trump, resigned two years ago. Guess where he now works? He is now Donald Trump's senior vice president.

**Audience** I want to talk about the cross-subsidy plan. I think that program is very dangerous because it's going to set the housing agenda. If the Lower East Side, the best-organized community in New York, gives up to the cross-subsidy plan which is 50-50, the government is going to give the money to housing organizations to build 50 percent of the apartments, and 50 percent is going to private development for luxury housing. It's very important to defeat the cross-subsidy plan, because that is the same thing that is going to be passed in Harlem, proposed in the Bronx, proposed in Queens, proposed everywhere, if we don't defeat it here in the Lower East Side.

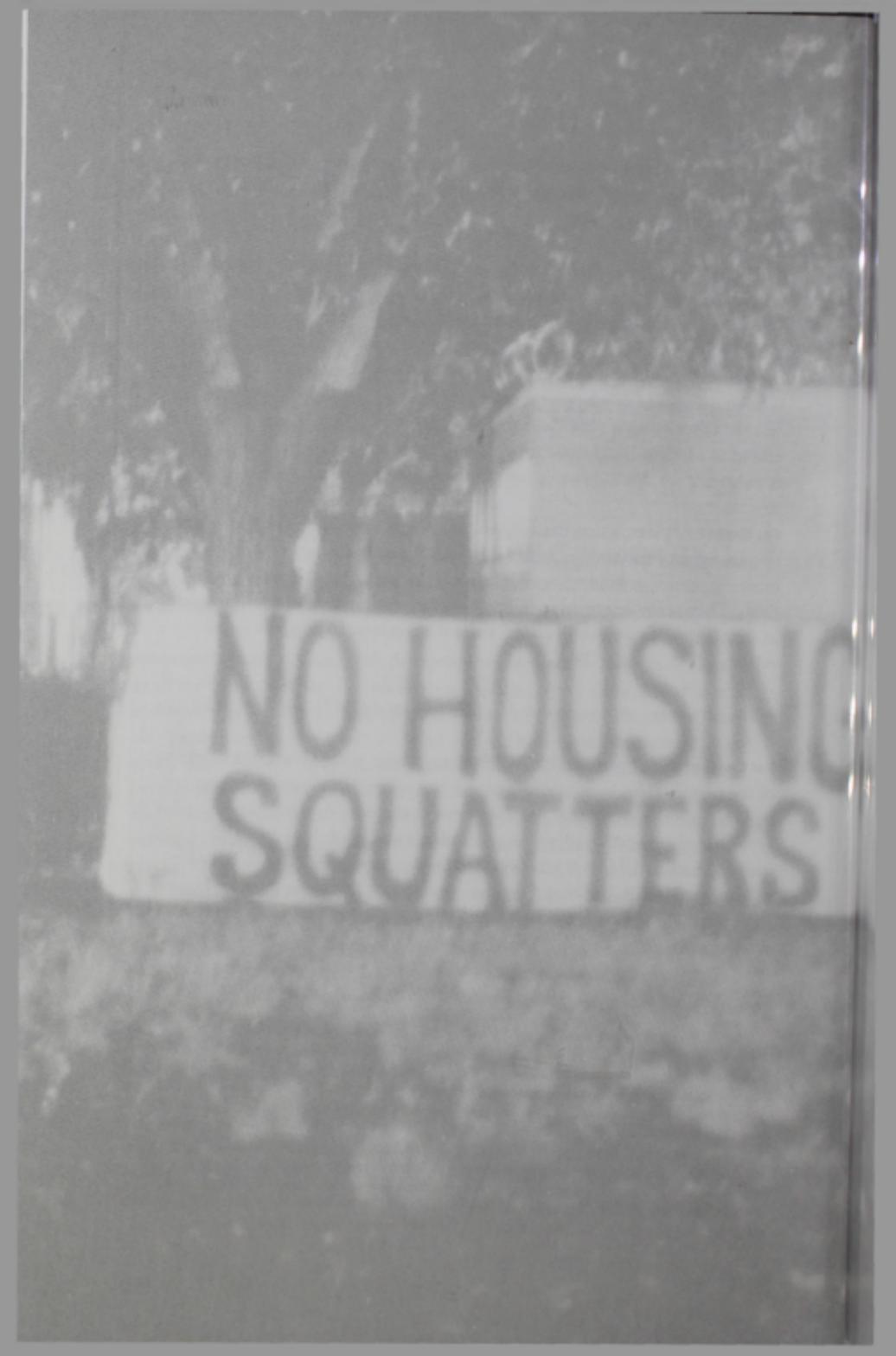
**Fal Gweno** It seems that the only way to defeat cross-subsidy is by squatting in some of the buildings that are already planned to go into development. My group is holding some of those buildings, with people living in them. They are going to have to sue to get us out, and we're going to spend as long a time as we can in court, years if necessary, to stop the cross-subsidy plan.

**Adrienne Laban** Are you with ACORN or Good Old Lower East Side?

**Fal Gweno** No, I'm not with ACORN, my name is Fal Gweno and I'm one of the persons who in the middle of the '70s started organizing squatter buildings on the West Side, and I was one of the persons who started a pilot project in the owner/steading program, that saved some buildings. We worked through UHAB [Urban Homesteading Assistance Board]. I never worked for UHAB, but they were my community. But some of those buildings became limited-equity co-ops and these are the ones that are now up for speculation.

#### Notes

1. The FCA ceased operation in the fall of 1989. The last issue of their publication, *Art and Artists*, appeared at the end of the summer of 1989.
2. Seventy-seven units of city-owned property have been sold to date. However, no low-income housing construction work has been done. Construction of the first low-income units is scheduled to begin in the summer of 1990—almost three years after the agreement between HPD and Community Board No. 3 was reached.
3. The amendment of 1987 protects the tenants of manufacturing zones who are eligible for the loft law. There has been substantial pressure on the Dinkins administration to drop the lawsuit—Community Board No. 2 passed a resolution in May 1990 and the Lower Manhattan Loft Tenants have demonstrated with over 400 people at City Hall. There has been no response to their demands.

A black and white photograph showing a protest sign in the foreground. The sign is white with bold, black, sans-serif text that reads "NO HOUSING SQUATTERS". The sign is held up by a person whose arm is visible on the left side. In the background, there are trees and a building with a crown on its roof. The overall scene is slightly out of focus, suggesting a candid or documentary-style shot.

NO HOUSING  
SQUATTERS

**HOMELESS:  
THE STREET AND OTHER VENUES**

NO PEACE!  
RIGHTS NOW

# Open forum



## HOMELESSNESS:

### *Conditions, Causes, Cures*

Wednesday, April 26,

6:30 PM

- **Anne Troy,** Executive director, Emmaus House
- **Cenén,** African artist and poet
- **Douglas Lasdon,** Director, Legal Action Center for the Homeless
- **Larry Locke,** Homeward Bound Community Services
- **Jean Chappell,** Parents on the Move

Moderator: **Bill Batson**

*These speakers will begin the forum, and then the floor will be open to all—  
**please come speak out on the issues!***

155 Mercer Street NYC between Houston & Prince

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## HOMELESSNESS: CONDITIONS, CAUSES, CURES

**Moderator, Bill Batson** Welcome to the Dia Art Foundation's open forum, "Homelessness: Conditions, Causes, Cures." My name is Bill Batson. I have lived in New York City proper for about five years now, and during that time I have been involved in the issue of housing on many different levels. This panel brings together people from the housing movement who are currently dealing with homelessness on many levels: legal advocates; people involved in creative and expressive efforts to describe this condition; the homeless people working to improve their condition; and people who are part of larger advocacy groups that bring other New Yorkers into the housing movement as volunteers. The subtitle of the forum, "Conditions, Causes, Cures," covers the whole spectrum. The first two subjects, conditions and causes, are vast, but I think that as we discuss this issue some of the conditions that have created the housing shortage in New York City today will come across. But for me, the most important word in the title is "cures."

The first speaker is Annie Troy, executive director of Emmaus House. Annie has brought two participants from that program, Kelly Robinson and José Gonzalez. Emmaus House is a residential program in Harlem that is unique in its creativeness and highly effective in its militancy.

**Annie Troy** Emmaus House is not shelterlike; we see ourselves as a community of the homeless working and pulling together. We try to make our place liveable. We have our own rooms or sometimes we choose to share rooms. We have phones and other things you don't get in shelters. People with a lot of talent and intelligence are being lost out in the streets. At Emmaus we provide services for those still out on the streets. When you come to live at Emmaus House, you go from standing on the soup line to serving the diners. You are running an emergency shelter for others. You are doing outreach counseling, homeless speaking to homeless.

**Kelly Robinson** Emmaus has projects on various ends of the house. All the jobs in the house are actual jobs, nine-to-fives, and the training you get is hard. We have a woodshop program. It has contracts for tenant construction and for private hospitals. The woodshop provides training from six months



Bob McKeown, *The Formation of the Wayne County Homeless Union, 1988*. First convention and election of officers and steering committee (standing) of the Wayne County Homeless Union at the Cass Methodist Church in Detroit.



Bob McKeown, *The Formation of the Wayne County Homeless Union, 1988*. Homeless family at homeless organization meeting.

to a year and job placement as apprentices. There is also a kitchen training program. You cook and clean up, make and serve the dinner, plan menus, order food. If you didn't have responsibility before, now you do. Then there's the singing group. Emmaus the Group sprang out of a little seed and now it's blossoming in North Carolina and in downtown and uptown Manhattan—everybody wants to know about this singing group.

In each area of our house, there is some sort of project. They say homeless people don't want to do anything with their lives, but that's ridiculous. To come to the house and see 55 people running up and down, answering the phones, running the social service work, running a soup kitchen, and working in the woodshop, that's amazing. There are a lot of different causes of homelessness: some people have addictive problems with drugs, others are burned out of their apartments, and it's kind of sad that a lot of politics have jumped into it. All you hear is, "What can we do, what can we do?" But they know the answers, it's just that they won't do what needs to be done. Housing in general, they just won't take care of housing in general.

**José Gonzalez** I'm 21 years old and I've been at Emmaus for a little over seven months. I work in the woodshop. Right now we are doing cabinetry for Mount Sinai Hospital. We are trying to get a program started to have people from the outside come into the shop and receive training. Hopefully these will be homeless or poorly housed people. One of the main things I have gotten from Emmaus House is a sense of responsibility. I've watched myself grow a lot over the past couple of months, to be able to care for myself and at the same time care for others. There are 55 other people, 55 other attitudes. I try to help whenever I feel someone might need it. I always keep in mind that the people are hurting. Me, myself, I am hurting; I am no different than they are. I've learned to talk with people as people, as equals. I feel good because I know that from that, from having a place to live, that if I stick to it, I can run. I feel that we need more places like Emmaus, and not just in New York, but throughout the world.

**Bill Betson** The next speaker is Cenén, an African artist and poet.

**Cenén** This flyer says "Open Forum: Homelessness: Conditions, Causes and Cures." And my first reaction in terms of "Conditions" is "Arrrrrggh!" It really is very hard to be a human being in this world and feel comfortable about not having and constantly looking for ways of getting and always having the door slammed in your face. Last night I was on the subway and a man came in, an African-American man, with two children. It was beyond 11 o'clock at night. The little one was about two-and-a-half years old, and the larger child might have been seven. These two children sat with their

daddy while he played with them. After a while he fell asleep, and the bigger one started saying, "Daddy!" We on the train were watching this process and becoming worried because the child was not able to wake the father. "Has he a medical problem?" "What can we do?" And so I began to realize the tension of living is not just mine, in terms of how am I going to pay the rent, can I meet the telephone bill, will the lights be turned off? While this is going on in my mind, this little child is trying to take care of her father on a train in New York, with all the wealth New York represents.

I go over and I try to be calm and ask the child if I can help her wake him up. But I can't get him up, and another passenger calls a policeman from the next car. The children get hysterical. They start to scream and yell. So what do you do? When you talk about "conditions," what are the conditions? The conditions of seeing . . .

There was a man on 85th Street between Central Park and Columbus Avenue. He was standing between two building entrances and he had something in each hand and he was busily eating. I could not stop looking at him, and he looked at me and smiled. He gave me a big broad, beautiful, human smile and he tipped his head. He couldn't tip his hat because his hands were full of the food he had found in the garbage, you know? And I smiled back. But what do we do? What does he do? How do we deal with the conditions that are oppressing us so much? And then the causes. What are the causes? This particular piece of earth is controlled by a set of individuals who represent only 2 percent of the population of this country, and they have decided that New York is going to become a fortress for the wealthy. Not only the wealthy who live in Manhattan but also from everywhere in the world where people are saying, "I am not going to allow you to repress me any longer."

**Bill Batson** You spoke about conditions and causes. Can I ask you specifically about your work and how you share it with people?

**Condon** This is part of how I share it with people. I need to scream not only because I feel like screaming but because I think all of us have a scream inside. We are uptight and nervous and concerned, and we don't know what to do. If that's the condition we are in even though we have a roof over our heads, what is it like to be a person in the street?

If you know that even when you are at home, locked in your house with three locks on the door and all of the windows gated, and you've got a phone partly in case somebody tries to break in, and you're still uptight, what is it like to be in the middle of Central Park on a winter's night in a cardboard box? What I paint and write about is about what I am saying to you. All of us are human. We have needs and we can meet those needs, not



Seth Tobocman, *The War Against the Poor* . . . spatial deconcentration, 14 panels, ink on board.

only for ourselves but for each other. There is power in each individual, but we have been socialized, and very cunningly so, to believe that we have no power. Do you really want to live your life like that? Believing that somebody else determines whether a person like me has a right to a home? Are you going to let somebody else determine whether they have a right to take away my apartment because I can't afford to pay \$1,000 per month? The wealthy don't pay the taxes, you do. So how come they can send their children to the best schools, get the best education, the best medical care, and the best housing? And what do you have? And we keep on letting that happen all the time. I think we need to say, "I have been used." And it's not only because you are an African or a Latin American whose lands are under siege, or somebody from the Mideast whose land has been taken. It is happening to all of us, we've got to speak to it.

**Bill Batson** What you've said brings the room together. When people talk about homelessness, they talk about what can we do for *them*, and your



Robbie Hart, still from *Seeing Windows*, color videotape, 1987.

comments make me think what can we do for *us*, everyone in the room.

Our next speaker is Doug Lasdon, Executive Director of the Legal Action Center for the Homeless.

**Doug Lasdon** As I was listening to Cenén I realized that what I was going to say will seem very mundane and unemotional—which I guess is appropriate for a lawyer. But I did want to talk about the causes of homelessness and try to destroy some of the surrounding myths. What I *don't* think is a cause of homelessness is “deinstitutionalization,” the release of psychiatrically disabled people to the streets, about 60,000 of them over the last 20 years. There was supposed to be community housing for them, but it wasn't there. I also do not think that lack of low-income housing or lack of employment are the causes. The causes have to do with more fundamental and more problematic flaws in our political system, namely that poor people—and homeless people in particular—are shut out of participation in the political process and representation in our legislatures. People get elected either because they appeal to people with large amounts of money or once in a while they appeal to a large and unified voting bloc. Homeless people do not go to thousand-dollar-a-plate dinners, and they do not contribute \$10,000 or \$100,000 to candidates, and they are not organized into a large voting bloc, so essentially they are shut out. Probably the best example of this is that in

the face of the worst homelessness since the Great Depression, the federal government has cut \$25 billion from the annual housing budget. Twenty-five billion dollars a year can buy a lot of housing, and if the government were truly responding to human needs, these cuts wouldn't make sense to a first grader, but maybe some of the first graders are smarter than some of our elected representatives. Homeless people do not create problems for the establishment or for those with the connections to the politicians; the homeless are left out of any share of the pie. It is interesting to note that as the federal government cuts \$25 billion out of the annual housing budget, President Bush comes out for the homeless, for HR 3789, the Stuart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, full funding of which would be \$500 million. We'll cut out \$25 billion, but we will pay \$500 million and take care of the housing problem.'

A quick comment on the beggar problem. Mayor Koch's response is typical of how he deals with social problems: he focuses debate on the character of the individuals. He said the problem is that these people are boozers, turning the debate to "Should I give money to a homeless person who may use it for booze?" rather than focusing on "What are the alternatives to begging?" Not one media source has reported that if you are homeless and living in the shelter system for single adults, your welfare grant is \$45 per month.

So as advocates we never debate the character of the individuals. We ask what the alternatives are. In the Billie Boggs affair, the debate was about whether Billie Boggs was crazy, not about whether there are beds for people who are psychiatrically disabled.

**Bill Batson** People have been very eloquent. At Emmaus House they are creating communities, and within them, art and song take place, carpentry and other skills are learned. Cenén engages everyone in her environment in this crisis. Doug advocates, educates, and litigates.

The next panelist is Larry Locke, who is with Homeward Bound Community Services. Because of my own housing crisis I learned you could go to a housing court and fight for your rights, and I was fortunate enough to be with a group of tenants who won. My first experience with this nightmare of a housing system in New York was a positive one because of advocates like Doug. So I was an activist for a while and also an artist, and I became art coordinator for the New York Housing Authority. The second I started the job something across the street also started that influenced me more than anything at the Housing Authority. Every morning on the way from the subway I'd go through City Hall Park and see people sleeping there—a regular sight for many New Yorkers. But there was something unusual about the people sleeping in City Hall Park: they had a voter registration table set up.

I had just moved, so I had to register to vote. Instead of asking me for change, they asked me for access to my xerox machine. So I decided to go down and lay some of my knowledge as an organizer on them, but they politely let me know they could take care of their own business; all they needed was the xeroxing. That was my first experience with Homeward Bound Community Services. They still ask me for xeroxing, but now occasionally they also let me attend their meetings.

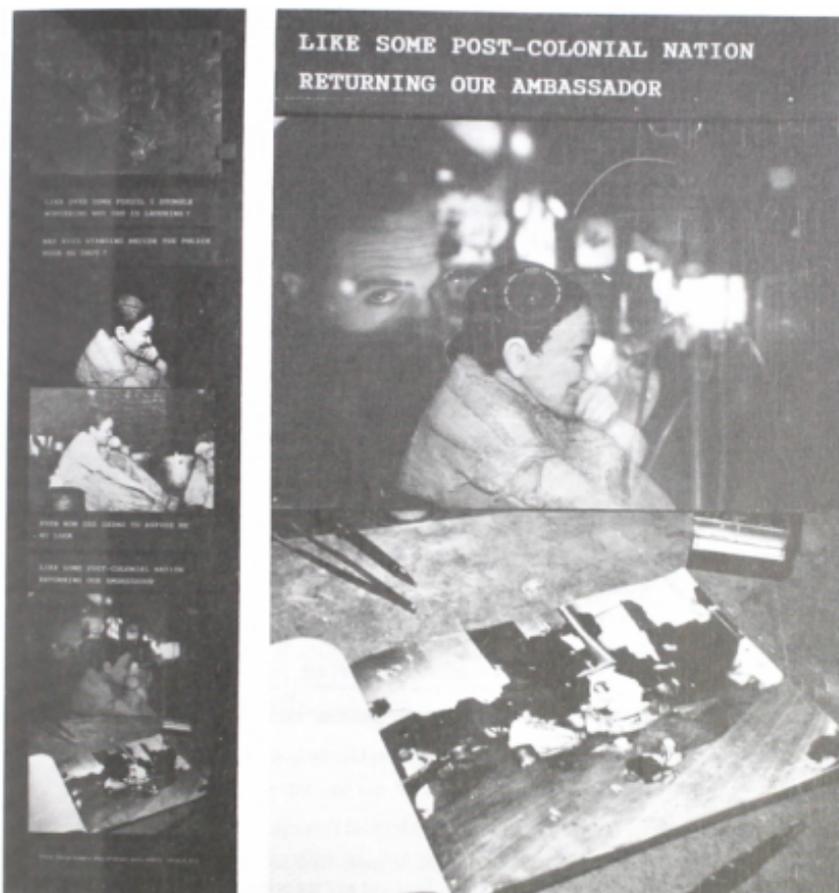
**Larry Locke** My name is Larry Locke, and I am with Homeward Bound Community Services, a group of homeless persons. We pride ourselves on the fact that we were responsible for organizing ourselves. And we did so in City Hall Park under adverse conditions, sleeping in the park, eating in the park. When we started out last year in June it was cold, as you may remember. We had to start a fire to keep warm at nights. Now some of us are working to educate people like yourself. Instead of you educating me, I have the opportunity now to educate you to some extent.

**Bill Batson** Can you talk about a day in the park, and then a little bit on the future of Homeward Bound?

**Larry Locke** One of our best days in the park was when Jesse Jackson came. We wrote to him and he came out. He recognized the fact that we were putting in an effort to register people to vote, people like yourselves who work in the City Hall area and homeless people as well, even though they didn't have addresses, addresses that they needed in order to register to vote. When Jesse picked up our voter registration sign and held it in the air, it gave me a wonderful feeling. Over 2,000 people were registered to vote in City Hall Park. We went around in Jesse's motorcade, registering people to vote in colleges all over the city. Isn't that something wonderful, homeless people registering other people and homeless people to vote! Right now, our pet project is working with Borough President David Dinkins to develop housing for homeless people and families. This is something that we feel very good about. We are also helping sponsor the project at Dia.

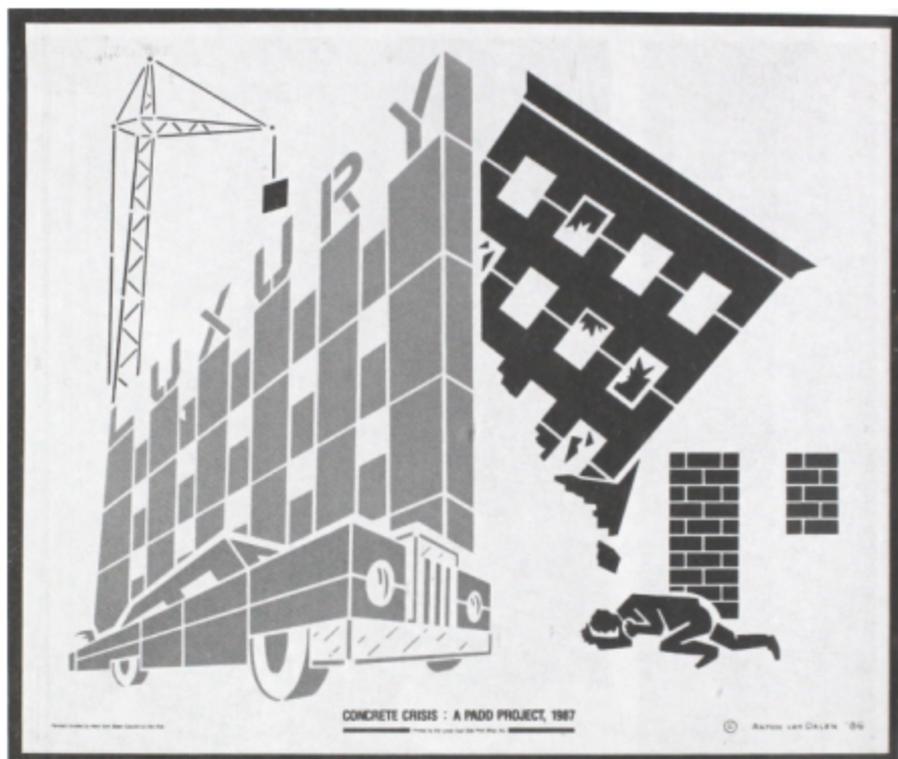
**Bill Batson** Speaking of the exhibition, if you were at the most depressed and difficult moment in your life and somebody came up to you with a camera, you might slug them. That's a daily occurrence for homeless people, especially when they are cold and shivering. And there was a protocol to getting photographs of Homeward Bound. But a photographer, Alcina Horstman, stayed with Homeward Bound for a while, and her pictures of the group are on display at the exhibition at 77 Wooster Street. So check it out.

As an organizer, I learned more from Homeward Bound than I did from



Greg Shulette, *The Resistance of Things Past: Looking at Jacob Rus' "How the Other Half Lives"* (detail), photographs and mixed media, 1989.

any of the organizations that I worked for and any of the organizers I've ever met. They have an intimate knowledge of city government that is unparalleled because they lived with city government. They would lobby every single day; the most obscure deputy commissioners were besieged by Homeward Bound activists. They have brought many people into the political process, into lobbying, and into the budget process. What Homeward Bound did was just extraordinary, and I would like to see people support their activities. Now, since I learned not only information from Larry, but protocol in dealing with a homeless group, I knew how to deal with Parents on the Move. Jean Chappell is here from that organization.



Anson van Dalen, *Luxury City*, silkscreen, 1986. Printed by the Lower East Side Print Shop.

**Jean Chappell** I happen to be the president of Parents on the Move. Our organization was formed over five years ago, by residents of the Brooklyn Arins Hotel, with some outside help. Tenants got together and demanded changes. The group is made up of community folks and hotel residents. We do voter registration drives in the hotel every six months. We do it every six months because once a person has been in the hotel for 30 days, they are deemed a permanent resident. We emphasize that you have to vote because that is the only way to make the politicians answer to us. On January 9 the residents stood up to Mayor Koch, to the commissioner of the Human Resources Administration, to the commissioner of Housing Preservation and Development [HPD], and the police commissioner. We took them to court and got a temporary injunction against their forcing residents living there less than a year to move out, into "transitional units." A transitional unit is something like a regular apartment, with a bedroom and living room; some have kitchens, some have shared bathrooms. In some, you eat in a communal dining room. Some contain more than one family. They have more rules and regulations than Carter's has liver pills. If you are a family and you happen

to get put into one geared only toward a mother and her children, then your husband goes to a singles shelter. In our group we try to keep families together. We educate. We agitate. As I said, we took the city to court over forcing people into these temporary units, and we are still awaiting the final decision. What we did on January 9 was we stopped the crisis-intervention workers from coming in and doing their paperwork and shifting us all over the five boroughs because the mayor had said that the city had made a lot of vacant apartments habitable. We said that every one of the nearly 268 families in the hotel was entitled to a permanent, decent, affordable place to live, not some going into permanent housing and some into transitional units. The tenants knew that they had a choice; they could either move where the city wanted, or they could fight for their rights. The majority of them did move into permanent places; as of today there are 86 families left in the hotel. Out of the ones who moved out, only six chose to go to transitional units.

I would like to read you something written by one of the members of Parents on the Move. It's called "Stereotype" because this is the idea that people have of homeless folks.

*Homeless is helpless.*

*No jobs, on welfare, no husband, just kids.*

*Ignorant and illiterate.*

*Lazy and loud.*

*Will they be surprised when it's them.*

*But this is who we are: we are families, we are working mothers, and working fathers.*

I would like to leave you with something that another colleague said, because I think that when you are homeless you believe this. "In the name of God, I decree that which I desire through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—health, wealth—are mine. The doors of opportunity are open for me now. No one can retard my progress, for I am a child of God."

**Bill Batson** Jean just spoke about stereotypes and homelessness. Growing up in Teaneck, New Jersey, I found that unemployment, drug abuse, mental illness, and fraud are not peculiar to the poor. I know that everyone in this room needs to get involved in fighting for housing, health care, and education.

Before we start the participation part of our program, I have two questions. Are most of the attendees artists or involved in the visual or literary arts? It's about 50 percent. Have most of you done any kind of work about housing, dealt with it in your studio or in a public forum like this? No one. Thank you. Now we'd like people to ask questions or just to speak.

**Faith Steinberg** I was at a pro-choice march in Washington, D.C., where there were 300,000 people from all over the country, from all walks of life. I would love to see the homeless and homeless activists march in Washington.

**Annie Troy** We've been there, but we didn't get the press. We went to jail, handcuffed for seven hours.

**Faith Steinberg** At the pro-choice march there were children, elderly, and others not directly involved in the movement. I would like to see people from all walks of life marching about homelessness and housing.

**Doug Lasdon** There are a lot of people working very hard on a march for next October<sup>2</sup>; but let me ask, how did you get to Washington?

**Faith Steinberg** By bus, which was chartered by NOW [National Organization for Women].

**Doug Lasdon** Exactly. The problem is that homeless people don't even have a dollar to get on the subway, so how are they going to get to Washington?

**Faith Steinberg** That's why I am saying that we need people from all walks of life involved in this project.

**Doug Lasdon** The abortion issue touches the lives of the middle class.

**Faith Steinberg** Well, even if the middle class doesn't know it yet, so does the homeless issue. It's taking them a long time to find it out.

**Larry Locke** Faith, there are people organizing around housing. Housing Now is a group of homeless people, as well as advocates, throughout the nation who are coming together to do just that, to go to Washington in October. We are going there to demand housing. We are also trying to organize a homeless conference to be held this July in Chicago.

**Wes Power** I walk my dog in Roosevelt Park twice a day. Some very creative people live there. We have people who, like all artists, are outside of—or at least on the edge of—our organized system. These guys are poets of survival. They watch the sun come up. They know when it rains. They have a sense of each day and more gut feeling of that reality than anybody who ever walks on Madison Avenue or sits in an office.

**Richard Eldlin** I work with an organization called We Can. We are running



Molly, a homeless woman from the Lower East Side, and her dogs; from Arlyn Kaplan's videotape *Not Just a Number*, 1989.

a redemption center on West 43rd Street which takes an unlimited number of bottles and cans covered by the state's deposit law. Since October 1987, we have been providing an opportunity for poor and homeless people who rely on collecting bottles and cans as a source of income. Hundreds of people a day use our facility during spring and summer, people who bring in hundreds and hundreds of cans. After a protracted struggle we are going to be moving to a larger facility on West 52nd Street provided by HPL. Some people come from Queens and Brooklyn, miles away. We are actively soliciting funding from foundations, and we've raised about a quarter of a million dollars in funds. We're planning to open other centers, in Brooklyn, on the Lower East Side, one uptown in Harlem, and possibly one on the Bowery. We are also running a collection network, where we pick up containers from law firms, corporations, and other large businesses. We then return the containers to the distributors for six-and-a-half cents each. You can participate in our collection network.

Just a brief comment on the politics of this issue. The distributors, Coca-Cola, Seven-Up, Budweiser—particularly Budweiser—were very reluctant to pick up the empties, claiming that it was a burden. They were willing to charge six-and-a-half cents per container, but they were not willing to



Skylar Switzer-Kohler, artist/instructor, and the students of Class 6-2, P.S. 161, Brooklyn, *Making Room for the Homeless*, 1989, fabric mural, sponsored by Artists/Teachers Concerned and Studio in a School Association, and assisted by Ben Rizzo, teacher, and Arthur Foresta, principal, P.S. 161, and Toba Zigmund, Cultural Enrichment Director of New York City Public Schools.

abide by the provision of law which required them to pick up the empties. For many small businesses it does impose a real burden when an individual walks in with a few hundred containers. By law they are supposed to take up to 240 containers, but for a small business it can pose a storage problem. So We Can is proposing to alleviate the problems of small business, posing quite a political problem for Budweiser and other distributors. We have received a great deal of support from prominent people in the city, in particular Borough President David Dinkins and City Councilmember Ruth Messinger. We hope that We Can is just a step in the evolution of people who are homeless. The employees at the lot are all homeless, including the manager.<sup>1</sup>

**Larry Locke** Do any of the homeless people who work in and run the operation take part in the planning?

**Richard Elden** They do. The business has a few components. One is the day-to-day redemption center. The individuals who work at the site are involved in many aspects of how it is run. They are not involved in the fundraising. They are not involved, at this point, in political negotiations either. We have worked with Doug Lasdon's group and are interested in establishing relationships with other advocacy groups. We see our role as providing not only a source of income but also an array of services to people

who use the center. We are developing a core of graduate students, Ph.D. students, who are familiar with the range of social services in the city. We'd be very happy to work with your group, Larry, as well, to have somebody on site there who is familiar with the situation, the needs of people who use the facility, and possibly the services available.

**Cenón** I think it is really important that the meaning of homelessness sink in, not just in terms of intellectual and emotional understanding, but also historically. My father—I have a painting of him in the exhibition—was homeless. He was homeless in Puerto Rico. If he were alive today, he would be 81 years old. He was born a little after the U.S. invaded Puerto Rico. They sent the marines to that very small island which had just become independent after all those years of control and destruction by Spain. And then my father was born. He was a child of a large household. His mother was of African descent, his father of Arab descent. His mother died when he was around seven, leaving a large number of children. Abandoned by their father, the older ones looked for food in garbage cans, and the babies stayed home. The younger ones all died of hunger. How different is it today?

**Nelson Prime** I want to get back to what Bill said about some of the cures. That was very important. Maybe it had to come out what it's like to be homeless. I saw it all my life. Now I am mad. I feel we don't have a specific agenda or anything like that. We have not set our priorities. There are so many problems that are partial. How do we get to the basic problem? I was thinking about something like a three-point agenda. One, on the advocacy level for people who have been around to educate others; two, forming the communities that need to be formed, raising people's self-esteem so they can get back into a decent life; and three, creating housing for everyone, housing created and implemented by people involved in that particular community. If people are actively involved in sharing their ideals and goals, by the time they live together it's going to work out just fine. Identifying an agenda by the time we leave here is important to me. And I'm still homeless.

**Annie Troy** You know, one thing about homelessness, you are being denied, denied, and then you are also being controlled, controlled. If you are homeless and you have a baby, you can't take your baby out of the hospital with you. If you've been homeless and you've gotten your life back together and you get your kids back out of foster care, the social service people may just take your kids away again. We just had a former resident of Emmaus who got a job and got his life together and one night the social service called up and asked where his kids were. He said, "All right here, except for my teenage daughter, and she's out with friends." "Where is she?" "Well, I don't

know, it's Saturday night." And foster care came and took his kids away that night. It's control, control, control. If you are homeless and you've got AIDS, you probably can't get diagnosed for AIDS because then the state would be responsible for you.

**Rich Jackman** I'm with the Caucus to House PWAs, people with AIDS. Nelson was talking about the big issues, the big problems, and I was going to ask a very specific question. But first, I have come to a conclusion: the problem of homeless people with AIDS is not AIDS, it's homelessness. AIDS is only on top of everything else. There are people who would like us to think that drug users who are homeless are homeless because they are drug users. The poor people who are homeless are homeless because they are poor. Alcoholics are homeless because they are alcoholics. Black people and Hispanics are homeless because they are black or Hispanic. But they are homeless because we have a homelessness problem. These are the people who get cut off first.

Now I want to ask Annie to talk a little bit about your program of housing people with AIDS, a scattered-site program.

**Annie Troy** The city has involved about six groups in what is called a scattered-site apartment program. You can't put them all in one community because that would be touchy, so you put people here and there. We tried to get city housing for PWAs, unsuccessfully, so now we have to find apartments in the private market with the very small amount of funds allocated. We're still fighting because the budgets have been cut and cut again. We are hoping that soon we can have the 20 apartments available for homeless people who have been diagnosed with AIDS. We also tried to include people with ARC and with HIV+, but we'll have to see what we get.

**Will Daniel** I'm with Homeless Voter '89. What we want to do is put homed people together with homeless people. We'd like to get Larry Locke's help, and his group's materials and registration forms, and get them out all over the city to help register homeless people to vote. Homeward Bound has probably registered at least 5,000 homeless people so far, but there are a good 20,000 to 40,000 more eligible homeless people in the city,<sup>4</sup> and we have to remember that Ed Koch won his first primary by less than 12,000 votes. See me if you want to do registration. It is easy—it takes three minutes to register a person.

**Lou Blackman** I'm from "Listeners' Action on Homelessness and Housing" on WBAL.<sup>5</sup> I'm talking about the middle class; I notice that the city is now moving in on them. People who live in Mitchell-Lama Houses, people over

60 who have been living there for years and raised their families there. I want to know about the legality of the mayor's plan for moving them out to smaller apartments. I don't think there is anything in their original lease that says the city can move them out when their children leave. If they can do it there, they will start doing it in all subsidized housing; this sounds like a test case to me.

**Liza Bear** I keep hearing middle class, middle class. Please wake up. There is no middle class, only low income and super high income. But as far as the Mitchell-Lama Houses are concerned, one reason why so many people have proposed moving out senior citizens whose kids have grown is because they are living in large apartments—so they say. [Boos.] Hear me out. I said, "So they say." These bureaucrats feel that if there are just a husband and wife, and they have two or three bedrooms, then they can move into a smaller apartment to make way for supposedly homeless families. I said "supposedly," because you do have to have a job to get into Mitchell-Lama.

**Bill Batson** Stan Michels proposed a bill to prohibit the city from doing that. They've come out with the antiwarehousing bill too.<sup>6</sup>

**Tomica Ferguson** I'm president of Teens on the Move, located in Brooklyn. You said foster care came and took a man's kids because the oldest girl was out. Well, I was in that situation at one time, but they didn't take me or my sister. My mother went into the hospital with a heart attack a year and a half ago. They called the Bureau of Child Welfare, but when they came in I told them my sister and I weren't going anywhere because my mother organized me, my godmother, and my aunt. I told them that if we were going anywhere, we were going to stay with my family. I just wanted to let you know that what happened could have been prevented. He could have said that he knew where his daughter was. What is going on is that families are just getting blasted apart, and purposefully, in an institutionalized fashion. I was only 15 years old, and I stood up and told them "no."

**Bill Batson** Councilmember Abe Gerges is here. Councilman, you probably know everybody on the panel. We haven't had a government perspective today, mostly activists and artists, organizers, and homeless people. There has been a lot of activity in the council lately, so maybe you can tell us about ways we can participate.

**Abe Gerges** I'm sorry I couldn't get here earlier; I had to speak elsewhere. Chairing the homeless committee in the council has certainly taught me about homelessness, because I have had the opportunity to have homeless

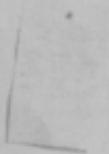
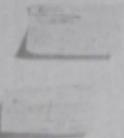
people and advocates bring me around and show me conditions firsthand. Let me talk a little about a bill I've introduced, and what I think has to be done. When I introduced legislation to the council to close the hotels the mayor said "no" at first, but we passed legislation to close them over five years, and I give the mayor credit in that he accelerated that to two years.<sup>7</sup> I also introduced a bill to close every large shelter and make SRO-type buildings—permanent housing in buildings with a maximum of a hundred rooms. I think that before September we are going to pass a bill that will do that.<sup>8</sup>

But the solution for housing the homeless is very simple: it's housing. Anything else is a lot of baloney. The bill I have sponsored is a controversial one. It has certain portions in it that I don't like, but sometimes you make a start and then you try to get everybody together to resolve those parts you don't like. We—not only myself but the advocates—got the public aware of the children. The children were invisible. They were in the hotels, out of sight. All of a sudden the press and TV heard us and started focusing on the kids in the hotels. They said, "Look at the kids, look at the money we are spending." It took two things: one, the visual of kids living in the squalid conditions in the hotels; and two, economics—the \$1,990 per month the city was spending for a rat-infested room. We said, "The taxpayers are being ripped off! Nineteen-hundred dollars a month for a flea-bitten hotel room?" It turned out that a couple of landlords got over \$70 million. I think that one case provided the momentum to close the hotels—that, plus the threat of the federal government taking away some of the city's funding. Over the next couple of years we are going to get those hotels closed; hopefully, we will have permanent housing.

With the single population, what has happened now is that everybody is saying, "It's Calcutta out there," and they are annoyed. If you watch what is happening with that annoyance you see that they are trying to get the problem out of sight, to make it invisible like the kids in the hotels. Suddenly they are saying, "We don't want homeless in the parks—it doesn't look good. There are homeless in the subways—that doesn't look good, either. We must get the homeless out of the subways." But homeless people are as smart as anybody else, and if you look where homeless people congregate, they go where it is safest. Where is it safe? It's safe on Madison Avenue. It's safe in subways and well-lit areas, or where there might be a police officer. So homeless people, not wanting to go into unsafe shelters, will look for a safe haven. Now you are seeing single homeless people in the so-called good areas of our city. What is the response to that?

Lech Kowalski, still from *Rock Soup*, film, 1989. Bertha Lewis, tenant leader, on the phone with attorneys attempting to stay eviction from Bronx homestead. ►

BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY



When I first became chairman of the homeless committee, I thought to myself, “These people must be crazy not to accept free room and food.” It wasn’t until advocates like the Coalition for the Homeless and many others took me around, and I started to go to the subways and talk to some of the people—like to Crystal, who spent her pregnancy in the ladies room in the subway—that I realized it was the brighter, smarter people who weren’t going into the shelters, because of the violence there.

Also, when *do* people use the shelters? The shelters reach their maximum numbers in March and April, and the city has been scratching its head and wondering why instead of using common sense. I figured it out quite easily. What do you do when you are cold? You put on one coat and then another coat. Maybe you go get a pizza, but you bundle yourself up. But what do you do when it rains? You call up and have the pizza delivered. And the highest numbers of people are in the shelters in the rainy season, not the cold season of December or January.

So I want to develop a strategy. We can’t permit homeless people to be thrown out of the subways, out of the parks, out of the safe areas, without another safe place for them to go, such as an SRO [single-room occupancy] room that is permanent and has social services. I think there has to be a strong move by advocates, in particular.

**Doug Leadon** I like what you said, but if I am not mistaken it is your bill that makes it legal for the police to pick up homeless people in the subways and parks and bring them to these shelters—which will happen the day the bill is passed—in exchange for promises for SRO rooms five years down the road. You may see that as a compromise, but I look at it more as giving away the shop for a tenuous promise.

**Abe Gerges** The first draft of the bill required the SROs to be in place prior to any pick-up. I fought very hard for that because that is what makes sense. It’s my hope that when hearings start on the bill, it will be changed to temper that exact point. I feel very uncomfortable with that portion of it.

**Doug Leadon** But you are sponsoring it.

**Liza Bear** I don’t know why this person is speaking here and is being allowed to promote this bill. I videotaped a hearing a couple of months ago, and there was a huge outcry against that bill by homeless people, advocates, and lawyers.

**Bill Betson** Everybody should be able to speak.

**Liza Bear** Yeah, let's invite Donald Trump to present the developer's side. I thought that the whole point of this is that people in this community, the artists' community, who are concerned about housing and homelessness would be brought together with Homeward Bound, Parents on the Move, with Larry McGill of the Homeless Clients Advisory Committee, who I don't see here, with the United Homeless Organization, which is also not here . . . It's okay that they're not all here, but there are people here who want to be actively involved. We know all this stuff; we want to know how to act.

I've been involved in the housing movement for about three years. I volunteered for the Coalition for the Homeless and was treated like shit. Thankfully I got to meet homeless people who were sensitive and humane. Those are the people we need to work with. They need some help, and there is no one way to do it. You just have to meet with them, talk to them, and find out how you can get involved. But it cannot be done as a formal panel. We've got to mingle, we've got to get together. There has been no flow of energy. I suggest we start to get together and figure out what we are really going to do.

**Larry Locke** I appreciate what you said, Liza. However, in finding solutions to the vast problems of all of the people who need help, we have to work with everyone. I think everybody agrees that we need to talk *to* each other and not *at* each other. Everyone here needs to put forth an effort to try to find solutions to this problem. Everyone including the councilmember here, because we have to work with him and his legislature to get bills passed.

**Dan Willey** I just want to shed some light. Unfortunately, Larry McGill is speaking at another panel at Medgar Evers College, at a conference on homelessness and housing that is happening simultaneously with this. And Ray Richardson is now in a meeting with HCAC, the Homeless Clients Advisory Committee, where they are considering civil disobedience because of proposed legislation that would make it harder for people to get services in a shelter. I'd like to learn something about (a) what that new legislation is that's taking effect in the shelters and (b) what are some of the specific criticisms of the bill.

**Bill Batson** I think Larry Locke has had access to the council, which has been very important for his organization.

**Liza Bear** I thought that people were here because the community is concerned to see what these panelists need. What do Parents on the Move

need? What does Homeward Bound need? What are the skills here? What can we do?

**Nelson Prime** On Sunday, April 29, the exhibition is closing. If we could come together on that day at 77 Wooster Street—Homeward Bound, Parents on the Move, HCAC—maybe we can all get together to see what we need. While we are here we are getting an idea of what we need to do.

**Bill Kammann** I work with homeless families on Staten Island. It is interesting to me to see a panel and forum discussing the problems of homelessness, conditions and causes, and have it come out with what Councilmember Gerges said, that the solution to homelessness is to have a home for everybody. Obviously, if we define homelessness as not having a home, then the solution is to have a home. But when you work with families that are homeless, you see that people may have other problems. Some of those problems may include substance abuse or drug involvement, often to the detriment of the children. To carry on the whole conversation this evening as though these other problems didn't exist is to gloss over possibilities for other solutions in addition to finding a house for everybody.

By the way, we've had 15 families housed without jobs in Mitchell-Lama apartments, so they are opening that venue up now. One more thing—this is addressed to Doug Lasdon. We define drug addiction and alcoholism as illnesses, but if I had another illness and I had to wait months and months to get a hospital bed in order to get treatment, there would be an outcry. This is an area for the legal community to act, the way you got people housing, even if only in hotels. You got people mandated for housing; let's get people mandated for drug treatment programs on demand. For people to say that mental illness is not a problem in the homeless population, that it was not a cause of homelessness—

**Doug Lasdon** I said that if homeless people had more representation in the legislatures, they would assign money for the community beds, and therefore the cause of homelessness isn't deinstitutionalization, it's the lack of support from the legislature.

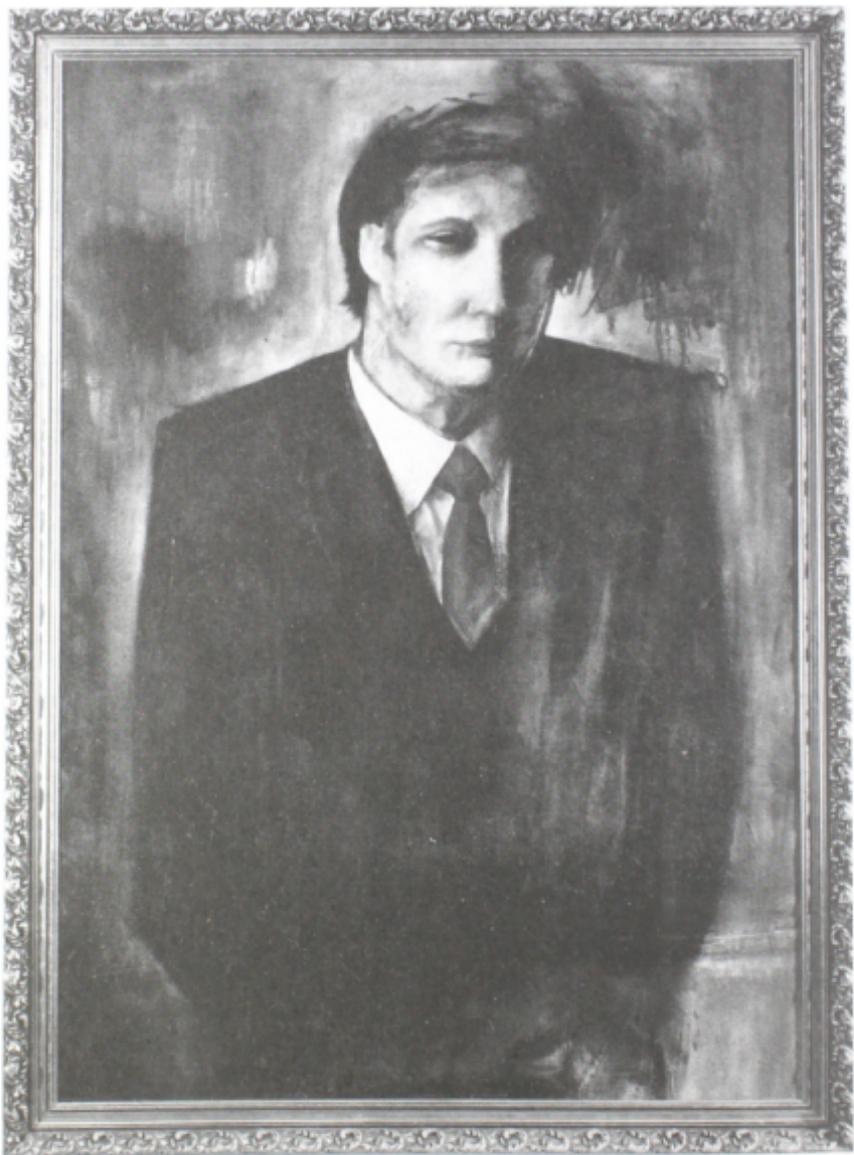
**Larry Locke** There is a committee of homeless that will be working with Councilmember Gerges and the Select Committee on Homelessness to address all the issues surrounding homelessness, in and out of the shelters and the subway. The issues you want to address will be addressed. If I am a part of it, it will not be just a showpiece.



Laura Scheerer and Andrew Millstein, still from *Addressless*, color videotape produced at the Center for Visual Anthropology, 1986.

**Audience** I am going to address this to Councilmember Gerges: I am not too familiar with this legislation and I understand the necessity of compromise in politics but there is one thing that you cannot compromise on and that is the right to be human beings, to live and not to be harassed. We are not going to let anyone drag people off the streets unwillingly to places they do not want to be. That is cruel and inhumane and wrong and we will not do it. Recently I took a bus up to 116th Street and walked over to Frederick Douglass Boulevard. I remember when I was a kid that all those houses along there were occupied—blacks and whites sharing the street. Those houses are still fairly sound structurally; with some rehabilitation, people could live there. Along the Major Deegan Expressway, you go past miles of empty, gutted buildings. There is no reason why the city cannot take a lot of people who have menial jobs or aren't working and train them to rebuild those houses. We are being taxed to put people in the Holland Hotel; there is no reason why the city cannot find some way of starting a training program.

**José Gonzalez** I agree. In Harlem there are young people willing to work and rebuild some of these buildings. If the Empire State Building were to fall



Andrew CASTRUCI (member of Bullet Space), *Donald Trump*, oil on canvas, 1986.

down today, New York City would rebuild it right away. But to rebuild a building that's been burned out, we can't do that. I am homeless. I'm 21 years old, and I want an apartment. I want to have my own room, my own bathroom, my own living room. And I do have carpentry skills: I can go into a building and make my own little apartment. There was a time when people were taking over buildings; then the mayor said we can't have you taking over the buildings because the city owns them now. Then somebody from a foreign country comes in and throws some money in somebody's locker and they own three blocks of buildings. What do they do? They turn them into condos. Then the rent goes up in the neighborhood and they push the people out and bring their people in. That causes more homelessness. They have a monopoly. It is basically that. There is Boardwalk and there is Park Place. Then you have the little squares nobody wants, Baltic Avenue—you know what I am saying?

**Paul Skiff** It has been really refreshing to hear people at a panel on housing, and homeless talk about their successes in changing the quality of homeless people's lives. On that level the discussion has been very successful.

**Bill Batson** On Sunday the show is closing. A lot of people have participated in this exhibition, and they want to end it in a way that is meaningful. Martha would like to invite everyone in this room to come by on Sunday afternoon at 77 Wooster Street. Thank you very much.

#### Notes

1. The Stuart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act is being reauthorized for Fiscal Year 1991. The budget will increase to roughly \$800 billion.
2. The National March for Housing Now took place on October 7, 1989 at the U.S. Capitol.
3. Since the time of this panel, most major-brand beverage distributors have taken more responsibility in picking up their empties from We Can, so that there is almost 100 percent reliability. Budweiser has taken over distribution of their product in New York City in response to redemption problems. There are problems occurring, however, with smaller brand distributors who are unwilling to cooperate with We Can.
4. According to Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing, there are presently (in 1990) 70,000 to 80,000 homeless and 150,000 at risk of becoming homeless in New York City.
5. This program is no longer scheduled on WBAL.
6. See note 6 in "Housing: Gentrification, Dislocation, and Fighting Back."
7. The city has been out of the welfare hotel "business" since June 30, 1990. Federal funding for hotels will be eliminated by October 1, 1990.
8. A bill known as Intro 1A was passed in June 1990, and initiates plans to phase out Tier 1 or congregate shelters.

## **TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK, EAST VILLAGE, LOWER EAST SIDE, MANHATTAN, NEW YORK**

Urban parks, no matter how innocent their appearance as natural oases free from city strife, are as much a part of the city as skyscrapers and garbage dumps. Nineteenth-century reformers in industrializing countries recognized that parks might fulfill a number of critical social functions, providing a locale for demonstrations of civic pride and the calming, health-giving effects of fresh air and "breathing space" for the poor, housed in overcrowded squalor. The amenities they might also provide the "better classes" were not overlooked, either, and men such as Frederick Law Olmstead were put to work designing ambitious urban parks and boulevards, including Manhattan's Central Park and Brooklyn's Prospect Park and Eastern Parkway.

Most city parks were not designed on such grand scale, however, nor did they aspire to Olmstead's romantic and picturesque ideals. Especially in poor neighborhoods, parks were built either as a form of "slum clearance," like the park replacing Manhattan's noxious Five Points neighborhood (later written about and photographed by Jacob Riis) in Chinatown at the turn of the twentieth century, or as social "ventilators." As early as 1831, the City of New York had approved plans to construct Union, Tompkins, Madison, and Stuyvesant parks as parade grounds and relief valves.

In 1834, the city drained some ten acres of swampland in the "Dry Dock" neighborhood (the Lower East Side), which had been donated by John Jacob Astor, and named the park built on the site "Tompkins Square," after former state governor and U.S. vice president Daniel S. Tompkins. The surrounding neighborhood subsequently became the home of a succession of immigrant groups, including Irish, Germans, Eastern European Jews, Poles, Ukrainians, and, by mid-twentieth century, Puerto Ricans. The housing stock, even when first erected, was often shoddily built, airless, and cramped and was little improved even by the turn-of-the-century reforms in housing law. As an area inhabited by diverse, not-yet-Americanized working-class groups, this area was contested terrain, and its parks were far from exempt. Union Square, in an industrial district, became famous for its soap-box ora-



**Tompkins Square Park, view east, from the southwest corner of Avenue A and 7th Street, 1916.**

tions, and Tompkins Square, located in a primarily residential area, saw its share of class struggle, overt and covert, acute and protracted.

In 1849, the militia, called to quell a riot in Astor Square, to the east, killed 22 people; 100 others were arrested the next day. In the fall of 1873, a financial recession led to unemployment, and several marches were organized by the Committee of Safety to Union Square and Tompkins Square to protest the lack of jobs, food, and homes. The heavy police presence prompted an Irish worker to ask, "Is the square private, police, or public property? Has martial law been proclaimed?"

The marches continued, and in January 1874, 7,000 people gathered in Tompkins Square Park to hear a speech by the city's mayor. However, the mayor, having already declared the march illegal, sent in 1,600 police instead. The result was a police riot later described by labor organizer Samuel

Gompers as “an orgy of brutality.” The *New York Sun* reported, “The rapidly moving crowd did not look behind. They simply yelled and moved as fast as their legs would carry them. Captain Speight’s men were close at their heels, their horses galloping full speed on the sidewalks. Men tumbled over each other . . . into the gutter or clambered up high steps to get out of the way of the charges. The horsemen beat the air with their batons and many persons were laid low. . . . One policeman actually rode into a grocery and scattered the terrified inmates.”

The police commissioner blamed the riot on “anarchists, communists, vagabonds” and said “[in the] most glorious sight I ever saw, . . . the police broke and drove that crowd.” In the prosecutions that followed, workers unsuccessfully argued that they had a right to resist the illicit and unnecessary force exercised by the police. Later that year, when a committee of citizens organized by trade unionists, workers, and socialists arranged a protest meeting in the park, the *New York Evening Telegram* advised the police not to repeat their “clumsy knavery and trickery.” The head of the parks department reaffirmed the right of people to gather and speechify in public parks. In 1878 the park was redesigned with the explicit purpose of making it more easily controllable.

At the end of the century, spurred by the reform movement, the city built a “Temperance Fountain” and a children’s playground in the park, and the Christodora Settlement House was established nearby. Christodora was similar in intent to settlement houses established by middle-class reformers, such as Jane Addams’ Hull House in Chicago and Lillian Wald’s Henry Street Settlement elsewhere in the Lower East Side. The aim was to aid the poor and to ease the transition from immigrant status to Americanism, especially for the young, imbuing them with culture and ideas favored by the (Anglophile) Progressive Movement. Christodora also maintained a rustic camp in New Jersey for Lower East Side children. In 1928, Christodora built an imposing 16-story building at the park’s east edge, at Avenue B and East 9th Street.

In 1936, the park was reconstructed, like many others in the city, according to a plan by Robert Moses, in order to emphasize sports facilities. In 1965, a band shell was built. By this time, an indefinite region to the east of Greenwich Village, between Houston and 14th streets and extending to perhaps Avenue B on the east, was becoming known as the “East Village.” Many of the American-born children of the Eastern European immigrants had left the Lower East Side and had been replaced by an influx of Puerto Rican families. The area was suffering a long decline of disinvestment and abandonment, which often took the form of suspicious fires that allowed landlords to collect insurance. By the ’60s, the East Village was becoming a center for hippies and the counterculture. The park resonated with the music

of folk guitars and Latin bongos, while elderly Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, and Puerto Ricans parked themselves on the benches and mothers sunned their children. The Grateful Dead played the band shell, and on Second Avenue many famous bands played the Fillmore East, the East Coast offshoot of San Francisco's Fillmore theater. The East Village emptied for Woodstock weekend.

The Fifth Precinct, maintaining its reputation for brutality, attacked hippies sprawled on park grass in defiance of the "keep off" signs. Police behavior often mirrored that in the better-known counterculture magnet to the west, Washington Square Park. In 1967 and 1968, Lower East Side militancy was manifested by the occupation of Christodora House, by then disused and in city hands, by members of the Black Panthers and Young Lords (a former Puerto Rican youth gang), and other community and political groups.

A "sweat equity" movement, indifferently supported by the city, allowed people—mostly young working-class Latinos—to take over and rehabilitate buildings on the verge of abandonment or over the edge. By 1976, abandonments following the city's fiscal crisis peaked, and reinvestment began in the western end of the East Village. The city could not sell Christodora House, still too far to the east, for its asking price of \$65,000. The city withdrew support for sweat equity; some say it was too successful and in the way of gentrification. Nevertheless, squatters, including artists and anarchists, moved into abandoned buildings east of the park, often driving out drug trade. By 1980, gentrification and displacement had reached Avenue A, the western edge of the park. Art galleries began peppering the neighborhood, attracted by a burgeoning "scene" and low rents. In 1983, the city sold Christodora House to a private developer for \$1.3 million. Several months later the developer resold it for \$3 million.

In 1984, Union Square, above 14th Street, was closed for complete reconstruction tied to the erection at its southeast corner of the huge luxury development Zeckendorf Towers. Citing the park's drug industry, the city replaced narrow, winding paths with broad rectilinear roads newly accessible to patrol cars. A similar plan for Tompkins Square was rejected locally amidst the recognition that the city's park strategy formed part of a broader policy encouraging gentrification.

Citing drug activity, a curfew was enforced in the West Village's Washington Square Park, partly at the behest of New York University, which rings the park and which had begun an aggressive new housing campaign of its own. The university's first attempt to build dormitories in the East Village, where it holds instruction in several converted buildings, provoked a storm of local opposition. But the community was defeated, and postmodern towers rose on Third Avenue, at the East Village's western margin. Boutiques

and clothing chains catering to the suburban students appeared to the east, following the pattern in the West Village.

In 1987, with its renovation complete, Christodora House condominiums were offered for sale; the penthouse was listed at over \$1.2 million. By then some 20 buildings in the Lower East Side housed about a hundred squatters. In early summer of 1988, the community board, considering complaints by parkside residents of noise, litter, drugs, and growing numbers of homeless people, asked for police patrols. The police demurred and proposed invoking a law requiring all parks to close at 1 a.m. The community board refused but again requested added police presence on weekends. Soon after, the local captain announced enforcement of the 1 a.m. curfew. Enforcement was uneven, and homeless people were allowed to return to the park to sleep after being cleared out.

In midsummer, local people and bands demonstrated against the curfew. A clash with police ensued. A secret meeting at the district police headquarters with a small number of pro-curfew community board members became a justification for escalating force in the park. On August 5, several hundred police assembled, apparently misinformed that a demonstration, actually planned for the next night, was going to occur. "We can't afford to lose this one," the police captain told a local priest.

On Saturday, August 6, 1988, the second Tompkins Square police riot, 113 years after the first, took place. Local residents, homeless people, squatters, and activists opposing the curfew had assembled in the park, chanting "Die Yuppie Scum," "Gentrification Is Genocide," and "Gentrification Equals Class War." Before midnight, the police barricaded the entrances and moved in, driving the protesters onto Avenue A. Several hundred people gathered in the street, facing a line of mounted police. A few bottles were thrown, and the mounted police charged up the avenue, supported by hundreds on foot. Many of the police hid their badges to avoid being identified, suggesting the resulting riot was premeditated.

A witness said, "The police seemed bizarrely out of control. They'd taken a relatively small protest and fanned it out over the neighborhood, inflaming hundreds of people who'd never gone near the park to begin with. [There were] cavalry charges down East Village streets, a chopper circling overhead, people out for a Sunday paper running in terror down First Avenue." At dawn police dispersed. Some protesters went to the park's eastern margin and smashed the glass doors of Christodora House with a police barricade, transporting a potted tree across the street to the park.

Only nine people were arrested, but 70 were reported injured, and 121 complaints against the police were lodged with the Civilian Complaint Review Board. "The police have monopolized violence," reported Father Frank Morales. Charges of police brutality were substantiated by a four-hour



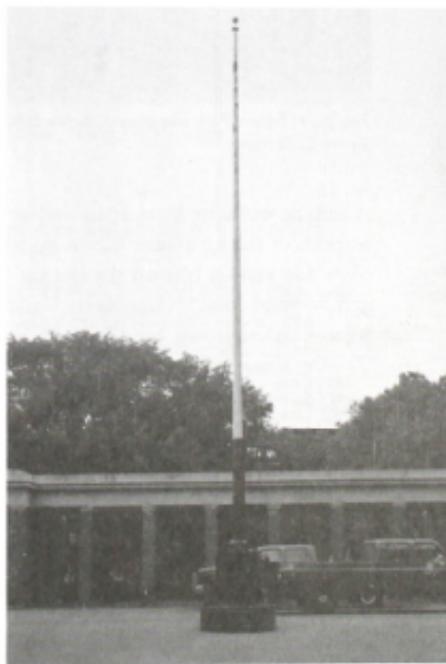
Slocum Memorial Fountain, 1906, commemorating the 1,031 persons of German-Lutheran descent who died in a fire aboard the steamboat *General Slocum* on June 15, 1904. The fountain was mutilated by vandals and restored in 1936. Artist: Bruno Louis Zimm.



Temperance Drinking Fountain, 1888, monument for Tompkins Square Park. Inscription: "Faith—Hope—Charity—Temperance." Life-size zinc statue of goddess Hebe now missing from top. Designer: Henry A. Cogswell.



Monument, 1918, commemorating Samuel Sullivan Cox, a lawyer who became the democratic minority leader in the House of Representatives during the Civil War. As a congressperson, he sponsored legislation that provided a raise and vacation pay for postal workers. Artist: Louise Lawson.



Ukrainian Memorial Flagpole, 1942, erected to mark the deaths of local Ukrainian soldiers during World War II. Inscription: "In memory of our departed comrades. American Legion. Lower East Side Post 868 A.I. Presented by the Ukrainian Production Unit of the New York Chapter. AD 1942 American Red Cross." Artist unknown.

Excerpted from Ken Saylor, *The Monuments of Tompkins Square Park Shape*, 1987.



Tompkins Square Park playground, Arbor Day, 1904. Museum of the City of New York, Byron Collection.

videotape made by local artist and activist Clayton Patterson. Sensational sections of the tape were shown on the news. The head of the Police Benevolent Association blamed the riot on "social parasites, druggies, skinheads" and "communists." "Anarchists," added Mayor Koch. The *New York Times'* belated coverage was headlined, "Class Struggle Erupts Along Avenue B."

Demonstrations continued in the park during the rest of the summer; activists chanted "Tompkins Square Everywhere." Park curfews were suspended citywide. The number of homeless in the park increased to over 100. The mayor, visiting the park, called it a "cesspool" of "anarchists" and homeless. In September, the police department admitted that some young officers may have been overzealous on August 6, and several top officers were reassigned. Clayton Patterson was jailed for contempt of court for refusing to hand over his original video footage, fearing tampering. After a much-publicized hunger strike, Patterson agreed to give police a copy of his tape and was released. When the copy was returned, 45 minutes of footage were missing.

Nevertheless, over the next few months, based largely on the evidence from his videotape and that of another local artist, Paul Garrin, several police officers—but none above sergeant—were charged with specific infractions. The civilian review board, however, was frustrated by a "blue wall of silence" as police refused to testify. In December, in record cold weather, two homeless people froze to death in the park, among eight such deaths in



Homeless man by fire, Tompkins Square Park demolition, November 14, 1989.

the city. In January 1989, the parks curfew was reimposed, but Tompkins Square was exempted.

By spring the city was quietly offering between five and fifteen thousand dollars to people injured in the riot. The police commissioner announced that disciplinary hearings rather than civil trials would be held for accused officers. The review board's report recommended charges against 17 officers and noted that many others guilty of misconduct could not be identified. The president of the police association dismissed the report, calling the board apologists for "the insipid conglomeration of human misfits and societal parasites who burned and pillaged property and assaulted police officers that night."

During that spring the city demolished a squatter building on East 8th Street. A Mad Houser hut erected on the site overnight for resident Tya Scott and her children was promptly bulldozed by the city. Another nearby squat with 25 to 30 people was severely damaged by arson. (In the previous two years, six other squats had been destroyed by fire or city demolition.) Hundreds of police in riot gear faced off against demonstrators trying to keep the city from taking down the building. Sixteen people were arrested. Demolition was stayed by court order, but workers had already begun dismantling the building front. A standoff ensued between police and demonstrators chanting "No housing, no peace." Two days later a wrecking crew retreated after being pelted from within by bottles of urine stored against

drug dealers. Demonstrators pulled down the scaffolding and entered the building as police stood by, but several days later—with the neighborhood in a “state of siege,” according to the *Times*—the police protected workers, who succeeded in pulling the building down. That night, the doors of Christodora were smashed again.

In July 1989, new parks department rules prohibiting tents or shelters went into effect; over 40 tents and other structures were by then housing as many as 300 people. “Officers with riot equipment sealed off the park while park crews knocked down the shanties with sledgehammers and axes and threw debris, along with food, clothes, and other belongings, into three garbage trucks,” the *Times* reported. Thirty-one people were arrested during the day-long demonstrations drawing 400 people. Demonstrations continued sporadically throughout the summer; some of the homeless people evicted from the park moved into squats in the neighborhood, while others rebuilt in the park.

In the fall the first officer indicted for the previous summer’s action was acquitted. About 20 homeless people who had moved into an abandoned school nearby were threatened with eviction. They eventually left the building after demonstrations and arrests. Although they had set up a community center there for homeless people, the city planned to use the building to provide services to elderly homeless people.

Tents and other structures in a drug-infested area of the park were razed, and a reconstruction was announced. In mid-December, on the coldest day of the year, all the park shanties were razed. The intention to do so had been supported by both the mayor and the progressive mayor-elect, who recognized the “painful shortage of affordable housing that has resulted in thousands of homeless persons living in the streets, subways, train stations, and parks,” but, noting that the homeless would still be allowed to sleep in the park, he supported the parks department’s “efforts to return Tompkins Square to use by the entire Lower East Side community.” In very cold weather, four homeless people froze to death elsewhere in the city.

In January 1990 the city evicted people again from the contested school building and a tent city opposite. Parts of the park were fenced off for reconstruction, but by summer 1990, at the time of this writing, perhaps a hundred homeless people were sleeping in the park, in the hand shell, on benches, and in small tents. Demonstrations, protests, and local organizing are sure to continue. There are now about 50 squatter buildings in the Lower East Side housing three to four hundred people. Gentrification continues piecemeal in the East Village and the Lower East Side, but with the housing market depressed and the entire Northeast experiencing severe fiscal crisis, the course of events is difficult to predict.

**M.R., based on a timeline prepared by Neil Smith**



**The Homeless Vehicle Project.** *This vehicle is neither a temporary nor a permanent solution to the housing problem, nor is it intended for mass production. Its point of departure is a strategy of survival for urban nomads—evicts—in the existing economy. It corresponds to the needs of a particular group of homeless, for it provides equipment for bottle collection and storage but can also be used for emergency shelter.*

*It is both emergency equipment and an emergency form of address for evicts. It recognizes and addresses the claim of the homeless to citizenship in the urban community, both as refugees from the physical transformation of the city and as working people. The form of address—the design of the vehicle—articulates the conditions of homeless existence to the nonhomeless, even conditions that the non/homeless may not wish to recognize. This allows the homeless to be seen not as objects without human status but rather as users and operators of equipment whose form articulates the conditions of their existence.*

*The vehicle resembles a weapon. The movements of evicts/resellers throughout the city are acts of resistance directed against a transformation of the city that excludes them and thousands of others.*

David Lurie

Krzysztof Wodiczko

# Lower East Side Did Not Win In Order to Lose

By Patrick J. Carroll

—Jan 12  
SS

**O**peration Pressure Point has succeeded in suppressing drug trafficking on the Lower East Side. The real story of Operation Pressure Point, though, concerns the residents of this scourged area, the people who hung on, who fought and who eventually reversed the degeneration of their neighborhood. Unless the city acts quickly, however, the last chapter may ultimately explain that their great victory was Pyrrhic after all.

With the deterioration reversed, residents of the area want to reap the benefits of their struggle. Yet, as they watch their neighborhood slowly become more livable, naiveté is being replaced by fresh sophistication. This is Manhattan, where desirable sections lend themselves to windfall real estate profits for both landlords and brokers. The residents, realizing this, are confronted with a new fear — of gentrification.

It was one thing to be driven out by avaricious landlords who rented to drug dealers or allowed apartments to be used as "shooting galleries" at the rate of \$200 to \$400 a week. But it is another to be forced out by some recidive process that is not even criminal. To many residents, gentrification is more threatening than the drug culture they sought to eradicate.

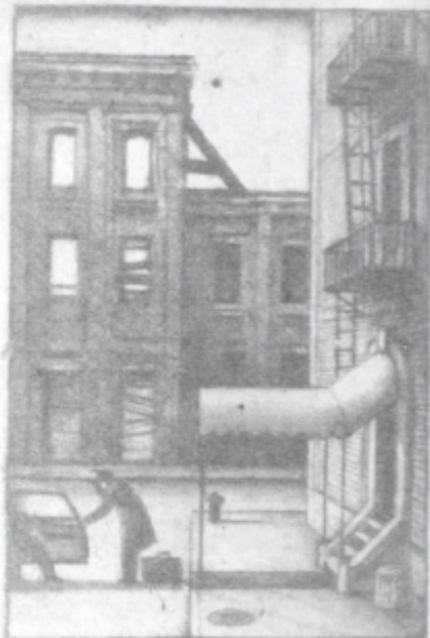
Some residents doubted all along the city's true motivation in cleaning up their neighborhood. "Are we making the neighborhood safe for us," they would ask, "or for those who follow?" The answer is becoming clear: business rents have doubled; tenants are being harassed and driven from their apartments to make way for rehabilitations; real estate brokers are paying astronomical prices for seemingly worthless buildings; artists and art galleries are streaming in.

At the corner of East 9th Street and Avenue B stands a ghostly, dilapidated 16-story building called the Christodora. Its last residents were nomadic junkies who used the building for a shooting gallery. The building was acquired at auction in 1975 for \$62,500. Nine years later, it was resold for \$3.5 million.

Residents living in rent-controlled apartments watch as the renovation boom moves farther east into the heart of Operation Pressure Point's target area — west from Avenue A to the East River, and south from 14th Street to Delancey St. Several years ago, an average rent was about \$150 a month. Now it can range anywhere from \$900 to \$1,300.

Gentrification may be inevitable but it need not be the death knell of the Lower East Side. A reasonable degree of gentrification could add stability to the area and

Patrick J. Carroll, a lieutenant with the New York City Police Department, is coordinator of Operation Pressure Point.



Bob Geln

at the same time not displace critically needed moderate- and low-income housing. Because of the shortage of public-housing units, it is in the city's interest to control the spread of gentrification. Thus, the next major concern should be how to harness the forces that are pushing gentrification ahead.

The city can do several things.

First, it should cut back the benefits of law 42a, which provides tax abatements for residential construction. Since developers can afford to erect only luxury buildings, the city should limit tax relief to a few designated sites. In addition, the city, with its ownership of more than 200 vacant buildings in the target area, should encourage the expansion of the homesteading program, in which neighborhood residents gain cooperative ownership by rehabilitating abandoned city-owned buildings.

The main thrust, however, will have to come from those politicians who were so quick to take credit for cleaning up the Lower East Side. They must work for legislation that will guarantee Federal and state support for moderate- and low-income housing.

The people of the Lower East Side will continue to fight for their neighborhood, and the police will continue to provide relentless enforcement against the abhorrent drug conditions of the area. It now remains for those in government to provide the necessary legislation and planning to offer dignified and affordable housing for the survivors of the target area. □



Geoff, Operation Pressure Point mural on the façade of St. Mark's Bar-Grill at the corner of St. Mark's Place and First Avenue, New York City.

## HOMeward BOUND

On June 1, 1988, the fourth annual vigil sponsored by the Interfaith Assembly on Housing and Homelessness proceeded as before—services at St. Paul's chapel, candlelight procession to City Hall, and the overnight encampment in City Hall Park. The purpose of the annual vigils is to make visible the plight of the homeless and to make legislators aware of the great need for housing for people with no housing.

No one dreamed that, a year later, a group of homeless people from that vigil would be firmly entrenched not only in the minds of the people of the city but in their hearts as well. The group is now known as Homeward Bound Community Services—except to Mayor Koch, who calls them ragtag lobbyists—and is celebrating its first major anniversary.

### **Who Are We?**

We are the homeless whom you saw in City Hall Park for six months last year—the same group who met daily with legislators, housing advocates, and the general public; the same group who registered 2,000 persons to vote; the same group who fed and clothed other homeless in the area. We did all this without benefit of a roof over our heads, without plumbing and electricity, with only our dedication to a cause, and knowing there was a reason for our being.

We are the homeless who came together a year ago in an attempt to better our own lives as well as the lives of our brothers and sisters who are homeless. We came from the city shelters and the city streets and now act as a role model to the thousands of homeless throughout the city.

We are the homeless who are now regaining our self-respect, controlling our addictions, solving our family problems, and finally beginning to realize that we are somebody. We have joined hands with many individuals and groups, sharing our problems and solutions in a symbiotic relationship, bringing feelings of fulfillment to all.

We are the homeless who invited Reverend Jesse Jackson to visit us in City Hall Park, and he responded by coming to the park, bringing hope and inspiration to all of us. In December, Homeward Bound shared the pulpit with Reverend Jackson at St. John the Divine to kick off Housing Action Week. Reverend Jackson's "Keep Hope Alive" and "I Am Somebody" will



*Alicia Herstman, Member of Homeguard Bound Community Services at the City Hall Vigil, Summer 1988.*



*Alcina Horstman, Homeward Bound Community Services City Hall Vigil, Summer 1988.*



*Alcina Horstman, Members of Homeward Bound Community Services at the City Hall Vigil, Summer 1988.*

continue to inspire us and give us reasons for continuing our fight against the social ills in the city.

We are the homeless who are invited to testify at City Hall hearings on the issues of homelessness and housing. We have also been invited to be part of a special task force on homeless single adults. We have participated in demonstrations, conferences, and workshops on antiwarehousing, homelessness, low-income housing, the mayor's five-year plan, and will take part in the march on Washington, sponsored by Housing Now, to be held October 4-7, 1989.

We are the homeless who have been the subject of extensive media coverage, on television and in newspapers. We have helped, through the media, to bring homelessness to the public to help them understand some of our problems.

We are the homeless who have met with the Manhattan borough president's staff in an effort to establish housing for Homeward Bound—housing that will serve as a model for other homeless groups. In addition, we have commitments for technical assistance from several prominent organizations.

We are the homeless who, in an attempt to help ourselves financially, have recently completed our first painting contract. We are endeavoring to run our own business and to provide employment to other homeless.

We are the homeless who spend the winter at St. Augustine's Church, thanks to the combined efforts of Homeward Bound, Trinity Church, Partnership for the Homeless, and the borough president's office. Father Earl Harvey and his parishioners have welcomed the group and assisted us in becoming a community, paving the way for permanent housing.

It has not been an easy year, but despite adversities and growing pains, we have emerged stronger and wiser, ready to continue our crusade to prove that homeless people can help each other and can have some control over their destiny. We have built an organization, complete with a board of directors, and have taken on the monumental task of turning around the homeless situation in the city.

## DISJOINTED DAYS



Andrew Byard, *Untitled*, acrylic on canvas, 1988.

as a child, i was alone  
always  
not lonely and simply fearing to be  
alone  
but simply . . . alone  
i had passed through many  
different orphanages  
that's what they called them  
i just call them places  
that's all they were to me  
i'd meet people  
constantly  
constantly knowing i'd be

moving on  
to some other place  
friendships were always shallow  
disjointed, irrelevant . . . friendships  
pretenses of alliance  
moments of connection  
knowing, constantly, that it  
would end  
when i moved on  
finally, i found a place  
to be  
i stayed longest there  
five years or so

many friendships, shallow still  
but worthy of friendship  
loyal but shallow  
i sang then  
loudly, with many  
sometimes we were close  
sometimes we were one  
sometimes  
most times we were simply together  
i met a girl then  
a girl i love forever  
there  
this too was disjointed  
this too ended  
but the love remained  
disjointed  
i moved on

finally, i was alone again  
on the street  
another place  
alone . . .  
and lonely  
i was alone  
friendships, i made here too  
disjointed  
lonely . . . alone  
friendships were always disjointed  
separate and apart  
lonely  
alone  
now i'm older  
and life  
like friendship  
is disjointed

## OUR GENETIC CORD

Before you begin the poem behind  
 this page,  
 Keep in mind:  
 Donald Johanson was the  
 anthropologist  
 Who discovered "Lucy,"  
 The oldest remains of the oldest  
 remains of the beginning  
 Of Humanity, in Olduvai Gorge  
 In East Africa  
 The finding of this set of human  
 bones  
 Re-enforced Leaky and other  
 anthropologists'  
 And intellectuals' belief and  
 evidence  
 Humanity began  
 In Africa  
 I'm white!  
 Are you white???  
 Look at my whiteness!!!  
 Are you as white?!  
 Hummm?!!  
 You're as white as myyy whiteness!  
 So you're white too!  
 Are youuu white???  
 Let ME SEE!  
 My whiteness is whiter than yours  
 So you're not whiiite!  
 Are youuur whitenesses  
 As white as mine?  
 Let's compare and seee!  
 Myyy baby bluuuesss  
 Are bluuuer than yours  
 My hair is hay blonde.  
 You don't have baby bluuues—  
 They're contacts—

Youuur hair is straightened  
 And bleached too!!!  
 III've got that over youuuu  
 So maybe  
 You're not whiiite tooo!!!  
 I'mmm Scandinavian!!!  
 My hair is not hay blonde,  
 It's white through and through!  
 My eyes are like ice,  
 With a hint of the sky's blue.  
 My skin is milk white,  
 And I speak German tooo!  
 So I am whiter than all of you!  
 I'm the first white—  
 The Albino—  
 With no pigmentation to my skin,  
 But the red of my blood  
 Can be seen through my pupil's  
 eyes  
 As a pinkish hue.  
 My hair looks like kinky  
 transparent plankton  
 And my skin is see-through.  
 My mind has an epic poem  
 Of how we came to be:  
 Some of us  
 Who wandered out of our Olduvai  
 Gorge—in East Africa  
 Wound up North,  
 Though at that time  
 We didn't know  
 That the Continents would  
 separate,  
 Shifting the land we were on  
 Even further North—  
 Changing the climate,  
 And leaving us stranded



Cenen, *My Body—My Spirit—My Baby (Maternal Great Grandmother's Body and Spirit, Grandmother the Baby)*, 1982, acrylic on wood panel.

For thousands of years  
 Without a way to get back home.  
 There wasn't enough of the  
     Sun's heat  
 Or nourishment  
 During those Glacier Years.  
 We evolved to no longer need  
 Our African curls  
 That had held the sweat  
**That cooled our skulls**  
**From the heat of the Sun.**  
**In the North,**  
**With the lack of Sun,**  
**And the scarcity of food,**  
 Our multi-layers of skin  
 And pigmentation  
**Were no longer reproduced.**  
 Our body's broadness became thin  
 And our Peace Dis-eased.  
 We had to fight to eat.  
 We formed into packs.  
 The most ruthless controlled.  
 Sex was taboo  
 Otherwise  
 Too many would be born,  
 To too little food.  
 Wars became the mode  
 Of justifying the Massacres  
 That thinned out the Human Herd

And also provided meat  
 In mid-winter itself  
 We fought each other  
 For the best caves  
 And bribed the most ferocious  
     warriors  
 To get the best Crew  
 With the most modern weapons  
 That could be made  
**From the sticks, stones and bones**  
**Of others, whose**  
**Compassion, age or failing health**  
**Made them hesitate**  
**To throw the first blow**  
**Giving time for our viciousness**  
**To win their flesh**  
**And their bones**  
**Winning became the only game**  
**Weapons our best ally**  
**And human concern**  
**Something to lose!**  
**So, Hail White Supremacy**  
**And down with Donald Johanson**  
**And other anthropologists of**  
     his kind  
**For unearthing "Lucy" at Olduvai**  
**And exposing Our Genetic Cord.**

1988

## **ESSENTIAL SHELTER: THE MAD HOUSER HUT**

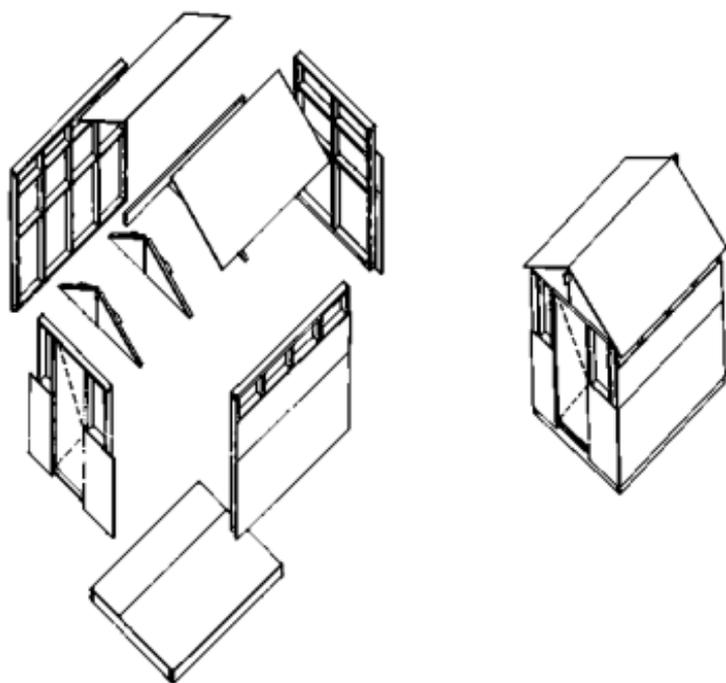
The Mad Housers' directives are simple. First, we seek to provide shelter to those who are homeless as quickly and as effectively as possible. Second, we seek to raise public consciousness of this crisis so that others will be motivated to adopt our first goal: that of providing shelter.

The shelters we construct are not houses by any means. They are humble in their intentions and in their realization. They provide a minimum of protection against the elements and are insecure of tenure. We operate outside of the regulatory framework that controls housing through building, zoning, and housing codes, because we find those regulations to act against many of the people they were meant to protect. We deny the basic premise of property rights to the extent that American law grants control of land to persons who may never even see the property they own. The shelters we build are squatters' huts. They are emergency shelters, a stopgap, band-aid measure. But they are effective.

In the course of our three-year project, the Mad Housers have built over 80 huts. Each has been slightly different from the last as we have explored many variations. We have serendipitously given each hut a character of its own through our pursuit of the essence of shelter. And we have given each of our clients a renewed sense of their own ability to effect change in their environment through both our demonstration and the infinitely mutable product we have given them. Nevertheless, the most vital aspects of our project are not embodied in the object, isolated as it has been here, in the gallery or on the page. It is the visible expression of an alternative order, both political and social, on the landscape of urban America. The social order promoted by the Mad Housers is an expression of the desire for a dignified life, a release from the alienation of homelessness, and entry into society.



**The Mad Houser shelter built for the Dia exhibition was deconstructed and rebuilt in a Brooklyn lot, May 1989.**



## **HOMES FOR PEOPLE WITH AIDS: A STUDY PROJECT ON INFILL HOUSING IN NEW YORK**

This project was initially conceived for Vacant Lots, a study project on infill housing in New York sponsored by the Architectural League of New York City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development. The project was exhibited and subsequently presented publicly in November of 1987. "Homes for People with AIDS" has also been included in *Reweaving the Urban Fabric: International Approaches to Infill Housing*, sponsored by the New York State Council on the Arts and the New York Landmarks Conservancy at the Paine-Weber Gallery in March of 1988.

"Homes for People with AIDS" is a collaboration between Gustavo Bonevardi and Lee Ledbetter (architectural designers), Linda Baldwin (urban planner), Morgan Hare (principal of a construction management-design firm), and Joe Lay (clinical psychologist).

Not all people with AIDS have the same needs: some, more self-sufficient, are able to live independently in separate apartments with minimal care; others, however, might benefit from the security of a community living situation and the support services it could offer. Our project addresses this second option, a community residence for people with AIDS.

Small vacant lots requiring infill construction are ideally suited for this kind of housing. The type of housing which would be required to house homeless persons with AIDS cannot be based on the premise of economies of scale. Rather, smaller projects are essential in order to minimize the effects on the neighborhoods where these residences would be built and to offer a way for integrating persons with AIDS back into their communities.

The site for our proposal is a city-owned vacant lot located in the South Bronx. We propose two identical buildings, each facing and maintaining their respective street walls. Each building, in turn, is composed of two conceptually independent sections: a front section of communal and administrative rooms, and a rear section with living units, the height of which could be changed as the zoning would allow. Between the two buildings is a garden uniting the two buildings and providing a contemplative and nurturing environment.



Street view.

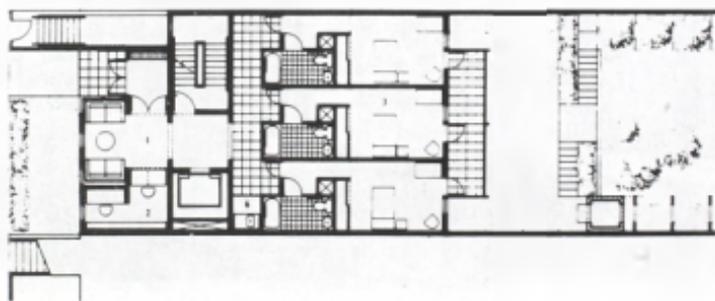
The design meets the requirements for New York City's Housing Quality Program and features handicap accessibility throughout. In addition, it incorporates low-cost building construction techniques and inexpensive materials. Living units are identical and repetitive so as to permit prefabrication.

The residence is composed of the following: individual rooming units, each with a private bathroom; communal dining and recreation rooms; offices for nursing services, counseling, and alternative treatments; and a central kitchen for on-site food preparation.

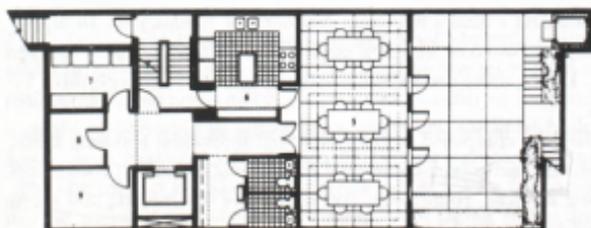
The higher costs inherent in this type of residence—which requires handicap accessibility—must not be compared to the cost of other low-income housing projects but, rather, to the costs associated with using our hospitals for long-term living arrangements. All residents would be eligible for government assistance (rent supplements, disability payments, Medicaid, etc.).



Third level.



Entry level.



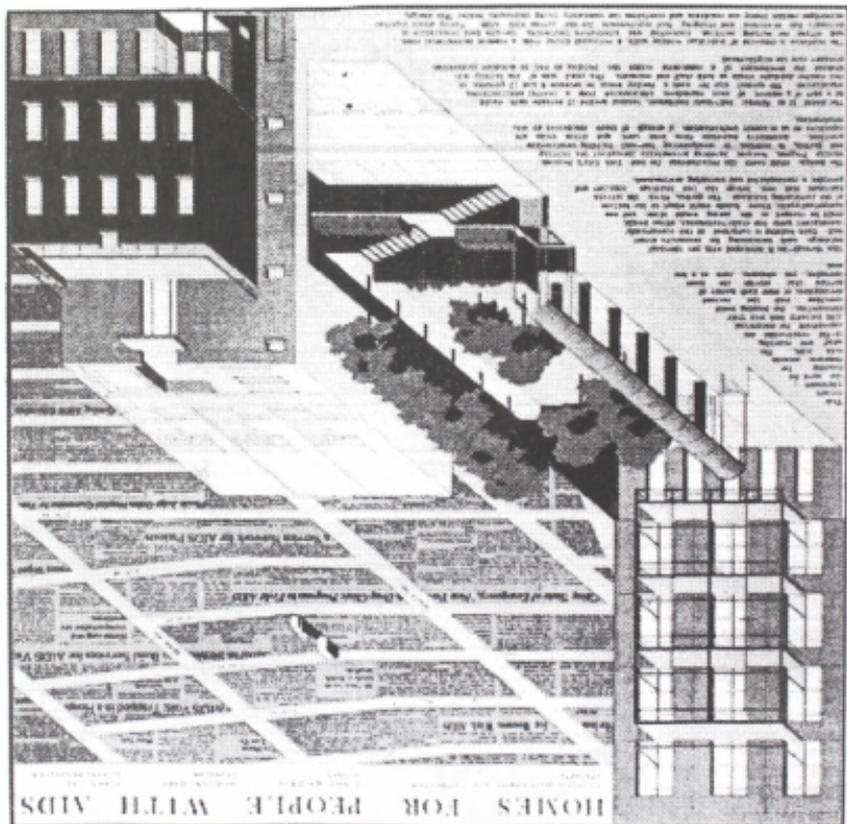
Basement level.

Legend: 1. Lobby 2. Office 3. Living 4. Common room 5. Dining 6. Kitchen 7. Laundry room  
8. Storage 9. Mechanical

Plan view



Street elevation





**CITY: VISIONS AND REVISIONS**



# Open forum



## PLANNING:

### *Power, Politics, and People*

**Tuesday, May 16,**

**6:30 PM**

- **Robert Friedman,** Special Projects Editor, *New York Newsday*
- **Jamelie Hassan,** artist, member of the Embassy Hotel and Cultural House, London, Ontario, Canada
- **Peter Marcuse,** Professor of Urban Planning, Columbia University
- **Mary Ellen Phifer,** board member, Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)
- **Frances Fox Piven,** Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Graduate Center, CUNY
- **Peter Wood,** Executive Director, Mutual Housing Association of New York (MHANY)

Moderator: **Robert Neuwirth,** reporter

*These speakers will begin the forum, and then the floor will be open to all—  
**please come speak out on the issues!***

155 Mercer Street NYC between Houston & Prince



## PLANNING: POWER, POLITICS, PEOPLE

**Moderator, Robert Neuwirth** My name is Robert Neuwirth. I'm a freelance writer and investigative reporter. I've been writing about New York City for the past five years. I'm also an activist and one of the founding members of the Clinton Coalition of Concern, a grass-roots neighborhood organization in Hell's Kitchen which has been fighting the city- and state-sponsored plan to turn Times Square into an office park. That project has been taking up a lot of my time during the past four years, and we're coming down to the wire now.

After having been through the process of land-use planning and fighting for affordable housing as a community organizer and also covering the process, chronicling it, as a writer, I can tell you that the system doesn't work. Most neighborhood people in New York (and I grew up here) don't really know the way the system works. They don't understand what the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure, or ULURP, is and how land use decisions follow along through the community board, the City Planning Commission, and finally to the Board of Estimate. And they certainly won't understand, because they don't understand the present system, how the charter commission is proposing to replace the Board of Estimate now that it has been found unconstitutional.

About that decision: I don't think anyone could have guessed that our government would be radically revamped. The Board of Estimate has been around for about 83 years, since 1906, and now we're going to have a brand new structure imposed, and I haven't seen a lot of intelligent discussion about it.<sup>1</sup> It's an important topic: urban planning and the role politics plays in it, the role that people should play in it.

Ambrose Bierce, a writer of the Civil War era, said that a reporter is a writer who guesses his way to the truth and then dispels it with a tempest of words. Our first speaker is someone who does not do that. Robert Friedman is in the unique situation of being the special projects editor at *New York Newsday*, where he has the space, the time, and the staff to get important projects done.

**Robert Friedman** Since I'm speaking first, I get to choose which of these words, "Planning: Power, Politics, People," I want to talk about, and I think I'll take "people." In particular, one person whom I met while working on a week-long series of articles about housing in New York that ran in *New York Newsday* last January. It was a project I worked on with half a dozen other reporters for close to three months. In the newspaper world, three months is an eon, and most reporters don't get the luxury to work with that amount of time or staff on a particular subject.

We put together a series of articles on various aspects of the housing crisis in New York. There was a piece looking at East 11th Street between Avenues A and B, at what was happening to the buildings in terms of gentrification. Then there was a story about families who had been burned out of a building in Brooklyn, four working-class black families who faced incredible struggles to find new housing on their incomes. Some of them were still homeless a year later.

We did another story looking at Site 30 on the Upper West Side, in particular, how and why it took 23 years to build a building called James Tower on the corner of Columbus Avenue and 90th Street. Buildings were torn down as part of an urban renewal plan. The original intention was to put up middle-class housing, but there were protests. The plans kept changing from low-income to middle-income to upper-income, back and forth and back and forth. Finally, just last year (1988), Samuel LeFrak opened a 21-story luxury building with apartments renting for \$2,000 a month. Renting a space in its garage costs more per month than the original housing was supposed to. So, by examining individual blocks and buildings, our series demonstrated the poverty of planning in this city.

I led off the series with the story of a man who lives on 118th Street and Madison Avenue. His name is John Campbell. He's a 41-year-old black man who has lived within a three-block radius all his life. I found him because his name was on a lawsuit against the New York City Housing Partnership, which was trying to build some low-income housing on the block where he was born. He was born and raised on 118th Street between Fifth and Madison. At the time, the block had row houses, brownstones, good housing stock. His aunt and uncle owned a beauty parlor across the street. It was a vibrant, active community in East Harlem.

In 1972, as part of the city's urban renewal plan, Campbell's block was slated for demolition to make way for low-income housing. Actually, it had been slated for demolition a long time before that, but in 1972, the bulldozers came and knocked everything down on the block. John was relocated, under city auspices, to a city-owned apartment building three blocks away on 121st Street. His family—he lived with his mother and his father

and two brothers—was promised an apartment in whatever housing was put up on the site.

I met John Campbell on that corner in January of this year. I urge you all to go up there some time; it's a scene of utter urban desolation. The block is vacant and has been since 1972. Nothing was ever built. Across the street is another vacant lot piled high with abandoned cars. There are several tenements crumbling to the ground. There are men standing around fires in 55-gallon drums for warmth. I met a man who had been living in an abandoned car on that lot for the past six months. It was like going to another planet, but it's not far from where I'm sure all of you have walked and visited.

At one point about ten years ago, the city put a little playground in there, but it has gone to seed. In January it was covered with broken mattresses, and weeds had sprouted up through the asphalt. The block was fenced off and there was a small sign up on the fence that said, "Interim Site Improvement Program." Then below that it said, "This site has been improved by the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development." A hundred or more families had been displaced from this community, from that block, scattered to other city-owned housing or further afield, and 17 years later none of them had been given what they had been promised: a home.

Campbell lived on 121st Street in a city-owned apartment building for about three years. Then the city announced that it was tearing down that building to make way for more low-income housing. His family was relocated to another building, to a city-owned building three or four doors down. When they tore down his building nothing was ever built on that site either. After about ten years, the city decided to let the second building Campbell had been moved to also go to seed. It was part of some plan. Ultimately, it was going to be demolished. He had to live there for three years in a city-owned apartment building without heat or hot water. The city was trying to get people to leave. Drug dealers moved into the building. Finally, he stopped paying rent.

John's father had died, and he, his mother, and his brothers still lived together. He finally moved his family back to 118th Street between Madison and Park, a hundred yards from where he'd grown up, the last standing building on that block, also city-owned. Last year, with the help of the Archdiocese of New York, that building's tenants managed to get a loan which enabled them to buy the building from the city. Now John Campbell is the superintendent of this building, and he's making a valiant stand to protect these last few units of housing in a God-forsaken landscape in East Harlem.

John Campbell is a victim both of planning and lack of planning. Urban renewal, of course, was massive city planning run amuck. In the years since, there has been no real planning, other than reaction to various proposals made by the New York City Housing Partnership or other developers to build this here and that there. In both the case of urban renewal, and in the Koch administration, there is a lack of planning. The same rule has applied: John Campbell and the people who live in that community have had no input. And from the reporting we did, that seems to be a common thread in what's going on all over the city. Plans are made or not made, and the people whose lives are affected are often the last to know what's going on—and the least able to do anything about it. Fortunately, John got connected with the Puerto Rican Legal Defense Fund, which sponsored a lawsuit and put him down as the main plaintiff. They were effective in blocking the New York City Housing Partnership from putting up row houses that were going to sell for about \$115,000 apiece, marketed to families earning about \$50,000 a year, far in excess of what John Campbell, who worked most of his life as a school security guard or a nurse's aide, ever saw.

Here we have a productive member of society, a working individual, who has been victimized by New York's housing situation, which is the direct responsibility of ineffective (or worse) leaders. I hope that his story serves as an illuminating reminder of what's going on in our own area.

**Robert Neuwirth** Thank you. I think that served well as a specific example of what we're here to talk about tonight. Our next speaker is Peter Marcuse, a professor of urban planning at Columbia University. He told me he'd like to talk about what he saw in the South Bronx this morning.

**Peter Marcuse** I saw the *results* of planning. The trouble with New York is not that there is too little planning. The trouble with New York is that there is too much planning—by the wrong people, for the wrong people, and against the wrong people. I think the South Bronx in the next five years will provide a tragic example of that.

I was going to approach planning, power, and politics this evening by talking about Robert Moses, who was perhaps the classic planner in the city. Moses pioneered a fashion of urban renewal nationally that put the private sector explicitly in the driver's seat and that made urban renewal a reaction to what private developers proposed for specific sites. It's a direct approach to the way most planning is in fact done in New York City that has never been matched since for its honesty.

To pick up on Bob Friedman's story, the West Side Urban Renewal Area was so designated in reaction to Moses, and as a result of massive fights by people to forestall the wholesale clearance that Moses had proposed and to

include housing and facilities available for low-income people on the West Side. The fact that 11 years after the massive protests that Moses' total-clearance, high-income plan met, a site could be rerescued from low-income use and given over to luxury housing shows how successful the planning of the Moses period was. Whether you call this "planning" or "lack of planning" depends on whether you use "planning" only to mean good planning or public planning, or whether you use it to mean what people intend to have happen. I think what *some* people intended to have happen on the West Side did happen—with tragic consequences for the rest of us.

I want to talk now about how our planning has affected the homeless. It's an interesting story, and I think it exposes in a nutshell what goes on in this city. The city's immediate reaction to the rise of homelessness in the early 1980s was simply to do nothing: that is a form of planning. It's not that the city was not aware that there were homeless people or that it was not informed that opportunities existed to do something about it. It was not as if the city played no role in creating homelessness through policies supporting gentrification. It was that the city decided not to do anything about it. This policy was based on Mayor Koch's expressed conviction that if you offered people who were on the streets decent housing, then people would regard going onto the streets as a way of getting decent housing, and then there would be no end to it.

That was Koch's testimony before the United States Congress in explaining why the quality of facilities being provided for the homeless was so low. The city was finally forced, through litigation by the Coalition for the Homeless, to provide some shelter. The spaces the city provided in the way of shelters constitute some of the most abysmal accommodations that any civilized society in the 20th century has ever offered to its residents—converted armories in which 1,100 beds are lined up in spaces the fire marshal says can safely hold only 900, spaces that were intended to hold bullets rather than people.

The objection to those conditions was so great, and the number of homeless was so great, that the city was finally forced to turn to more aggressive policies and to provide transitional housing. And so began the "welfare hotels." The city began to use hotels because it would rather put people up in accommodations regardless of the cost if someone else was contributing to that cost and if, in so doing, it did not have to acknowledge the permanent existence of the factors creating homelessness in New York.

It was a way of rejecting the argument that permanent housing was needed and, instead, pretending that the problem would go away if only we provided hotel rooms for six months or less. In fact, the problem mushroomed, and the welfare hotels became a scandal and began to have other repercussions. I'll go into them in a minute, but let me first describe what

the city has now turned to as a solution to this problem. It has created a program called the Special Initiatives Program, or SIP, in which it takes *in rem* buildings, rehabilitates them, and places in them only homeless households. It concentrates those SIP buildings in the areas in which there are the most *in rem* units—that is, in the South Bronx and in Central Harlem.

It puts into those buildings the minimum amount of money required to bring them up to code. It does not provide services. It provides three days of orientation to families being moved into them, and that, essentially, is it: it leaves them alone.

The first of those buildings opened about a year ago and will probably be abandoned within six months. The city has convinced the Housing Authority, after summarily dismissing its general manager and the chair of the commission, to give special priority to the homeless on the argument that theirs is the greatest need and thus is on the way to making New York's public housing into housing of last resort. It is taking the New York City Housing Authority from the point where it was a racially and economically integrated and safe environment to one that is beginning to match the worst of the *in rem* stock and the privately owned, slumlord-owned, stock.

Further, whenever a vacancy occurs in a city-owned, presently occupied building that is in either the Central Management Program or the Tenant Interim Lease, or TIL, program, the city is putting into them only homeless households. Those management programs are geared to help tenants take over their own buildings and are conditioned by the city on residents' meeting certain prerequisites in terms of self-management and self-financing. But the city is thus making it virtually impossible for those buildings to become tenant-owned or tenant-controlled. Meanwhile, other types of city-owned stock excludes homeless households. The argument here is not that priority shouldn't be given to homeless people; the argument is that the city-owned stock and all of the city's efforts should be geared to developing an overall housing policy that gives priority to homeless. It does not do that.

Those buildings that have come into city ownership which are now desirable for private initiative the city sells with the requirement that at most 20 percent of the apartments be made available for low- and moderate-income—which means almost overwhelmingly moderate-income—households. So homeless people are excluded from those. There is no requirement and no likelihood that homeless people will ever go into the Private Ownership and Management Program, or POMP, that the city uses for much of its city-owned stock or in much of the rest of what it owns.

There is thus a pattern developing in which the worst of the city's stock is being allocated exclusively to the homeless and in which the homeless are thus concentrated in ghettos, which you can see if you go to the South Bronx and which you will shortly be able to see when the rehabilitation pro-

jects in Central Harlem are completed. The city is putting people in there who clearly do not have the financial resources to pay for management, maintenance, and repairs, and it is providing no ongoing support for them. The only city subsidy is the initial rehabilitation of the building. Buildings are being turned over to nonprofit groups and, in some cases, community groups, who know that there is a disaster brewing but who have no choice because they already own buildings on the next block over.

Why is this happening? Is this simply inefficient or stupid planning for the homeless? I think not. I think this is a very sophisticated plan for downtown Manhattan; this is a way of clearing the homeless out of Manhattan south of 96th Street, and perhaps out of parts of central Brooklyn also. It is a way of getting rid of the welfare hotels that are a blight on Times Square. Times Square is to be redeveloped; you can't do that if you have homeless people hanging around—you've got to get them out.

In a nutshell, what the city is doing is moving the Martinique from Times Square, which the city wants for other purposes, to the South Bronx, which the city doesn't care about. It is doing so through a series of discrete programs, each one of which, viewed separately, doesn't appear wrong. Certainly, the homeless should have priority for public housing, if public housing is the only way to house them and they are the ones who are in greatest need. The same argument holds for city-owned buildings in Central Management.

The problem is that the people managing each of these programs are simply doing what any decent person should be doing. Each piece develops its own logic and leads to the creation of a completely dualist, quartered city. I think there are more than two parts; I think there are many parts, and the whole picture is obscured. Still, that whole picture is *planned*. The program of those doing planning for the City of New York is to create an insulated, protected, high-class business district in Manhattan with adjoining residences for those who work there, and to let the rest of the city take care of itself, or *not* take care of itself.

Let me end with a comment on what is now happening politically with the planning process in New York. One of the surest proofs that the planning going on is not accidental is the discussion now taking place within the Charter Revision Commission. The charter revision process referred to earlier and the restructuring of the city show how the city reacts to the possibility of greater planning. There was one planning proposal included in the suggestions that the chair of the Charter Revision Commission made to the commission for improvement of the charter. That was that the city develop four-year plans for major sectors for the disposition of city-owned property and for the use of the property the city retains. The response of Abraham Biderman, the commissioner of the city's Department of Housing Preserva-

tion and Development, was, "You want us to tell people four years in advance where we're going to put the homeless. Don't be crazy!"

And that was exactly the right answer. It isn't that he doesn't know what he wants to do, or that the mayor doesn't know what he wants to do with the homeless, it's that they don't want to tell people. It isn't that the planning isn't being done, it's that the planning *is* being done, but in the wrong places, to the knowledge of the wrong people, for the wrong people, and against the wrong people.

**Robert Neuwirth** It appears from your description that New York City is increasingly becoming the city that Mario Cuomo described in his speech at the Democratic National Convention in 1984. He talked about the shining city on the hill with all the poor masses down below it, not being able to participate.

Our next speaker is Frances Fox Piven, known to many of you as the author of *Poor People's Movements, Regulating the Poor*, and most recently, *Why Americans Don't Vote*. She's Distinguished Professor of Political Science at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She will speak about how the housing problem did not originate with the market, but originated in politics.

**Frances Fox Piven** When I got the call to speak here, I was leafing through a report by a Washington organization called the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. It was a new report, issued last month, on what is happening to housing and the poor in the United States. The Center reported that between 1978 and 1985, the number of poor households in the United States had risen by 25 percent, from 10.5 million to 13.3 million. Meanwhile, the number of housing units renting for \$250 a month or less, or renting for 30 percent of what would be a household income of \$10,000 a year had declined by almost 2 million. These two figures present in a nutshell a main reason for the worsening of housing conditions in the United States for the least well off. It's an aspect of a larger pattern of increasing inequality that has been unfolding: enlarging numbers of people who are poor and enlarging numbers of people who are rich. You see them on the streets of New York, both kinds, all the time. It suggests the extreme misery at the bottom. It isn't only the numbers of people who live below the official poverty line that are increasing; the numbers of people who are desperately poor, whose income is half the official poverty line, are increasing even more rapidly.

Taken together, these trends have everything to do with what's happening in housing. Declining wages, declining government benefits, mean that people have less income, and that causes housing deprivation when housing costs don't just remain the same but in fact increase. Meanwhile, to make

matters worse, instead of offsetting these trends, government aid in the area of housing has been sharply cut: now, fewer than one in three poor renter households gets any government housing aid at all. The percentage of people with such aid has gone down even as incomes have gone down and the number of rental units has contracted. The result is, of course, another desperate dimension to poverty in the United States. Households earning less than \$10,000 a year pay on average 62 percent of their income in rent.

Why is a situation that's always been bad getting worse? Why is inequality, and especially housing inequality, getting worse? The general argument that has been made to account for increased inequality in the United States, and especially for the changing role of government with regard to inequality, is that American government and American corporations increasingly have had to compete with countries where investors have the benefit of low wages and where governments don't collect large tax revenues to help support fancy programs for people in need. In order to deal with these competitors from Singapore and Mexico and Japan and so forth, it has been necessary to cut government programs. We have to sell for less, unleash our entrepreneurs, increase their profits by cutting their taxes to make the United States competitive. It's a very powerful argument.

A lot of people have bought that argument. They've bought it partly because they're always buying Japanese VCRs and television sets and so forth. They've bought it because plants are, in fact, closing. But the argument is wrong. It is ideology in the narrow sense of the word, in the sense of propaganda designed to conceal a political reality. One way to know that this argument for lowering wages, decreasing government benefits, and cutting government expenditures on housing is wrong is that during this period, while government benefits for housing for the poor have decreased, government subsidies to the better off have increased. In fact, in just two years, tax deductions for the better off came to \$107.4 billion, about three times the amount allocated for subsidies to low-income people. So, rhetoric aside, what is really happening is that housing is not, and never has been, a free market. It's an industry, pervasively influenced by direct government regulation and government subsidies.

That is true not only of poor people but also of the gentrifiers on the Lower East Side and of Donald Trump. These people have got to be regarded not as entrepreneurs obeying market laws but as political operatives. Increasing housing inequality in the United States is the result not of market imperatives but of politics and changing politics, and currently of the predatory politics of organized business in the United States. Business is organizing under pressure because of economic change in the United States and in the world which the housing crisis reflects.

Between the end of World War II and the 1970s, American business

enjoyed an extraordinarily privileged position. It could dominate the world easily, sloppily, because potential competitors had been devastated by the war. American entrepreneurs grew thoroughly fat and very lazy. But that changed in the 1970s. International competition did appear. There was a shift of mass-production industries, for example, into the newly industrializing countries. Competitors like Japan and Germany took advantage of new technology. But these were problems confronted by all rich, industrial countries. They had to operate in a more competitive international environment. The responses of organized business in different industrial countries—in Germany, for example, or in Sweden or Austria—were very different, however. Measures were taken in Germany to protect the industrial base. Sweden and Austria tried to become much more capital intensive, to compete in a world market by developing product lines that could successfully compete with low-wage countries. Even Italy responded to increased international competition with new forms of production. In the United States, however, there was very little of this kind of restructuring or streamlining, very little improvement in productivity.

Profits did go up, but they went up because business organized politically, not for increased productivity, increased capital investment, but through redistribution, through a program to lower wages, to strip away government regulations, to wipe out large classes of government benefits, including those for housing, and to lower taxes. In other words, business organized, using politics, controlling government policy. They organized to solve the problems faced by an increasingly less competitive American corporate structure, taking away what American working people had gained in the area of wages, income benefits, and housing. They organized to get what they could while they could—in ways that may yet prove catastrophic for us all in the coming decade. Moreover, they did this not only on the national level but also on the municipal level, where in any case, there never was planning in the sense of democratic planning.

In New York, for example there are glossy plans published by the Planning Commission, but the actual decision making about municipal government infrastructure is done in league with business. Business domination on the national level signaled a kind of open season on the municipal level. In the aftermath of the disaster of the type of urban renewal practiced by Robert Moses, there was community protest. There was more caution and more support for low-income communities. But now, in our era of Reaganism, it has become municipal policy to declare open season for developers and gentrifiers. The impact is plainly visible all around us in New York City, a city that is rapidly becoming as chaotic as Rio de Janeiro or Manila.

**Robert Nauwirth** We're going to turn from the broad perspective now to a couple of individual and community perspectives on how people actually take planning into their own hands. The next speaker, Jamelie Hassan, is from London, Ontario. She's involved with the Embassy Hotel, a residential hotel and cultural house in London, Ontario.

**Jamelie Hassan** When Dougie, longtime worker and resident of the Embassy Hotel went missing for three days last fall, it was Eddie, the young female bartender of the Beaver Room Bar who settled him back into his room. Dougie, in his eighties, had wandered off and, suffering from disorientation, found himself lost in the semi-industrial alleyways of the East End. Thanks to the warm days and nights that mark Indian Summer, he was relatively unharmed when the police found him and returned him to the care of the hotel. The attention given to older people, displaced persons, and those disadvantaged forced to live on the edges of our societies, figure prominently and visibly, is what distinguishes the Embassy Cultural House [ECH] from other artist-run collectives in Canada. The ECH collective operates out of the Embassy Hotel in the East End community of this conservative, university-oriented, southwestern Ontario city, with more millionaires per capita than any other city in Canada. Like its colonial parent, London has an ethnically diverse, economically depressed, working-class East End, and it is here that affordable housing can still be found in the core of the city. In the case of the Embassy Hotel, 60 percent of the residents live there full-time, many are pensioners, and others are on fixed or modest incomes. The regulars reflect the mix of the neighborhood, with an increasing percentage of Native people who have moved into the city from nearby reserves. (Land-claim settlements have never been one of the Canadian government's priorities.)

Artists' projects are developed throughout the hotel, with particular respect paid to the hotel's working/living climate. In our past projects we have tried to take into account the working relationships of artists, writers, musicians, and performers, within the immediate context of the city of London and, in particular, the cultural house's East End location. Our approach has involved an in-depth analysis, over a three- or four-month period, of critical concerns relevant to our specific neighborhood and city, as well as to the national and international context.

Bedrooms, hallways, bars, and bathrooms of the Embassy Hotel have served as sites for exhibitions and permanent installations. Often these bedrooms have been occupied by residents who have become quite attached to artist projects, extending the meaning of installations into their lives. Brian

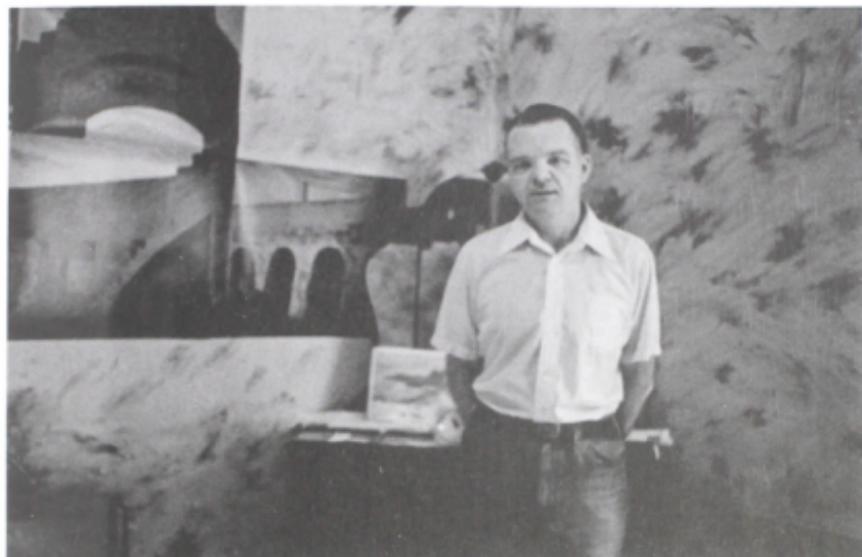
Egerton, on a disability pension from the Canadian military, moved by chance into Shelagh Keeley's bedroom project #34. There, photos of a French colonial prison in Algeria were embedded in thick, Vaseline-pigmented walls. Brian described his impressions of sleeping in this room as being very special, like he was a VIP. In an interview, he said, "This room is like something some high official from the armed forces would stay in." Brian eventually moved to London so that he could live full-time in the room, giving up his room outside Toronto. He began an obsessive project of his own, layering military and surveillance paraphernalia on top of Keeley's project. When Brian's project outgrew the Keeley bedroom, he was asked to move down the corridor where he would have the space to develop his installation. Now he proudly gives tours of his room and other artists' projects on the second floor.

When Michael Fernandes created his "dream room," drawing on a Trinidadian fable, he asked us to rent the room immediately, without the usual one-month viewing time for public visitors. The night after it was completed Fernandes' room was rented to a night driver of transport trucks; the reversed sleeping pattern makes the room inaccessible to most visitors. As a result, it is surrounded with mystery.

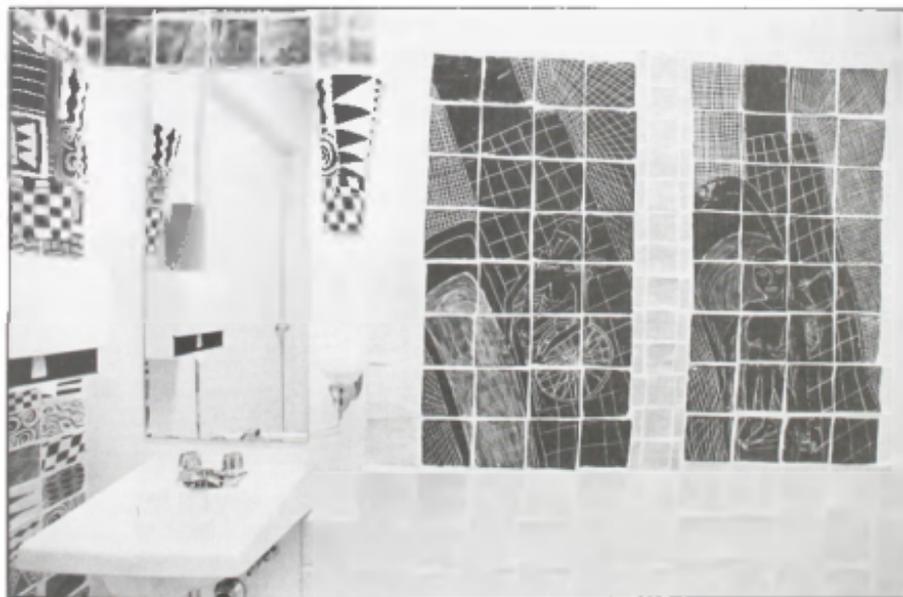
The project by Susan Day for the handicapped-access bathroom includes hand-built ceramic tiles with images reflective of tools the differently abled require for bathing. This project was part of the exhibition series "The Body & Society," which also included conferences and seminars that considered AIDS in relation to representations of the body.

While the hotel has a physical roughness, it has by degrees become a safer place for women, both as workers and as patrons. Prostitution is widespread in the East End, but in the immediate vicinity of the hotel, it has been drastically reduced. The art and the support activity with many diverse groups have had a positive influence on the neighborhood without leading to gentrification. Given rapid urban developments in the central downtown, this may be a potential problem in the future. After seven years of programming, the hotel management continues to support our programming financially. Without making concessions, the art activity continues while the hotel serves its regular customers. We move throughout the hotel, attempting in our programming to be informed and considerate of the residents, workers, and regulars to the hotel. We hope that in a modest way our work contributes to gently alleviating the hostility that many people in the East End face on a daily basis.

**Robert Neuwirth** Next, we will hear from Mary Ellen Phifer, who is a board member of ACORN [Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now]. She is also the chairperson of the Action Committee for the



Shelagh Keeley, *Bedroom #31* at the Embassy Hotel, London, Ontario, with resident Brian Egerton pictured, 1984.



Susan Day, site installation in handicapped-access bathroom from the exhibition series "The Body & Society" at the Embassy Hotel, London, Ontario, Canada, 1988.

New York City chapter of ACORN and a member of MHANY [Mutual Housing Association of New York].

**Mary Ellen Phifer** I consider myself a longtime activist in Brooklyn, having joined CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] in the early '60s. I participated in a number of CORE projects on education, housing, employment, against police brutality, the stall-in at the World's Fair, you name it.

MHANY is an organization that oversees the renovation of abandoned buildings. ACORN is a national organization located in 26 of the 50 states and in the District of Columbia. ACORN chapters in various communities work on issues that they feel affect their community to improve conditions for a better quality of life. The issues ACORN confronts are quite various, everything from problems with sanitation to the police—you name it. It's whatever issue that particular group feels that they want to work on; ACORN organizers work with them to help them help themselves.

ACORN is a membership organization; you pay an annual fee to belong to the organization, and the whole family belongs, not just one individual. If there are six members in the family, all six members are ACORN members. In New York, with the large number of homeless people and the high rents for apartments, more and more low- and moderate-income families are being forced into homeless shelters and welfare hotels. And so we feel that this is one way to make a big contribution to the homeless situation in New York City: to provide affordable permanent homes for low- and moderate-income families.

Now, in New York, ACORN has mainly been working on housing, affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families. We held a squatting campaign in 1985, and in 1987 we negotiated with the City of New York to turn over abandoned buildings in East New York [in Brooklyn] to ACORN. A total of 59 buildings were turned over to the organization—these are mainly two- and three-family dwellings; there were 180 units. We have expanded some of these 180 units to provide for larger families, so at this point there are actually about 169 units.

This came about because there was a woman in East New York who had heard about ACORN and what they were doing and how they were trying to organize around the country. She invited an ACORN organizer to come to Brooklyn and look at some of those boarded-up buildings in East New York. The organizer saw that these were structurally sound buildings that had been foreclosed—the people living there had had their mortgages foreclosed. So the buildings were just sitting there boarded up, and the city was not doing anything with them. So community members decided that they were going to occupy the buildings as squatters. And that is exactly what they did. They just opened up the buildings and started doing the re-

pairs that the buildings needed. Some of the repairs were minor, some major, but soon they were able to start living in those buildings. Some of the folks were arrested, and some went to jail. It was 1985 when this started. Then ACORN began to negotiate with the city to turn over the buildings to them. It took two years to get the city to turn the buildings over to ACORN. That finally happened in 1987.

The squatting in Brooklyn was similar to what is now going on in the East Village, but on a much larger scale. If I were living in East New York and needed a decent place to live, and I saw the buildings that were just sitting there not being used, just going to waste, I'm sure I would have been tempted to go into one of those buildings as a squatter myself. I think that is exactly what was happening. Especially, in that case, with an organization behind them, it made it much easier for the squatters than to just do it on an individual basis. And the fact that ACORN is a national organization with lawyers and some resources behind them makes a difference.

ACORN has also negotiated with the various banks in the city to reinvest a certain portion of their income in the communities in which they are located. This is based on the Community Reinvestment Act passed by Congress in the late '70s. The money the banks provide goes for home improvement, mortgages, and small business loans. Chemical Bank has been very responsive; the Bank of New York has been very responsive; and we have negotiated with Immigrant Savings Bank. We are now in negotiation with Republic National Bank. These banks have given low-cost, long-term loans in order to help rehabilitate abandoned buildings.

ACORN has been so successful because we have used the law, particularly the Community Reinvestment Act. Most people aren't even aware of this legislation, but ACORN has been very successful across the country in using it. Philadelphia has done quite a bit, St. Louis, Little Rock, Arkansas, even in Washington, quite a bit has been accomplished with the Community Reinvestment Act and the local banks.

ACORN members are put on a waiting list, and based on their priority and their participation with the organization, they are selected for an apartment. These apartments actually become the family's apartment—they own it. The situation is like a co-op; they have to put a certain amount of equity into the building. And we have a long list of members waiting for apartments.

We are now going into Phase II; those 59 buildings were in Phase I. Phase II means that we are going to be negotiating with the city to turn over any additional abandoned buildings that are structurally sound and that do not require a lot of renovation in order to get them into shape for living. We look at each building first, and if it is badly deteriorating, we do not take it. There is no point in taking a building that is so badly deteriorated that it would cost as much to build a brand new structure as it would to re-

hab it. We only want structurally sound buildings that we can renovate at a moderate cost. These buildings will be put back onto the rent roll, and families will actually have permanent homes. We are beginning Phase II this year. Once those buildings have been “rehabbed” and assigned to the tenants, then we will negotiate for additional buildings.

The 59 Phase I buildings are in East New York. But for Phase II, we are going to be negotiating for buildings in other parts of Brooklyn—Bedford-Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, Brownsville—and Queens. If there are additional structurally sound buildings in East New York, we can also negotiate for buildings there. We hope Phase II and Phase III will be much larger and on a broader scale than Phase I.

**Robert Neuwirth** Our next speaker is Peter Wood, who is the executive director of MHANY, the organization born out of a housing campaign that ACORN undertook in 1985.

**Peter Wood** I direct the staff and am responsible to the board of MHANY. Previously, I worked for ACORN for over 12 years, in various capacities, but principally as the national staff liaison to various organizations that provide funding and support for operations that ACORN runs in cities throughout the country. As a result of that experience, I have been fortunate to participate in many of ACORN’s local and national efforts to bring about fundamental institutional changes in housing. This also means that, on a local level, I am familiar with ACORN’s process for organizing within a community. The hallmark of ACORN’s organizing effort is that it works from the grass roots up. ACORN is committed to door-to-door organizing. Rather than borrowing from pre-existing institutional lenders in the community, ACORN seeks to find people who are concerned about problems that already exist and who want to do something about them, and who are willing to work together with other people in the neighborhood to address those issues. ACORN’s leaders are developed endogenously; ACORN encourages leadership development by putting local people (rather than, say, ACORN staff members or existing local leaders) in the position of speaking for the organization. Just last week, I was surprised to run into the son of one of the original squatters who is now organizing for ACORN. That kind of cross-fertilization seems to be happening more and more with the organization.

In New York City, ACORN’s history is, as Mary Ellen suggested, predominantly in the area of housing. The mission and purpose of this organization were defined by the squatting campaign, the successful squatting that ACORN undertook in the City of New York in 1985. In the process of organizing that campaign, ACORN built important political bridges and established valuable allies. That campaign involved so many people—in the

squatting, in the rallies, and in the media support—that ACORN succeeded against all odds. ACORN forced the Koch administration to refrain from the arrests and evictions that were the initial response to the campaign, and to negotiate a program.

However, some of the city's stipulations in that deal were: first, they would not negotiate with squatters; and second, they would not negotiate with a squatters' organization. Moreover, the city was not convinced that ACORN had sufficient experience in housing development work to rehabilitate the buildings since it had no local track record. City officials felt that if they gave these buildings to ACORN, it could not bring them up to code and properly assist the homesteaders. As a prerequisite, therefore, HPD required that technical assistance from other organizations be secured to provide certain services. For instance, the Pratt Institute Center for Community Environmental Development was brought in to provide architectural and construction services for the project. And Consumer Farmer Foundation was brought in to assist in the planning and structuring of an independent entity to administer any city funds that were put into the project. That independent entity was MHANY. So MHANY was a direct result of the marriage of those two technical-assistance providers with ACORN, which lent a community support base to the organization. It was originally structured only to assist these 30-odd families who had taken over buildings and were continuing to homestead their own. But the founding sponsors have continued to play their respective roles in the development of this organization.

A part of the city's agreement, then, was that it would turn over the homesteaded buildings to MHANY for one dollar apiece. The city also agreed to provide a full UDAG (Urban Development Action Grant) tax exemption for the buildings, taxes against the buildings themselves, and the property tax for the improvements. Further, the city agreed to provide \$15,000 per unit over the 180 units, or \$2.7 million total, in a forgivable loan to the project to assist homesteaders (again, with the requirement that they bring in licensed contractors to bring systems up to code).

A forgivable loan is an interesting concept; it is a loan for which no debt is paid but for which a mortgage exists against the property up until the twentieth year. But for each year that passes, one-twentieth of the loan is forgiven, until the twentieth year when it is forgiven in full. I had never heard of this being used with other projects; it may have been unique to this project. After all, we were providing housing for predominantly very low-income families. The median income of homesteaders in the MHANY project was about \$9,700 per year.

Beyond the resources which HPD originally agreed to turn over, MHANY was able to bring in the additional resources necessary to complete the rehabilitation of these buildings. In typical city fashion, it took two

years of working through the bureaucracy to even get this project to the Board of Estimate. In other words, it was over two years from the time the squatters occupied these buildings until the Board of Estimate actually approved the transfer of the buildings. And it was more than a year later that the first lines were closed on the project. So, for over three years, these people were really left to their own devices in these buildings. Only in 1989 were we able to begin to close the loans, hire contractors to help complete these buildings, and attempt to get their certificate of occupancy, or "C. of O." The C. of O. is the document that would then allow MHANY to transfer the titles of the buildings to the original homesteading families.

In cases where homesteaders occupied buildings for their own use (that is, they weren't seeking to provide housing for their entire families, often extended households) and where the buildings had three units or less, we were able to turn over the title to that building directly to them. For larger buildings, those with four or more units, or any vacant buildings where we are assigning members from the waiting list, we have to make co-ops. We want members to have an ownership interest and to have successor rights for their own family members. One of the structural vehicles that ACORN has employed here and in other housing corporations that they have put together is a land trust. That is designed to maintain restrictions of use; to ensure that use continues to be available and affordable to low-, very low-, and moderate-income families; and to enforce resale restrictions. These are limited-equity co-ops; the value that one can receive in selling that property is limited. In this case, members are required to sell the property back to MHANY so that, in turn, it can be made available to other eligible low-income families.

These units will never again see a speculative market. They are now really under control of the community. ACORN uses whatever institutions are available to empower people within that community. A land trust is a device that can be used to require that a whole property is always in the control of that community rather than of a city agency, a private organization, or some other entity that is several steps away from the people who are affected. That is a central theme that ACORN has pursued here and elsewhere: ACORN wants to see that local people are involved in decision making, that local people have control over their community.

**Robert Neuwirth** Now we'll take questions from the audience.

**Nelson Prime** Professor Marcuse, as homeless community advocates, we are especially interested in ways to help get language changed in certain proposals, certain bills that are being presented to the legislature. We find that

some of the language in some of the bills is excluding us, the homeless community and poverty-stricken people.

**Peter Marcuse** One of the key proposals suggested for the new city charter is a statement of all residents' legal right to housing. Everybody who lives in the City of New York would be legally entitled to a permanent home.

**Nelson Prime** But my question is, specifically, how can we get some of the language changed in the proposals that are now being presented?

**Peter Marcuse** There will be public hearings, one in each borough, during the first week in June. They will be well-advertised and they run from three to eight p.m., to accommodate both working and nonworking people. You should show up and speak your mind.

**Nelson Prime** We found that in those hearings you really can't get much done. You have to be in on the revising of the bill or the proposal. We find that there isn't enough support at the actual hearings. Also, what are the criteria for getting involved in the homesteading movement? We looked at that very hard and found it almost impossible to get into homesteading—legalized homesteading, that is.

**Peter Wood** I can tell you how to get involved with MHANY and the East New York project. It's a unique project—it was unique in its inception, and it doesn't follow the standard policy formats that other HPD programs do. There is an urban homesteading program within HPD, although I think it isn't a large program but rather restricted to particular buildings here and there in the city. I'm not an expert on any program with HPD other than my own, so I'm not the best person to respond to how you could help set up your own homesteading project. Maybe somebody else could speak to that.

**Larry Locke** I have one thing to say, picking up on what Professor Marcuse said about the way the city is planning to move the homeless community out of downtown Manhattan. You may have noticed that just today the mayor had a press conference to put forward a five-year plan for single homelessness. I suggest that each and every one of you take a look at that. It involves taking single homeless individuals and putting them on islands—isolating people, putting them in concentration camps. That is by far the worst thing the mayor has tried to do. That's one of the issues the homeless community has to address, and address vigorously. And we desperately need your support. Thank you.

**Andrew Castrucci** I'm from a homestead group on the Lower East Side. The statistics say that there are 250,000 abandoned, warehoused buildings. They say there are 100,000 homeless, up from 20,000 in 1980. To have faith in HPD, to have faith in the politicians, to have faith in the community boards to do anything about this is foolish. I really encourage people to do what ACORN and the other homestead groups are doing, to take over city-owned abandoned buildings. The community boards, for instance, are not even chosen by the people, they're chosen by politicians. Community Board No. 3 on the Lower East Side was responsible for the police riot in Tompkins Square Park. Community boards are a tool. We're living in a war zone, and I don't think the board knows what is actually happening. Why do we have to go out to East New York to get legal homesteading? What about right here? Why do we have to be segregated?

**Robert Neuwirth** I'd like to make one point in response to that, and in terms not just of homesteading but also planning. There's a bill pending before the City Council that would penalize landlords for holding apartments vacant, an antiwarehousing bill.<sup>2</sup> A majority in the City Council supports it, but it can't get out of committee because of the power of the mayor and the majority leader of the council, Peter Vallone. And the housing commissioner, Abraham Biderman, showed up at the public hearing and claimed that there were only about 6,200 warehoused apartments in the city.

**Peter Wood** In East New York we are attempting to make this project work and manage the properties and create good, solid, decent, affordable housing. Squatting isn't something that I would propose as a model for creating housing. Because of its randomness and spontaneity, you end up with a randomness of occupants with very different means, abilities, and interests but having to work together cooperatively on long-term policies. The "sweat equity" element of it becomes a self-selecting criterion: those with sufficient need and commitment and ability are those who stay with it. At the same time, if you're going to try and create something that is more than an individual building that somebody owns and can do whatever with, if you're going to make a program out of it, then in fact you have to do much more than physical rehabilitation. Then you're dealing with the political parts of the program and the need for consensus. So I would just say our situation in East New York was exceptional. I don't know whether it could work in any other community. But if it is attempted, either through random or organized action, I would certainly say, be very clear about what you want initially, and make sure that there is some process for ensuring people's commitment.



Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo, still from the videotape *No Place to Call Home*, San Diego, 1984.

**North San Diego County: The New Homeless.** *Since the late 1940s, because of the lack of low-income housing in the affluent area of North County, San Diego (Carlsbad, Rancho Santa Fe, Encinitas), migrant workers, many of whom are legal residents of the United States, moved to the unbalanced Green Valley area and set up living facilities in the summer of 1988. There were approximately 200 migrants living there. The news media began reporting on their lack of sanitary living conditions. The reports embarrassed county residents and authorities, who then declared the migrants' living quarters substandard and evicted them. Legalized migrants are among the new homeless in San Diego County in 1989. Asked to leave on February 1, 1989, the Green Valley residents set up camp near an abandoned North County landfill, but county authorities said that they had to move because of Health Department rules and formal complaints from nearby residents. On March 6, the Encinitas sheriff's station conducted sweeps of the new camp, and Border Patrol agents were on hand to deport any undocumented migrants.*

*San Diego North County nurseries are a \$265-million business. San Diego County growers do not provide housing for their 14,000 migrant workers. Alternative housing was unavailable to 95 percent of the workers and their families; 95 percent of migrant workers in North County have documents permitting them to work. The Comité Civico Popular Mixteco, organized by workers from Oaxaca (100 percent peasant), is beginning to organize San Diego migrant workers to demand housing for workers, which would include water and electricity, and to establish networks with other California migrant labor camps.*

**Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo**

**Marshall Berman** How did ACORN get this critical mass of people in East New York? What are the characteristics that have helped them stay with it for years? It seems to me that it could provide a workable model for other parts of the city like the South Bronx or the Lower East Side.

**Mary Ellen Phifer** I want to emphasize not so much squatting as organizing. It was really years of organizing that led us even to look at a particular tactic that might sway the city.

When ACORN first came to New York in 1984, it began to recruit members in the East New York section because that's where the person who brought ACORN to New York City lived, near a lot of abandoned buildings. We thought the buildings seemed structurally sound, and there were a lot of people in the community who needed homes. They decided to take over those buildings and see what the city would do about turning the buildings over to them. It was their decision. ACORN provided the organizing to bring them together and help them to understand what they were up against—that they would probably get arrested, first of all, but also all of the other things you have to endure in order to be successful and get those buildings.

**Marshall Berman** What were they like, the people who hung in there? What qualities did they have, what characteristics?

**Peter Wood** I guess the best profile would be a family that had been involved in other neighborhood struggles, and was familiar with the kind of long-term goals and low-income housing needs that the organization was attempting to respond to. Obviously, the members should be hard working and principled. Like every homesteading program, we had a small contingent who were in it for their own self-interest. But to homestead successfully, one has to put together a group with shared principles and long-range goals. It can't be based on the individual effort or interest in profiteering.

**Marshall Berman** Do you have plans to organize in other parts of the city?

**Mary Ellen Phifer** ACORN has organized in a variety of neighborhoods, in Brooklyn and in Queens; in fact, it's been organizing in the city for six or seven years now.

**Frances Fox Piven** The squatting organized by ACORN started in Philadelphia, Detroit, and Boston before it came to New York. What distinguishes ACORN's organizing, I think, is that they're careful to target very specific,

small, low-income areas with the kind of racial composition they want to organize. They don't need a selection process where more middle-class people are drawn to the organization. They are very committed organizers and they like direct action. And they've been doing this now for almost 20 years. Many of the organizers come out of the 1960s movements. The squatting was tried in three cities before New York. One of the things that makes it work is that you get a response from the city government, which then provides some money. You can't do it through self-help. So squatting is a political tactic, not a self-help tactic.

**Nelson Prime** I'm from Homeward Bound Community Services. With respect to squatting, you can do it either high profile or low profile. We've been able to do it very high profile, down at City Hall Park, right in front of the mayor and all his constituents. That called for sleeping in the worst conditions. We wanted to create a model for housing, and we've been able to organize when we thought we wouldn't be able to. If you're talking about commitment, I think we've proven we have it. We've gone to HPD on numerous occasions with Norm Siegel of the New York Civil Liberties Union, for example. But we find that each time we contest the city, we're put down.

What homeless people need is some kind of help in creating a system where they have input. When you're talking about the shelter system, you're talking about family dispersal—the father may be in Queens and the mother and child in Manhattan. I believe that if people make the commitment to their housing, they'll be able to maintain it. We have a lot of not-for-profit organizations competing against each other for money. We have the political process squeezing the not-for-profits out and producing better ways for private developers to move in, including by tax deductions. So how can we effectively put together an agenda, and see that each community gets its share?

**Frances Fox Piven** Well, it's really a question of politics. The opposition to turning the city's governmental apparatus around, and directing government funds toward housing for people who need it, is going to be great on the part of those who benefit from that apparatus and those tax breaks that deplete the public budget.

That opposition isn't likely to be overcome with anything less than militant and massive action. You can think of squatting as a way that people can obtain housing, simply the first step in a process which is partly self-help, partly an effort by the city government to keep these little people quiet. Or you can think of squatting as a stage in trying to organize a much more massive movement, squatting designed specifically, as you said at the beginning, to attract public attention to what is almost a criminal scandal.

**Robert Neuwirth** If homeless organizing combines with community organizing, so that homeless groups will be able to work together with community groups, it's one way of establishing a broad base.

In my neighborhood, Clinton or Hell's Kitchen, we tried to work with people from the Holland Hotel and found that some of the hotel's administrators were highly obstructionist. They wouldn't let any of the hotel residents have visitors. We had to meet in front of the hotel, and it was really difficult to bring the community and the residents together to try to get some of the vacant apartments in the community occupied.

**Robert Friedman** There have been some successes due to political organizing around the issue of homelessness. As Peter Marcuse said, for years the Koch administration's approach was to do nothing. Activists in the Coalition for the Homeless and other groups were successful in raising the media's consciousness about the issue.

When the story reached the front pages of the city's newspapers, and people could no longer avoid the sight of homeless people camped out at City Hall or living in subway tunnels, then the mayor had to do something. So, he invented this \$5 billion plan—a bit hokey in some respects—that would provide, or in some cases rehabilitate, 250,000 units of housing [the Ten-Year Plan], although now it turns out that only about 30,000 are low income.

But forget the numbers game. Money is being spent on housing where it wasn't a few years ago, and I think that's largely a consequence of consciousness-raising through political action.

**Nelson Prime** We're going to be out there again pestering Koch, reminding him that the homeless problem is not yet solved; we don't have the answers.

**Bill Kammann** I work with homeless families in Staten Island. Professor Marcuse, when you say other housing units have only 20 percent homeless or real low-income housing, you make the assumption that housing developments with people of different economic levels are going to be safer and better-run than housing units which contain only people who are homeless and on public assistance. Why do we make that assumption? Why do we assume that the drug problem and other such problems we're addressing here tonight are going to result in these SIP [Special Initiatives Program] buildings and other buildings being torn apart, being ruined? Why do we make that assumption? Because we believe people are not really "entitled" to entitlement programs. From the president of the United States on down, we call people bums who find themselves in the position of being on welfare. And it seems to me that that attitude was inherent in your description of the

inequity of reghettoization. What I'm proposing is that we change the idea of what entitlement means. If you're entitled to live someplace—and we are all providing for other citizens to live someplace—and if those housing projects are being torn apart, then artists' groups or other community activist groups or, best of all, the people who live in that community themselves should structure the thing to get what they want.

The families I work with want to be safe, want to be secure, want to live in a decent place, and want to provide an opportunity for their kids to go to school, get an education, and do better. There are ghettos in New York on the Lower East Side where poor people were crammed together historically, one group after another. Those groups emerged from that ghetto and made their way to great successes in the city. Why not, then, in the South Bronx or in Harlem or elsewhere?

**Peter Marcuse** I don't disagree with you. I disagree with your use of the word "we" to include you and the city and the politicians.

**Bill Kammann** Aren't those our elected officials?

**Peter Marcuse** Yes, but some of us have these ideas and others fight against them. Just to say generally that "we" have this idea about the homeless obscures the fact that there are people on opposite sides of this issue. The problems that are created in ghettos, are not created because the people who live in them are any different from anybody else. They're created by the fact that it's not "we" but "they"—those who run the City of New York—who have historically, for literally hundreds of years, treated the schools in those areas differently, treated the streets in those areas differently, treated the safety and security of those areas differently. And I think one of the ways of breaking out of that is by providing that people can live together.

**Bill Kammann** I agree with you. I think a solution would be to say that so many units in every building in New York should be opened up for homeless families and then there would be a homeless family in every building. But short of that, it still seems to me a cop-out to say that the people in power have the wrong ideas. It seems to me that—at least by what they say—the elected officials are committed to providing a certain decent level of housing. It's not enough to shrug your shoulders and say the big guys upstairs are working against us, so we're stymied. The big guys are supposedly up there to solve the problems that people have.

**Audience** I feel compelled to tell everyone that there's a national movement called Housing Now, to restore the funds the federal government has cut

from public housing in the past eight years. Also, as to what the squatter was saying about organizing artists, I know how difficult it is to organize artists because I'm an artist myself. But I'd be willing to try. I have a little bit of organizational experience, and if anyone wants to see me after the meeting, I'll take your name and put together a meeting or something, just to talk about some things we might do.

Peter, undoubtedly, the mayor is using his Ten-Year Plan to get election results this year. Can you talk about that plan? How much housing goes to homeless people? And is it just a political move on the mayor's part?

**Peter Marcuse** I think it's strictly a political move. There is supposed to be \$5.1 billion set aside for housing low- and moderate-income people. What that means is moderate-income people and not low-income people—the amount going to low-income people is a small proportion. The source of the money isn't set. Some is supposed to come from the Port Authority, but it hasn't been committed yet. I think to the extent there is any low-income housing being rehabilitated, it will be housing in ghettos, and there will be no money for operating expenses or heat or fuel or maintenance. I think the plan is utterly inadequate; there's a lawsuit pending against it. What is needed is a plan that is spelled out and subject to public hearings and public input at meetings like this.<sup>1</sup>

**Audience** The mayor's numbers look compelling on paper, and a lot of people aren't challenging him.

**Peter Marcuse** The best analysis I can think of offhand is the one that appeared in the March [1989] issue of *City Limits*. It looks in detail at the incomes and at the allocation of money for each income group and shows that it is directed not toward those most in need but toward middle-income people.

**Bob Bogen** I was a planner assigned to East New York and was allowed to describe the problems in East New York but never permitted to do anything about them. Since then, I've done some planning in Third World countries and it's been suggested that in some ways New York is becoming a Third World city. There are two points that I haven't really heard—maybe I've just not caught them—that seem necessary in order to deal with the problem. First, the problem is not just a New York City problem, it's a national problem. In past decades, it was dealt with to some extent with federal aid. The last commentator suggested that there be a restoration of funds for public housing. However, there are much more ambitious programs that some of the panel members, I'm sure, are aware of. One calls for expenditures of \$30

AFTER A SUCCESSFUL COLONIZATION



THE MOTHER SHIP LANDS

John Koenig, *The Mother Ship Lands*, photomontage, 1950

billion a year. That's the number that's used by Seymour Melman in his *Save America Budget*, his national budget for all purposes. The other numbers are two and three times that size. The Institute for Policy Studies in Washington proposes government subsidies for public housing ranging from \$29 to 88 billion per year. If New York received a tenth of that, it would amount to possibly \$9 billion a year. Obviously, that's a lot more than the mayor's \$5 billion over ten years. With that kind of money, some real change could occur.

The next question is, where does the money come from? We should be very clear about where it comes from. There have been allusions to it in the current proposals for the federal budget—\$400 billion in tax giveaways. Some may even be legitimate—a good many of the tax benefits are given to homeowners, but there are a lot of others. The tax giveaways add up to even more than the military budget, which is about \$300 billion. The Melman budget proposes cuts in the military budget of \$100 billion.

The second point is, I've heard no discussion during the hearings for New York's proposed charter revision about provisions that originally gave citizens a measure of control over the government. New York's City Council was created by the 1937 City Charter. There was no City Council before that. The original concept provided for an election in which for every 75,000 people in a borough, a member of the City Council would be elected at large. Until that provision of the LaGuardia days is put back into effect, we're not going to have much control over our city officials. I've heard no one on the City Charter Revision Commission talk about it. Until that's put back on the agenda, we're not going to have much control over the money that comes in from Washington or the \$5 billion that Koch keeps talking about.

**Audience** This is a question for Jamelie. The topic of one of our previous panels was artists' housing, and I know that the Embassy Hotel is not really artists' housing, but it involves an artists group in an area that's marginal. I'm not familiar with London, Ontario, but I wonder whether the intentions to involve artists, to work on the environment inside the hotel, has set a tone for possible development in the surrounding area. The block the Embassy is on was bought by a developer for a shopping plaza. Are there any possible connections between that and the artists' presence in the hotel? If you avoided gentrification, you've succeeded where many have failed. Obviously Soho, the area we're in right now, has experienced extreme development pressures. Also, how is it possible to buy a block from the developer? Even if it is possible to obtain the money, why would a developer want to sell it?

**Jamelle Hassan** One block in the area was bought up ten years ago by a number of companies; slowly over a number of years, they accumulated the whole block, which had been traditionally artists' studios and low-income housing as well as small boutiques. It was in a downtown area but marginal in terms of its real estate value at that point. But over the ten years, a number of developments occurred, including the building of the courthouse and a new art gallery, which in fact, was built on top of a Native Canadian site. There was tremendous protest against the development of this part of the city. Now, that area is referred to as downtown, whereas the Embassy Hotel is located in the East End. London is not a big city, but the East End is still fairly removed from where the downtown developments are occurring. In fact, the area where the hotel is located is probably one of the areas that still have affordable housing generally, including for artists.

There are also, as I mentioned, a number of Native people who have recently immigrated to London from the reservations. It's a very mixed community, and it's also the original factory industry area of the city. So it's still not a terribly desirable area for developers, who are concentrating on the other end of the city. The group has involved activists as well as enlightened people with money, who would like to see the block restored to its original use. They are pulling together as a coalition to buy it back as a group and then resell it to more people.

So there are actually two separate sorts of activities happening in relation to London's development. We are also getting a number of the shopping-mall complexes in the city. Our city could have learned from all these developments in North America over the past 15 years that these things are disastrous. Yet, the City Council follows a retrograde policy of going along with developers. One of the major fights the group has won has been over designation of the block as a heritage site, so it wouldn't be torn down. But that's still no guarantee. The real guarantee is collective control of the whole block.

People of various income ranges are involved in the coalition, which represents a very broad base of people. It's because we're working on a small scale that I thought we ought to touch base with people who own companies in the city and have a fair investment in keeping the industrial base from being totally destroyed. I don't know whether in 15 years the East End, where we live, will also fall prey to the developers. That may very well be the case. But we are strongly encouraging anyone who has any resources to work together with us cooperatively and collectively.

In Canada we have a number of programs where people can get assistance for rehabilitation of property to convert it for living. Here, historic or

industrial areas are the most desirable for development, so maybe pressures on the East End will be coming. Those areas in the downtown core of London really have been expropriated—they no longer provide a possibility of housing for the very low-income and homeless people. We're trying to address what has happened downtown and avoid having it happen in the East End.

**Kian Tajbakhsh** We started out by saying that planning is political. I want to suggest a way in which planning is much more insidiously carried out in this city, and I want to talk just a little about the language of politics. I worked as a tenant organizer for four years in a community organization in Coney Island, and it was my experience that the city controlled the language we used to talk about things. I'm a bit critical of the language used here tonight, as well.

In the first forum on housing, people talked about how the question of homelessness has to become a revolutionary issue. For something to become a revolutionary issue, it has to have an oppositional culture; it has to have an oppositional vocabulary. What happened to a lot of community groups in New York City and around the country in the past 20 years is that they began by being somewhat oppositional, but by the late 1970s they had been sucked into using the vocabulary of the state. Concretely: grant writing, proposal writing, programs, private partnerships, handshakes with HPD, stuff I even heard coming from the panel tonight. People come here, and they talk numbers, they talk statistics, they talk tax breaks. This is not how you're going to build an oppositional political movement dealing with housing, because this is the language that HPD wants people to talk, and then no oppositional culture will be able to emerge.

I left the community organization I was working with because all they wanted me to do was write grant proposals for low-income housing, to leverage money. All this bullshit vocabulary used by developers is making all the activists in community organizations talk like minidevelopers. What I want to suggest to people who are homeless or people who are artists is this: Beware! If you are housing with money from Citibank, think about that. It's like artists getting support from IBM.

There are issues of race and class here. Advocates for housing are professionals, and they know how to talk that lingo, which most people don't know how to use. You cannot *produce* low-income housing; you produce concrete structures. The reasons why it will be low-income have nothing to do with the structure you produce. You can begin by creating physical structures, which is what these groups do, and later on, what income level it's going to address, the maintenance cost or whatever, has nothing to do with

the actual production of the housing. It has to do with politics, but not the politics of making deals with assemblymen.

I'm not saying that you can't do that in the short run, but unless there's an oppositional culture that doesn't involve all this grant writing and buying into the vocabulary of the state, I don't think any great change is going to come about. So, to the homeless people and activists who want to fight for themselves, I say, "Beware of the so-called leaders."

**Audience** What's the alternative?

**Kian Tajbakhsh** The alternative is to create an oppositional culture, that doesn't follow the leaders, that doesn't just use their language. For example, the question of why ACORN's squatting project wasn't carried out in Manhattan as opposed to East New York shouldn't be: "Because the land values are lower out there." It's just that those are the rules of the game, and the city sets the rules. Unless the rules can be broken, you don't play by the rules, I don't see anything coming out of it.

**Audience** I understand what you're saying, but if it was a question of using a certain vocabulary—if it was a question of using the word "unit" as opposed to "studio"—and you were going to get thousands of dollars and were going to be able to get that space converted, would you say don't use the word "unit"?

**Audience** I imagine he's saying don't take the money at all. Aren't you suggesting there's a language police that determine how we pick different strategies to benefit people? I don't like to see the word "unit," but if the man said it was going to be a several thousand dollar issue, so that we would be creating affordable housing for people, then I don't see—

**Audience** Affordable housing isn't a technical issue; it's got nothing to do with legislation which comes from above. All the groups that were "working for low-income housing" in the city have unwittingly allowed gentrification to come to their areas, because the city says, "Stop doing tenant organizing. You have to write grant proposals. Be realistic! We can give you 2,000 units." In five years' time, when David Rockefeller and his New York City Housing Partnership are building all their buildings, what is the group going to be doing? Nothing.

If you take the money, you still have to continue organizing. Organizing is a process of gradual radicalization—people try to get something they think is reasonable, and they come up against the power structure that says



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no. They learn from that experience that you have to fight to get what you want and you have to be willing to take certain risks. That's something that has to go on at the same time as taking whatever money.

The city manages things by trying to institutionalize the struggle over the distribution of housing or property. There is a conflict between the social-welfare responsibilities of the city—or the country, on another level—

and the functional conditions of the economy. The result is a more aggressive practice of management of the public, whether through the economic policing of 42nd Street development or a police "TNT" squad. The programs are therapeutic, they're not really organic. They don't come out of the community's interests; they're not generated by it.

The fact that there's no ability to plan what the city should be like ten years from now is obscured. I agree with the point made earlier that a lot of the communication comes from the top down. But the city politicians are going to have a big problem, because the people are organizing at the community level, at the neighborhood level—squatters, homeless organizations. And we've seen a lot of people in these panel discussions who represent them, too. All those people are going to do what they're doing, no matter what. And they're going to have some degree of success.

**Marshall Berman** I think one function of the Koch housing plan is to shut up all the housing activists and all the community organizers and all the groups that have bugged Koch and made trouble for him for years and years. The premise is that if you shut up for the next few months, you'll get a share of the big bucks, but if you make trouble, you can be sure you won't—the wives and kids and homeless people won't get a share of it; so if you care about them, shut up. I can see why housing activists would be tempted, because they aren't thinking only of themselves. But I hope they don't buy it—I hope they make a lot of trouble and make it clear how much this plan is a betrayal of the people it purports to help. I hope they find some way to shout in unison, so that Koch can't campaign against the "kooks" and the "anarchists."

**Robert Neuwirth** I want to thank everyone for coming. I think that the point now is, as everyone said, "Get involved!" And if you're concerned about corporations taking over the rhetoric, then get involved. Get involved in planning in your own communities in the city. Thanks for coming.

#### Notes

1. The Board of Estimate was disbanded in August of 1990. Land-use, budget, and planning decisions previously made by the Board of Estimate will become the responsibilities of the City Council or the Planning Commission depending upon the issue.

2. See note 6 in "Housing: Gentrification, Dislocation, and Fighting Back."

3. Mayor Koch's Ten-Year Plan basically became the plan of Mayor David Dinkins with some major structural changes. These changes include some provisions for homeless individuals as well as for homeless families. Mayor Dinkins also proposes to try out various experimental programs.

## UNEQUAL DEVELOPMENT: THE TWO WATERFRONTS

In the late 1960s and through the '70s, a landfill was created for new development on the western shore of Lower Manhattan, while near its eastern shore private housing stock inland from the public housing developments began to deteriorate. While Manhattan's financial center continued to push its shoreline out into the Hudson River, housing stock on the Lower East Side was increasingly abandoned, gutted, and often razed. In both cases, open land was produced. In the 1980s, the western shore would become the site of luxury housing—Battery Park City—while the Lower East Side would receive scant funds for public housing.

The Battery Park City of the 1960s was to include low- and moderate-income housing. Conversely, in the early 1930s, before there was any promise of new low-income housing on the East River front, there were six years of shared hopes and elaborate plans for an attractively landscaped East River Drive, like Riverside Drive, that would lead to slum removal inland and be linked to high-class housing development along its inner edge.

What was actually built on the two waterfronts reflects a larger trend: that of New York City's shifting priorities. In the period following World War II, housing was seen more or less as a necessary service to help support the "productive forces," the wage la-

borers of the manufacturing industries and, more specifically, the returning veterans of the war effort. Docks remained on the western shore while affordable housing, which included moderate-income tenants, was produced on the eastern shore. In the following period, capital was invested increasingly *elsewhere*, and the city's role as a center for manufacturing began to shrink.

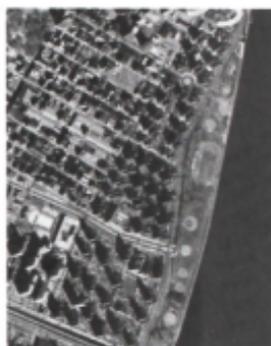
The promises of affordable housing on the Battery Park City landfill site faded along with the fiscal crisis. The city's top priority became servicing those who were to benefit from the "boom" in the ever-expanding financial district. Correspondingly, save for the simple maintenance of existing publicly subsidized projects, housing for those left out of the new prosperity became a nonissue, as large tracts of privately owned rental housing were left to decline unchecked.

### Lower East Side/East Village Waterfront

**1934** The New Deal's Public Works Authority proves a new source for the funding of highways and low-cost housing. The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is established to build and manage the city's public housing, marking the start of public housing in this country. Along income lines, tenancy is intended to be almost a cross section of the city.



World Financial Center at Battery Park City, New York City.



Lower East Side waterfront, 1966.

East Village waterfront, 1984.

East Village waterfront, 1988.

**1937** The Housing Act of 1937 states that one housing unit must be taken down for every unit of public housing built (*equivalent elimination*) to avoid competition between new and existing housing. The Act thus protects the interests of slum owners in a weak market. The East River Drive opens between Grand and East 12th Streets, with traffic lights for pedestrian crossings at every intersection to provide access to East River Park.

**1938** Once adjacent housing is slated for a less affluent group, the roadway takes back its mantle of local traffic relief. Stanley Isaacs, the borough president, announces his intent to make the drive "a streamlined highway." Its purpose is no longer to serve the adjacent residential community. The city and the Federal Housing Agency (FHA) work out a deal to build public housing in the Corlears Hook area, Vladeck Houses, which become the precedent for the development of public housing adjacent to the East River Drive along its northern section.

**1939** The Montgomery-Grand Street section of East River Drive is approved to coincide with demolition proceedings for Vladeck Houses. The *New York Times* keeps hope alive for luxury housing on the drive. One realtor involved in earlier plans for the area

charges in a letter to the editor that the city had "stolen the site the banks had in mind for white-collar housing since 1933."

**1940** The East River Drive opens from Montgomery to East 30th Street.

**1946-49** Jacob Riis Houses, 19 buildings between East River Drive and Avenue D from East 13th to East 6th Street, are the second public housing projects built after World War II, in part to absorb people displaced from the Stuyvesant slum-clearance site. (Stuyvesant Town, completed in 1947, draws twice the NYCHA rent levels.) It is begun with federal subsidies, but rising costs delay construction. The 1947 McCarthy Act permits resumption of construction where municipal governments contribute funds to cover excess costs. The southern portion changes to city subsidy. Construction resumes with city subsidy in the form of "Jacob Riis City Bonds." In the city-subsidized public housing projects, income limits are substantially higher than for the earlier or later federal projects.

**1947-49** Lillian Wald Houses, 16 buildings directly south of Riis Houses, from East 6th to East Houston Street, are built, also in part to ab-

sorb some of those displaced from the Stuyvesant site. It is a state-subsidized project and, like the city program, geared toward higher-income tenants than those served by federal projects. The Riis and Wald projects total 35 buildings, 3,629 apartments, and house at least 10,500 people.

**1952-59** Baruch Houses, 17 buildings directly south of Wald Houses, from East Houston to Delancey Street, are built with 2,194 apartments housing over 6,000 people.

**1968** Brooke Amendment: no one in public housing is to pay more than 25 percent of his or her income for rent.

**1972** Jacob Riis Houses (city) are converted to federal subsidy.

**1976-78** The East Village (as defined by the area between the Bowery and Avenue D, south of East 14th Street and north of East Houston, excluding the public housing) experiences its peak vacancy rates, and 800 buildings are in tax arrears.

**1977** Lillian Wald Houses (state) are converted to federal subsidy.

**1980** The East Village (as defined above) has a population of 50,000, down 30.2 percent from 1970. For the same period, rents increase between 128 percent and 172 percent in the area's 11 census tracts, universally higher than the citywide increase. Furthermore, a quarter of all households in this area are below the poverty line.

**1984-86** Lower East Side Rehab (Group 5), between Avenues B and C and East 4th and East 7th Streets, is built.

**1985-86** Lower East Side I Infill located at Delancey, Rivington, Forsyth, and Eldridge Streets, and Lower East Side II between East 4th, 5th, and 6th

Streets and Avenues B, C, and D, are built. The above three projects, developed by NYCHA, total 11 low-rise buildings (432 apartments) and house 1,313 people. Lower East Side III, located between East 8th and 9th Streets and Avenues C and D, is planned to include 56 apartments. For all NYCHA units, the maximum yearly individual income is \$16,500; for a family of four, it is \$23,600.

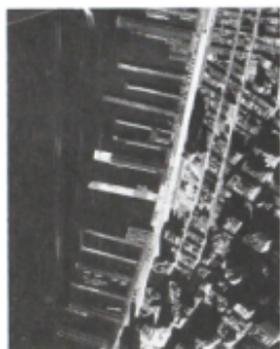
**1988** The city currently owns some 500 vacant buildings and lots on the Lower East Side. There is not much statistical data as to when and how many buildings or housing units were abandoned on the Lower East Side. There does exist a listing of *in rem* properties, those the city has repossessed for property tax delinquency.

#### **Battery Park City Waterfront**

**1966** New York's governor, Nelson Rockefeller, proposes Battery Park City (BPC) be built on Lower Manhattan's western waterfront, to include two office towers and 14,000 apartments: 6,000 luxury, 6,000 middle income, and 1,400 low income. Mayor John Lindsay would prefer that it house only high-income residents.

**1968** The Battery Park City Authority (BPCA) is created by the state legislature as a "public benefit" corporation intended to improve the Battery Park City Project Area by creating there, in cooperation with the city and the private sector, a commercial and residential community on a landfill.

**1969** Lindsay, reelected as an Independent and in need of liberal support, agrees to divide housing on the landfill equally among low-, moderate-, and



Financial District waterfront,  
1966.



Battery Park City landfill, 1984.



Battery Park City, 1988.

high-income residents, and that these groups be mixed throughout the project. The city leases the project area to BPCA: development is to be controlled by the master lease agreement between the two. Work on the landfill is completed; it remains empty throughout the following decade.

**1970** Despite the 1969 agreement, the Lindsay administration and BPCA make no visible effort to develop low-income housing. BPCA seeks developers to build conventionally financed high-income housing. (Proposing economic segregation is far more acceptable than proposing racial segregation, but there is much evidence that BPCA was aiming at creating an all-white project.)

**1974** Although BPC could have been developed as a "middle-income" housing development with Section 236 subsidies and tax-exempt bond financing, the planners do not want even middle-income people living there. Low- and moderate-income construction would "act as a brake on demand for luxury units," it is claimed, despite very low demand for luxury housing in that area (see Maynard T. Robison, "Vacant Ninety Acres, Well Located, River View," in *The Apple Sliced*, 1984).

**1975** New York's economic and fiscal turmoil makes it difficult for state-created agencies like BPCA to borrow money.

**1976** The enlarged landfill (92 acres) is completed.

**1979** In the "rescue plan" for the BPC project put together by Mayor Edward Koch and Governor Hugh Carey, there is now no mention of subsidized housing.

**1980** BPCA obtains mortgage insurance from HUD for the first six buildings, guaranteeing government absorption of any losses. Construction begins on the 1,712-unit Gateway Plaza, BPC's first residential development, financed under programs originally intended to produce middle-income housing.

**1981** Olympia & York (O&Y) Properties begins construction of the World Financial Center, with a ten-year tax abatement from the Urban Development Corporation in return for developing the project in half the normal amount of time. New York state senator Franz Leichter makes public the total value of tax deferred: \$117 million over a ten-year period. Ten years after the last building is completed, O&Y

will begin a 15-year payback of \$76 million. Leichter estimates O&Y's final savings at \$85-90 million.

**1982** Gateway Plaza, BPC's first phase of residential development, is completed.

**1984** Construction begins on Rector Place, the second phase of residential development just south of Gateway Plaza, to include 2,200 units in 12 buildings in a four-block area bisected by a park.

**1986** The World Financial Center opens as a corporate headquarters; the first tenants move in. The WFC includes four office towers, a "winter garden," a "public" plaza, and a yacht harbor.

**1988** Under Governor Mario Cuomo's direction, the Housing New York Program is developed, backed by excess BPC revenues, to create low- and moderate-income housing *elsewhere* in the city. Since BPC is on *state* land, its lessees need not pay real estate taxes to the city. Instead, annual payments in lieu of real estate taxes ("PILOT") are required to be made to BPCA by the lessees developing the sites. These PILOT sums are comparable to Manhattan real estate taxes. Steve Norman, City Bureau director, calls BPC the "largest scale linkage project in the country, where local government takes advantage of a boom in the central business district real estate and spins it off to benefit low-income." But when all the federal, state, and city monies poured into the BPC project in the form of tax abatements, bond issues, mortgage insurance, and the necessary infrastructure are accounted for, it is questionable whether the BPCA is giving the city, much less low-income residents, a gift of any kind.



Lower East Side II, infill project, 1987.

**1987** The last building in the Rector Place neighborhood is completed.

**1988** The BPCA reports the results of its survey of BPC's 3,200 residents: the average yearly household income is \$102,000. Construction begins on Battery Place, BPC's third phase residential development south of Rector Place, to include 2,800 units on nine parcels of land. Half of the 1.6-mile promenade, to span the entire BPC waterfront, is completed or under construction. Requests for proposals for the North Residential Neighborhood, north of the World Financial Center to Chambers Street, are submitted. Stuyvesant High School's new building is under construction on its northeast corner. North Park, eight acres of fields and meadows along River Terrace—an avenue intended as a contemporary version of Riverside Drive—is scheduled for completion in 1991.



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**BATTERY PARK CITY AUTHORITY**

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March 26, 1990

As you can see from the enclosed advertisement, Battery Park City Authority has announced a design competition for a Police Memorial.

Battery Park City Authority is very proud of the high level of artistic achievement in our ninety-two-acre development, from the individual sculptures of Richard Artschwager, Ned Smyth, and R. M. Fischer; to the collaborative works of Mary Miss, Stanton Eckstut, and Susan Child at South Cove; Scott Burton, Siah Armajani, Cesar Pelli and M. Paul Friedberg at The Plaza, and the works in progress of Jennifer Bartlett, Alexander Cooper and Nicholas Quennell at South Gardens, and Tom Otterness at North Park.

We believe that the Police Memorial competition will attract artists and designers of the same high caliber and stature to continue Battery Park City Authority's tradition of excellence in all aspects of design.

We have assembled an outstanding group of design professionals to assist the Police Shield Groups in their selection process. The members of the Design Committee are as follows:

- \* James Wines - Chairman of Environmental Design, Parsons School of Design
- \* Susan Freedman - Director of Public Art Fund
- \* Amanda Burden - Vice President of Planning and Design, BPCA
- \* James Wolfe - New York City sculptor
- \* Barbara Sahlman - Community Board 1 representative

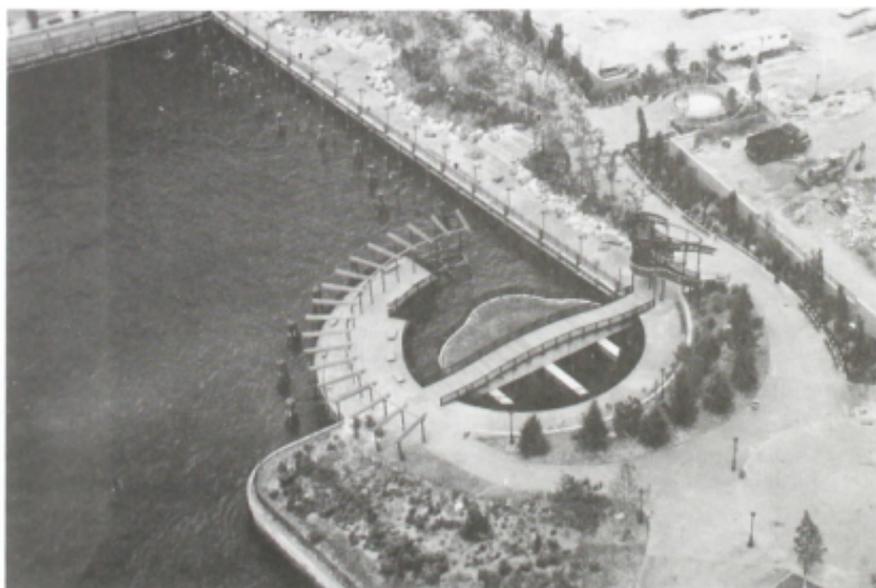
We are eager for you to participate and look forward to hearing from you. As you can see in the advertisement, the deadline for requesting a program packet is April 30th, 1990. If you would like additional information please contact Ms. Sidney Druckman at 416-5378.



**Richard Artschwager, *Sitting/Stance*, 1989.**  
West Thames Street Park, Battery Park City.



**R. M. Fischer, *Rector Gate*, 1989.**  
western entrance to Rector Park, Battery Park City.



**Mary Miss, artist; Stanton Eckstut, architect; and Susan Child, landscape architect.**  
The South Cove, Battery Park City, 1988.

## THE ARCHITECTURE OF FEAR

The Coalition to Replan the West Side Urban Renewal Area is concerned with a parcel of some of the world's most valuable real estate, a 20-square-block on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Columbus Avenue is the backbone of the neighborhood. Since the late 1950s, the low-rise buildings along Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues—almost all homes of low-income families—have been the object of massive demolition under urban renewal. When first proposed in 1958, this urban renewal project was to be a model for the entire nation. But after years of experience with urban renewal, the coalition urges you to take stock of the effects of "renewal" on our community.

The West Side Urban Renewal Area has always been known for its diversity: in its buildings, in its politics, in its people. A local wall painting shows the flag of Puerto Rico and the flag of Lares, commemorating a rebellion of the people of Puerto Rico against foreign domination. Above the flags is written, "*Viva Puerto Rico Libre*" and "*Venceremos*," "We shall win." On another wall of the same lot is painted the flag of revolutionary Cuba. To the right is an assertion that this park does, in fact, belong to the people; the sign reads, "Keep our plaza clean."

The West Side has long been known for its left-of-center politics, from liberal to radical. In the '50s, at the height of the McCarthy witch-hunt, the West Side elected as its congressman William Fitts Ryan, the most outspoken critic of the House Un-American Activities Committee. The West Side gave birth to the reform Democratic Party movement, and during the '60s, the movement against the Vietnam War was stronger here than anywhere else in the city.

Urban renewal brought a new politics to the area. Middle-income tenants from other areas soon filled buildings like the RNA house, a project sponsored by the Riverside Neighborhood Assembly. One of the early actions taken by the new tenants was to stop the construction of low-income housing on an adjacent plot of land at 96th Street and Amsterdam Avenue.

When the urban renewal program was first proposed in 1958, the City Planning Commission said: "It is a balanced neighborhood in a democratic pattern with considerable character which should be maintained." That was 1958; since then, many tenants have found padlocks on the buildings where they once lived. Many of these buildings have been bought by real-estate



Lone low-income building awaiting demolition.



Political graffiti.

speculators, vacated, and held off the market for later sale. Completely gutted brownstones, with walls, floors, ceilings, plumbing, and wiring removed, with only the shells remaining, have become a familiar site on the West Side over the past 25 years. The interiors have been rebuilt and rented as luxury apartments. The federal government has encouraged this kind of operation through FHA loans.

Urban renewal was also intended to “upgrade” surrounding neighborhoods, to encourage private developers to conduct their own “urban renewal.” To the south, in the West Sixties, the huge cultural complex of Lincoln Center was built—for those able to afford the high price of culture there—as part of the Lincoln Square Renewal Area, where 4,620 low- and moderate-income dwelling units were demolished. To the north, the expansion of Columbia University also dislodged low-income residents.

The city government helped with the relocation of tenants in the West Side Urban Renewal Area. But when relocation wasn't proceeding fast enough, landlords used an amazing array of frequently cruel harassment tactics. Police generally sided with landlords in such cases and were quick to guard the landlords' private property. Tenants and community workers were often arrested. Blacks, Hispanics, and elderly whites were the principal victims of these changes. Tenants trying to fight back were confronted by a solid wall of bureaucracy, as the city refused to enforce its tenant-protection laws.

It was estimated that the combined effect of all these policies on the area from West 59th to 110th Street would be to force out 112,670 low- and moderate-income residents by 1980 (twice the population of White Plains, New York). Feeling the brutal effects of heavily subsidized renewal and expansion efforts, many tenants fought back. A group called Angry Tenants, mostly in the West Seventies and Eighties, demanded (1) a halt to evictions and removals, (2) public housing, and (3) preservation of the community as a place where people of all cultures and incomes can live. Around 1969, a number of community workers, seeing the impact of forced removals on families, joined with activists who understood the political significance of this vast population shift. In February 1970, the first squatter family moved into a vacant building. By that summer, 214 squatter families had taken possession of—had “liberated”—vacant apartments in the urban renewal area. The city’s initial reaction was to call in the police. A major show of community support stopped that. The city’s next response was to smash the toilet bowls of the remaining vacant apartments, and to rip out the plumbing and brick up the entranceways of vacated buildings. But in a series of confrontations, for which the squatters had wide-ranging community support, the city was forced to recognize the legitimacy of the squatters’ cause and let them stay.

The squatters moved into more than 30 buildings. Out of that beginning grew the Coalition to Replan the West Side Urban Renewal Area. After protracted negotiations, the squatters and storefront groups agreed to move out if the city rezoned the site from middle-income to low-rent, public housing.

Construction of the proposed low-income housing was to have begun at Site 30 in June 1972. But neighbors sued federal, state, and city officials to prevent its construction. One of these neighbors, Trinity Episcopal School, a private institution, has (as stated in the lawsuit) almost \$9 million invested in Trinity House, a new school building under an apartment building. Trinity claims that its interests would be “irreparably damaged” by additional low-income housing and that more low-income residents would “destroy the fabric of the community.” Implicit in the suit is the belief that low-income residents directly across the street from Trinity House would make it unattractive to those who can afford its rents. (Eventually Trinity School dropped out of the suit.) In 1985, after years of court battles, a compromise settlement was reached for Site 30. Two buildings would be constructed on the site: one for elderly housing; the other a market-rate, skewed-rent apartment building. In the latter, built by Samuel LeFrak and called James Tower, one-fifth of the apartments were allocated to low- and moderate-income tenants, subsidized by the rest. The elderly housing has yet to be built.

One of the rationalizations for the upscale development of the West Side has been what property owners and policy makers call the tipping point—essentially a justification for a quota system against the poor. The reasoning behind the tipping point is that to maintain a stable, middle-income community, the number of low-income (primarily nonwhite) families must be limited, or the middle class won't move in. Proponents of the theory quoted scholarly theses and sociological studies to support their contention that low-income occupancy must be limited in order to preserve "viable integration." These studies showed that when nonwhite families moved into a white area, a point of panic was reached by whites that could be measured by percentages—a point at which increasing numbers of whites would flee, setting up an irreversible trend. This panic point, or tipping point, was commonly considered to be 20 or 30 percent. Eventually, this statistic began to define federal, state, and city housing and urban renewal policies, especially in those instances where it is possible to control population characteristics. The tipping point, far from representing any behavior or misbehavior on the part of nonwhites, merely measures the threshold of white racism.

In 1968, the National Commission on Urban Problems reported that "Government action through urban renewal, highway programs, demolition on public housing sites, code enforcement and other programs has DESTROYED more housing for the poor than government AT ALL LEVELS has built for them." Behind all the policy considerations, there would appear to be two basic choices for low-income, mostly nonwhite New Yorkers: (1) to live integrated in a statistically defined minority status as prescribed by the social engineers through a quota system, or (2) to be contained elsewhere within a ghetto. Neither is a free choice. Both are choices that can be used to control any group considered alien by the dominant population.

So the question remains: for whom should the West Side Urban Renewal Area be planned—for a "viable," middle-class, mostly white community at the expense of the neighborhood's original low-income families? The Coalition to Replan the West Side Urban Renewal Area fights for more low-income housing on the remaining sites of urban renewal. It opposes a quota system that operates against the poor and that the coalition considers to be racist. The coalition demands a thorough investigation by the New York City Council of the policies and implementation of urban renewal, its racism, its attacks on the poor. We ask for your support in this struggle.

## REBUILDING DRUG CITY

A gigantic arc of drugs and destitution is forming in the South Bronx along the east side of the Major Deegan, the west side of the Bruckner, and on both sides of the Cross Bronx between the two other expressways. The arc is bisected along College Avenue by a similar strip connecting it to the base of the Bronx. Here is where New York City is building the largest concentration of homeless housing and shelters in the nation. Like a narrow ribbon, about seven miles long and six blocks wide, it will contain six large new shelters, half of the rebuilt apartments for the homeless, and some of the most dangerous, drug-infested, and segregated neighborhoods in the city.

In New York City one can judge the strength of a community by the number of homeless people being resettled within its boundaries. Neighborhoods with political clout and active local community organizations, able to plan how abandoned buildings and empty lots will be used, have vetoed an overwhelming influx of residents and shelters and hotels. Newcomers are selected and placed in locally managed buildings, so that rooted, stable working and welfare families remain dominant. By contrast, weak communities have gotten more homeless people than they can handle, large concentrations of destitute young families and many more on the way, repopulating neighborhoods that are extreme in their isolation, drug infestation, poverty, and despair. In these sections of the city, ghettos, starker than any New York has seen in the last generation, are being rebuilt at great public expense.

Since the 1950s, when U.S. social scientists began ranking cities according to residential segregation, Chicago has led all others. In 1989, sociologist Douglas Massey found the new pattern of segregation in U.S. cities to be "deeper and at more levels," justifying the neologism "hypersegregation." In Massey's new index, New York City ranks thirteenth, giving the impression that it is relatively integrated.

In Chicago, the present form of segregation was crystallized by the siting of public housing and expressways in the 1950s and 1960s. Poor, black residents live in confined communities that are often physically separated from white neighborhoods by highways and railroad tracks. The longest ghetto "wall," the six-lane Dan Ryan Expressway, was shifted several blocks during the planning stages to separate the huge black ghetto on the South Side from ethnic blue-collar neighborhoods to the west. Public housing in Chicago was built almost solely in black neighborhoods. When the courts



Northwest corner of Westchester Avenue and Kelly Street, South Bronx, April 1981.

forced the city to construct new projects outside the ghettos, Chicago chose to stop building altogether. The high towers of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) complexes, with more than 180,000 legal and illegal residents, not only house but also concentrate the poorest families in the city.

In New York City, until a decade ago, public policies have aimed at a greater mix. Segregation remained steady during the 1970s but is now increasing. A 1987 *New York Times* poll found more than 60 percent of the city's blacks reside in all-black or mostly black neighborhoods, and that 72 percent of whites live in all-white or mostly white areas. These figures minimize the extent of the separation, however, because it is difficult to place New York's large and diverse Latino population into clear racial categories.

New York's ghettos, occupying huge areas of the city, are by far the most populated in the nation. In Brooklyn, for example, there is a hyper-segregated area of more than 450,000 nonwhite residents that includes much of Williamsburg, Bushwick, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, and East New York. It is an urban section comparable in its poverty, appearance, and size to the west-side ghetto of Chicago but considerably more populated.

The same is true of the area comprising Harlem and the South Bronx. For a length of about five miles, one finds only poor, minority communities barely interrupted by a small Italian enclave along Arthur Avenue in the South Bronx. This section of the city is home to approximately 600,000 mi-



Northwest corner of Westchester Avenue and Kelly Street, South Bronx, May 1983.

nority residents concentrated in a much smaller area than the less populated black communities on Chicago's South Side.

### **Shaping the Ghettoes**

Just as the layout of expressways and the location of public housing transformed Chicago three decades ago, today in New York City three powerful, mutually reinforcing factors are adding to racial and economic segregation: the changing composition, increasing number, and growing poverty of the residents of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) projects; the ravages of crack; and the repopulation of the poorest, institutionally weakest, and most drug-ridden urban areas with some of the city's most vulnerable families, many of them formerly homeless.

In contrast to the Chicago Housing Authority houses, only about half of the 178,000 NYCHA apartments are in large ghetto areas, and there they house about one-fourth of the residents; public housing complexes have been built more evenly throughout New York City's five boroughs. One project, for example, is located behind Lincoln Center and another at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge, two blocks from City Hall. In addition, 40 percent of the residents are working families with higher incomes and more opportunities for interracial contacts than those in Chicago. This situation, which has given stability to public housing communities, is rapidly changing, however.



Northwest corner of Westchester Avenue and Kelly Street, South Bronx, October 1947.

Forty-five percent of the families on NYCHA's waiting list are on welfare, and a recent rule mandates that one of every four new families chosen for public housing must be selected from among the homeless.

The new NYCHA population will approximate that of other cities, where a majority of residents are members of young female-headed families on public assistance, a program that encourages passivity and dulls the initiative needed to take advantage of the few opportunities available to them. It can only be a mistake to abandon the original formula, which seems to have ensured the much better physical condition of NYCHA projects compared to those of other cities. Moreover, overcrowded public housing complexes, flooded with crack, desperately need strong families who believe in their own effectiveness. NYCHA's new tenants, instead, are highly vulnerable to addiction, and many stable families who can afford to move are leaving.

#### **One Mile**

So far the most developed homeless resettlement area is part of the "arc" with which this article began. It is a one-mile, five-block-wide ribbon of the South Bronx bounded by the Bruckner Expressway, the Major Deegan Expressway, and Longwood Avenue. By 1992, this area, starting at one of the 12 largest drug centers in the city and ending at the beginning of another,

will absorb more than \$100 million in city funds for construction alone.

Here, more than 5,000 of the city's poorest families live in buildings publicly owned and managed under several different programs. NYCHA, for example, has some of its most troubled buildings here: the Mill Brook Houses, the Mill Brook Houses Extension, and the Dr. Betances III Houses, a total of over 1,600 apartments. The Section 8 program of HUD here rebuilt 1,250 apartments in the 41 buildings of the Diego Beekman Houses. The Special Initiatives Program (SIP) has 14 buildings. These were first designed to accommodate only homeless families, but since December 1988 SIP has been aiming at an even mix of working and formerly homeless families. The Division of Alternative Management Programs (DAMP) has about half a dozen buildings; Emergency Housing has four buildings used as temporary shelters for victims of fires and demolitions. And the area has more than 30 *in rem* buildings, that is, those taken over by the city for nonpayment of taxes after years of neglect. Adding to the complex residential makeup of this area are the hundreds of apartments used by the city's Human Resources Administration as group homes for foster children, adolescents, and battered women.

This section of the South Bronx has only a few signs of stability, among which are dozens of surviving family houses and, nearby, several buildings covering a block, managed by the South East Bronx Community Organization, Father Louis Gigante's nonprofit organization. Among the very few active institutions are St. Roch's Church and St. Luke's Church and School. The pastor of St. Luke's, Reverend Gerald Ryan, finds it extraordinary that former mayor Koch would locate next to each other two large shelters, to house a total of 200 homeless families in the confines of his parish. "It seems that nowhere else are they acceptable, but our community has to accept both without consultation." The neighborhood is apathetic, according to John Webster, Sr., a maintenance man at the Diego Beekman Houses: "They call a meeting and four people show up." When the city needs to put up another shelter, Webster explains, "they say, 'Put it over there.'"

This area of the South Bronx has been designated an economic development zone, but it now has become an area devoted to social programs, and these are bringing in large amounts of public funds. According to a local public official, some community leaders have not opposed the city's policies because they stand to gain from the coming boom in social services. He explains: "There are going to be a lot of homeless, who have a lot of emotional and mental problems, that are going to be visiting doctors' offices, medical centers, and methadone clinics for prescriptions or medication. This is a gold mine."

Donna Kirchheimer, professor of political science at Lehman College, CUNY, has been studying the relocation of the homeless in the South

Bronx. She sees little interest on the part of the private sector in this geographical area. Government, she says, "has decided to give that space an industry, which happens to be services to the poor. The fact that it is a residential service means that the poor have to live there to get it."

Abraham Biderman, commissioner of Housing Preservation and Development under Ed Koch and the person directly overseeing the new initiatives, was quoted in 1988 as saying: "This program is literally rebuilding Harlem, rebuilding the South Bronx, rebuilding parts of Brooklyn. . . . These neighborhoods will not be recognizable five years from now." He is right. Not clear, however, is what life in these neighborhoods will be like in 1993. As poor and segregated as the Chicago ghettos and as full of drugs and fear as the South Bronx area adjacent to the Bruckner Expressway is today? Or will they be neighborhoods of nurture, of hope, where children can have a future? Left behind, isolated and ignored, the "homeless buildings" and rebuilt ghettos of the last three years may be one of the great urban disasters of the 1990s.

## THE SOUTH BRONX OF AMERICA

Imagine how wonderful it would be to turn the wilderness of the South Bronx into a park with trees and grass and factories surrounded by real homes! I believe it would lift the spirit of all those who live there. . . .

**Brooke Astor**, President, Vincent Astor Foundation, in a letter to the editor, *New York Times*, October 17, 1977

You must concede that this Bronx slum and others in Brooklyn and Manhattan are unrepairable. They are beyond rebuilding, tinkering and restoring. They must be leveled to the ground.

**Robert Moses**, quoted in the *New York Times*, January 18, 1973

People don't want housing in the South Bronx, or they wouldn't burn it down.

**Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan**, quoted in the *New York Times*, December 21, 1978

It happened so slowly and it happened to such an extent that I wasn't even aware of change until one day I decided to walk around the block and found that we had no block. Then I decided to walk around the neighborhood and found that we had no neighborhood.

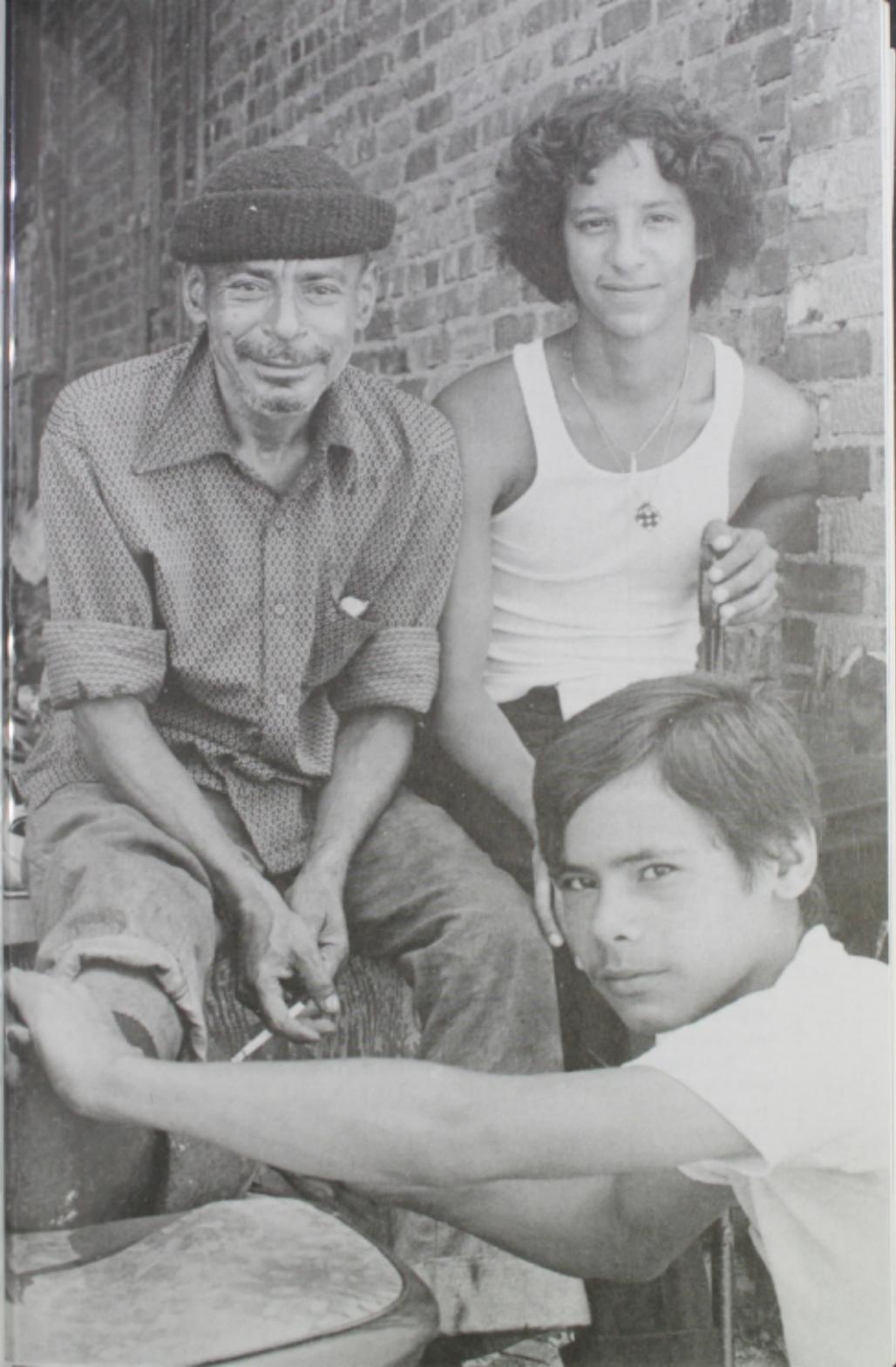
**Victor George Mair**, quoted in *Devastation/Resurrection*, Bronx Museum of the Arts

Between 1970 and 1975 it was estimated that there were 68,456 fires in the South Bronx . . . more than 33 each and every night.

**Neighborhood**, August 1982

Given the natural trend towards conservatism and racism, there's not many places I'd feel safe living in. At least here I know everyone and they know me and we both know which side we're on and that we share the same struggle. People read the papers and all they learn is how "crazy" and "dangerous" we are. But what they don't tell them is who is *really* responsible and why it continues to happen. And until people learn that, nothing will ever change—which is why I'm still here, struggling to teach them and myself.

**Marina Ortiz**, South Bronx resident and community activist, September 1986





Mel Rosenthal, *Mother and Daughter, Bathgate Avenue.*

Your business will have room to grow in the Bronx.

You don't have to worry about spiraling rents, lack of space, congested streets, parking shortages, and a host of other problems that plague expanding businesses elsewhere. The Bronx has prime real estate that is affordable. No inflated prices like Westchester, New Jersey, or Long Island.

The City of New York is planning to sell prime parcels of real estate for retail, light manufacturing, office, and industrial development. These are properties that the City has held from sale until the market was right.

Now the market is right. You can own real estate in thriving, busy commercial centers, industrial enclaves, and growing residential areas.

**The Bronx: Business's Best Kept Secret**, published by the Bronx Marketing Project of the New York City Department of General Services, 1983

I'm impressed by the spirit of hope and determination by the people to save what they have.

**President Jimmy Carter**, Charlotte Street, South Bronx, October 3, 1977, quoted in the *New York Times*

I'm impressed with the spirit of hope and determination by the people to save what they have.

**Ronald Reagan**, Charlotte Street, South Bronx, August 5, 1980, quoted in the *New York Times*



Mel Rosenthal, *Sunday Morning*, South Bronx.

In 1969, the *New York Times* conducted a study of the Hunts Point section of the Bronx, and by checking death records on three streets—Simpson, Fox, and Tiffany—it was learned that residents there had only a 1 in 20 chance of dying a natural death. Most were dying in homicides or from drugs.

**New York Times**, October 6, 1977

Thirteen of every 1,000 babies born in the Bronx's Morrisania section die within 28 days. Twenty-one of 1,000 die before their first birthday.

**New York Daily News**, May 15, 1984

Essentially, planned shrinkage is a recognition that the golden door to full participation in American life and the American economy is no longer to be found in New York. . . . Better a thriving city of five million than a Calcutta of seven, destroyed by its wrangling.

**Roger Starr**, *New York Times*, November 14, 1976

These people come by, and stop, and take pictures. We are not animals. We are suffering. There is nothing to look at here. This is serious, this is people's business.

**Peggy Long**, resident of Charlotte Street, South Bronx, quoted in the *New York Times*, October 7, 1979

## THE CASITA PROJECT

*The Casita Project researches and documents contemporary casitas in northern New York City. Members of the Casita Project Team include Bill Aguado, Juan Flores, Luis Aponte-Pares, Martha Cooper, Betti-Sue Hertz, Joseph Sciorra, Susan Slyomovics, and Nancy Solomon, all of whom are working on material for a full-scale exhibition.*

*People create their own options by claiming a space and creating buildings, gardens, and other structures in a city that is tough and unsympathetic to the cultural needs of most Puerto Ricans.*

*Siting a casita takes the entire lot into account. Set up close to the street or way back against a wall, it is never rid of the urban setting outside the chain-link fence. By fencing the space and creating an atmosphere of home, casitas can create an aura of relaxation and quiet against the strains of the city. At the same time, they are a public display of the cultural and political loyalty to the island.*

When I step inside the framed space of the site, I feel like I am visiting a small rural yard. This place constructs a rural scenario that contrasts positively with the urban poverty that surrounds it.

**Betti-Sue Hertz**, artist, director of the Casita Project

In fact, all messages sent by *casitas* are part of the same historical process where the production of space, archi-

ture, and place come together in the history of a colonial people.

**Luis Aponte-Pares**, architect and urban planner, member of the Casita Project

I built this to look just like the house my grandmother has.

**Luis Diaz**, *casita* builder

"We brought Puerto Rico to New York," Diego Perez explained. "I feel like I'm in P.R." Luis considers *la casita* the best of both worlds: meaning Puerto Rico and New York, as well as country and city.

**Janis Benincasa**, folklorist

### **Villa El Gato, Brooklyn**

*An interview with Angel Hernandez, resident of Villa El Gato, Columbia Street, Brooklyn. Angel is a 45-year-old Vietnam vet. Born in Ponce, he came to New York when he was ten years old and was raised in the neighborhood. He has been living at Villa El Gato for the past eight years.*

Now, if they want, they could be a little considerate and say, "What are we going to do with them?" Because if they throw us out from here, they'll throw us out. We'll go somewhere else. This is our block. This is our home. And when they want, they come and knock it down and do what they want. We don't care, we'll just make our



Installation view of *The Casita Project*, 1989.



Martha Cooper, *Casita*, Villa El Gato, Brooklyn, 1988.

house again. And if the government doesn't like it, then the government can find a place to put us. . . . No one is going to be abused, no one. We'll go to the mayor, we'll go to City Hall. We'll go where we want and if we have to talk, we'll talk. This is my neighborhood. I die, if I have to die for my neighborhood. This is Columbia Street.

**Angel Hernandez**, recorded by Joseph Sciorra on October 23, 1988 (translated by Zulma Ortiz-Fuentes and Joseph Sciorra)

### **Rincon Criollo, South Bronx**

*Rincon Criollo*, named after a Puerto Rican village, was built in 1978 by José Soto, a professional carpenter, with Pedro Figueroa and José Rivera. Soto had built casitas in Puerto Rico when he was a young man. Originally the casita was one small room. The casita was expanded in 1988, and a front porch was added. Members of the *Rincon Criollo* building team became partners in the maintenance and time sharing of the site.

Rincon Criollo is notable because of its construction features. The frame and porch have interlocking studs (vertical support posts), with horizontal sills and plates (the beams on the floor and ceiling, respectively). Most other casitas and houses are nailed together. There is a ridge pole that supports the plywood ceiling. The rafters extending



*Martha Cooper, Neighborhood children, Loyda Matos, Freshy Minnie, and Ella and Iris Rosman of the dance troupe "Guajana," named after the flowers of the sugar cane, performed Bomba and Plena dancing on Father's Day, 1988, under the tutelage of Norma Cruz and Benny Ayala, Rincon Criollo.*

from the ridge pole end in a boxed cornice, so that the ends are concealed.

**Nancy Solomon**, folklorist, member of the Casita Project

The *casita* is my love. When I don't go to the *casita*, I feel empty. I have friends there who are like my brothers and sisters. We enjoy getting together. [There] I can be relaxed and happy. The best place is the *casita*. You feel like you are in your home in Puerto Rico.

**Norma Cruz**, the only woman on the list of members posted on the exterior wall of Rincon Criollo; Cruz teaches children *bomba* dance at the *casita* (interviewed by Joseph Sciorra, July 12, 1988)

Antonio Tirado wanted to build his *casita* in the style of a Chinese pagoda, so when he heard from his friend that a broomstick factory was going out of business he went up and bought lots of them. He then constructed his *casita* entirely out of broomsticks. His *casita* and garden-builder friends liked them, so he gave them out for people to use. Now you can see them all over the neighborhood.

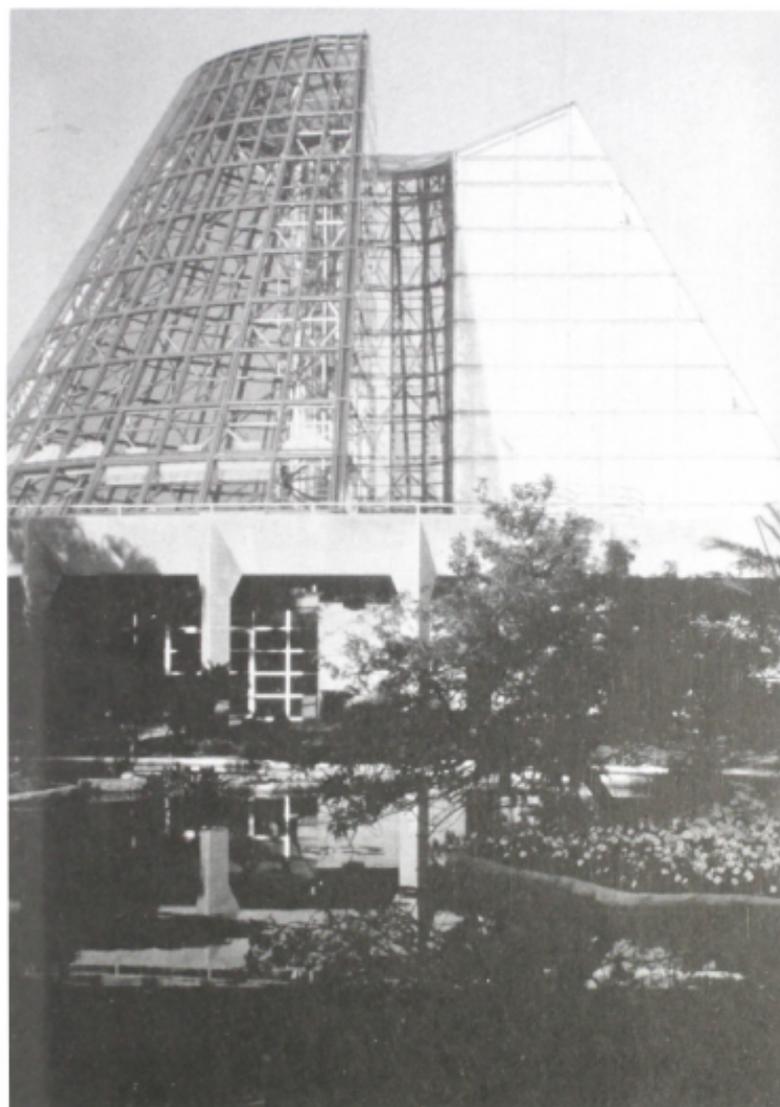
**Susan Stymovics**, as told by Antonio Tirado

## CORPORATE ATRIUMS: URBAN ARCADIAS

In the late 1960s, New York City zoning law was amended to allow incentives for the creation of covered pedestrian spaces. In exchange for providing a "public amenity," the parklike atrium, the developer was permitted to add to the new building's rentable floor area. The result was a sprouting of such spaces in the city. Privately owned and maintained, these sanctuaries are usually under surveillance through the building's hidden electronic security systems, as well as through the presence of guards. They often double as an entry to areas off-limits to the general public. The questions of how individuals may use these corporatized "public spaces," who will decide that, and whether or not they are open to all, remain open. Still, these atriums are taking over some of the functions of the urban park. In some cities, they are becoming integrated into the existing outdoor park system. From the River Walk along the San Antonio River in San Antonio, Texas, for example, pedestrians can follow a stream of running water into the Hyatt Regency Hotel atrium.

Many atriums have become a kind of parallel form to the suburban shopping mall. The late '70s and '80s have seen a return of the upper middle class to the city from the suburbs, and the atrium has adopted the suburban model. Spaces like Citicorp Center, the New York headquarters of Citicorp, and Trump Tower, also in New York, are simultaneously office or residential building, public park, and mall. These atriums suggest a suburban arcadia in the midst of the city (no need to commute), an urban fantasy of the picturesque brought into city central.

The urban corporate atrium is an attempt to smooth over contradictions between environmental decay and technological progress. As a mini-utopian retreat from the stresses of city life, it reevokes the notion of "garden" as idealized landscape (the return to a pre-urban Eden), attempting to reconnect it to the idea of technology as an aid to man. The same attempt lay behind the 19th-century utopian communities of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, which abandoned the city for the countryside; the Ford Foundation building seeks to address similar issues, but integrates itself with the urban community and urban park that surround it. More recent corporate atriums have increasingly separated themselves from the city fabric. To-



Emilio Ambasz, San Antonio Botanical Conservatory, 1987.

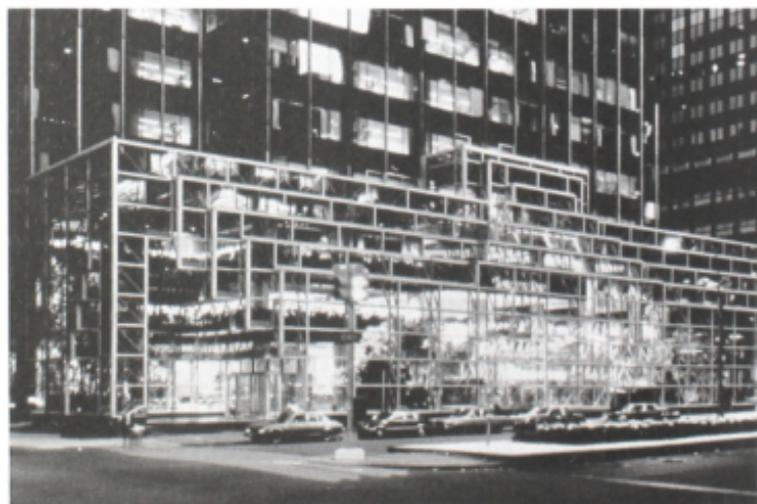
day, there is a proliferation of separate, self-contained, competing corporate atriums, which tend to vitiate the radicality of the Ford Foundation model.

Emilio Ambasz's San Antonio Botanical Conservatory stands as a critique of this trend, and an attempt to rethink the questions raised by the atrium form.



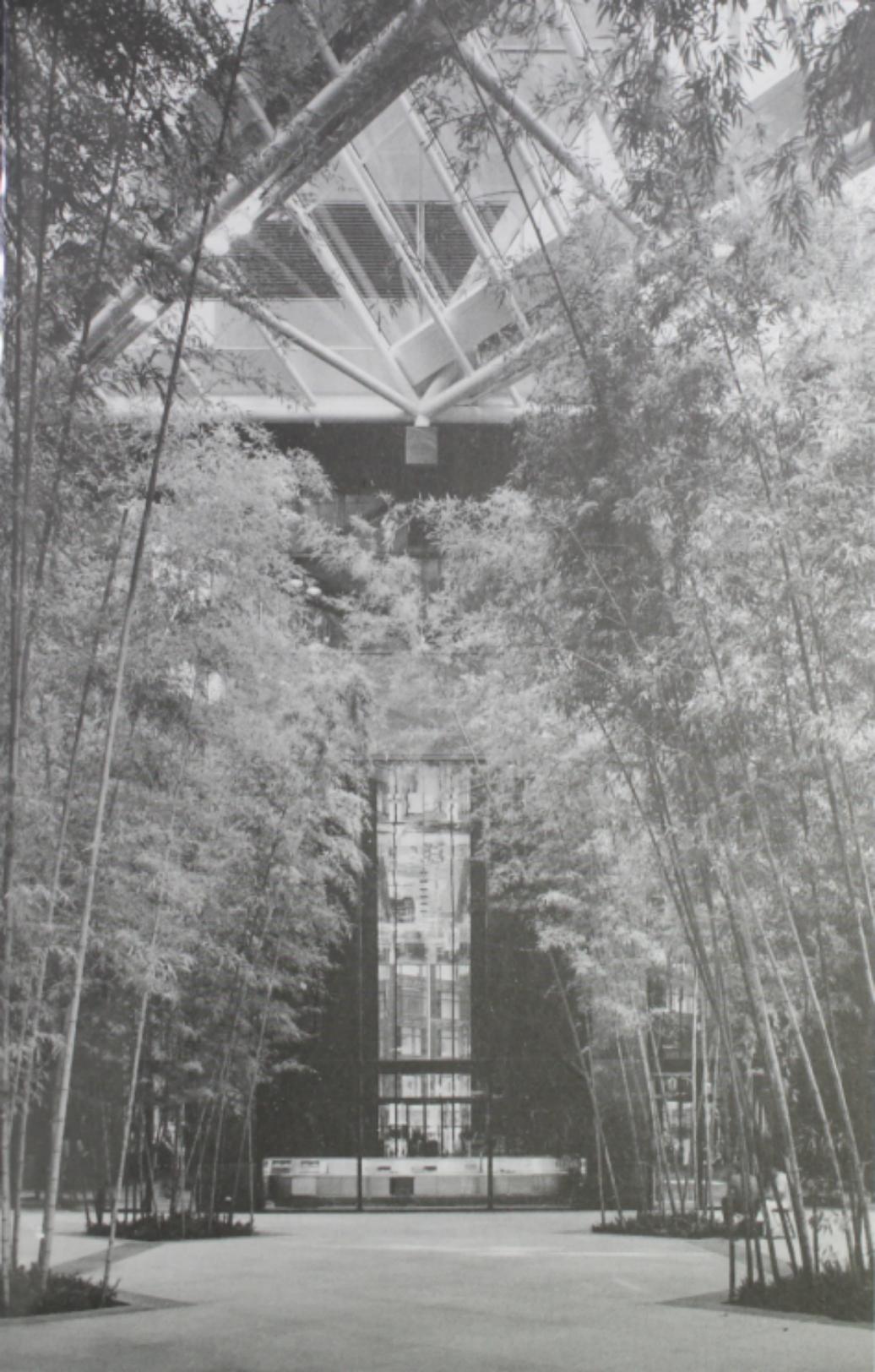
How does a day of shopping sound?

Advertisement from the *New York Times*, June 29, 1990, showing the winter garden of the World Financial Center, Battery Park City.



Haines Lundberg Wachler, ChemCourt, New York City, 1982.

Edward Larrabee Barnes Associates, IBM Garden Plaza, 1981. ►



## DOCKLANDS COMMUNITY POSTER PROJECT

The Docklands Community Poster Project, whose founding members are Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, has been producing works in conjunction with London's East End communities since 1980. The project was initially funded by London's city government, the Greater London Council (GLC), but has obtained its funding from more diverse sources since Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher summarily dissolved the GLC, which had stood in firm opposition to her policies.

The project's work is exemplified by billboard series that represent quasi-allegorical narratives of the history and collective struggles of the communities along the London docks. In *The Changing Picture of Docklands*, for example, portions of the image—which combines drawing with photomontages of the area's residents—change over a period of time until a complete transformation is effected.

More recent campaigns concern the Docklands Redevelopment Project, centering on the Isle of Dogs. This project, apparently the largest Western effort to institute the model of the Enterprise Zone (a central conservative concept in both England and the United States), is funded largely by overseas money. Initially taken on by a combination of Boston's First Bank and Crédit Suisse, the project is now primarily in the hands of Olympia & York



The Docklands Community Poster Project (Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, with Sonia Boyce, Sandra Buchanan, Roberta Evans, and Sara McGuinness), *The Changing Picture of Docklands* 1-4, 1981-84.

(led by Montreal's Reichman brothers), the Canadian company that was the principal funder of New York's Battery Park City, a huge luxury office-residential complex in lower Manhattan. The two projects exemplify new approaches to large-scale city planning favoring corporations and the rich.

The Docklands Community Poster Project's primary vehicle in publicizing just how the Docklands redevelopment scheme flouts the needs and desires of the area's residents while serving the needs of international capital is the *Docklands Road Show*, a traveling exhibition. The *Road Show* aims not only to mobilize the communities to organize for concessions, but also to provide a warning and a rallying point for other working-class communities outside London.

Docklands has been described as the biggest piece of real estate in Europe. It stretches for nine miles on each side of the Thames River, east from Tower Bridge. It represents eight square miles of opportunity for London. But the London Docklands Development Corporation [LDDC] sees it only as an attractive showcase for private investors. The LDDC was imposed on Docklands in 1981, taking planning powers away from elected local authorities. Immediately after taking control, the LDDC began selling the land to speculators, land that local authorities had acquired over many years with public funds to provide houses and jobs for local people. The results of years of local government consultation and planning to meet local needs are now literally in the dustbin.

This "redevelopment" has been subsidized by public funds. For example, £2,250,000 of public funds were spent preparing the London Yard site on the Isle of Dogs, which was then sold to a Dutch developer for only £808,400. Now there are 296 houses and flats for sale at up to £120,000 each (and rising). Meanwhile, unemployment and housing waiting-lists continue to rise at an alarming rate.





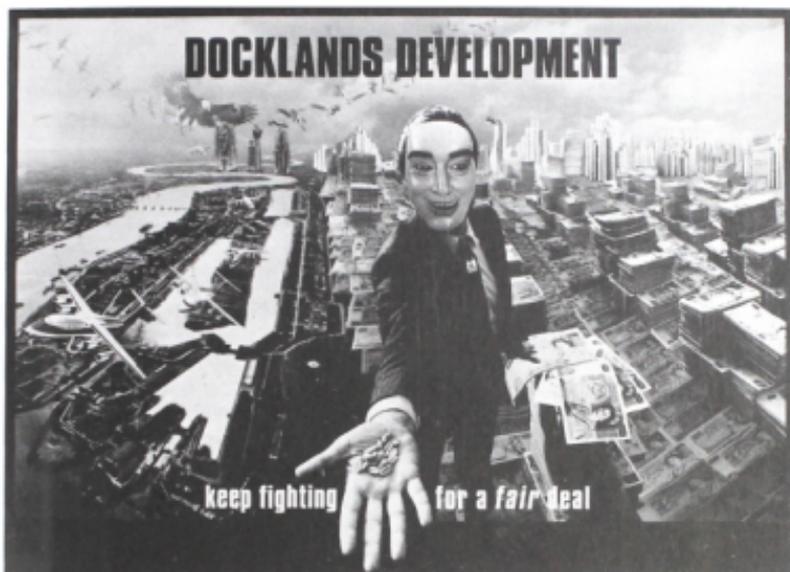
Docklands Community Poster Project, *The Changing Picture of Docklands*, 18 x 12' photomural in Wapping.

After the docks closed, the dockers and their communities were made literally redundant. The developers project an image of Docklands as either an uninhabited wasteland or a small Luddite community standing in the way of progress. In fact, there are over 40,000 people in Docklands desperate for the right kind of development. But the LDDC is totally unaccountable to the people and ignores their needs; its decision making is shrouded in secrecy.

With the realization that it is a question of fight or go under, the struggle for Docklands is on. For developers, Docklands is simply a piece of real estate. For local people, it is their home, their history, their heritage and fu-



The Docklands Community Poster Project (Lorraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, with Sonia Boyce, Sandra Buchanan, Roberta Evans, and Sara McGuinness), *The Changing Picture of Docklands* 1-8, 1981-89.



Docklands Community Poster Project, *The Changing Picture of Docklands*, 18 • 12' photomontage in Wapping.

ture: their lives. The people of Docklands will not allow themselves to be ignored or trampled under the feet of developers scrambling for profits. Their history has taught them valuable lessons in organization and resistance, and they have a keen sense of the future. Developers are destroying long-term initiatives for short-term gain. Those who live daily with the consequences of these "planning strategies" have a deep understanding of their flesh-and-blood implications.



## ARTISTS IN THE EXHIBITIONS

AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power

[ACT UP]

Emma Amos

Mike Anderson

Edgar Anstey

Nat Ayer

Peter Basselmann

Max Becher

Michael Belenky

Ron Benner

Mark Berghash

Daniel Berman

Christine Benglia Bevington

Willie Birch

Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte  
Fronterizo

John Brentlinger

Marie-Annick Brown

Dina Bursztyn

Andrew Byard

Andrea Callard

Andrew Castrucci

Paul Castrucci

Cenén

Curtis Choy

Lynne Christensen

Robbie Conal

Brian Connell

Charles Copelman

Thom Corn

George Corsetti

Anton Van Dalen

Susan Day

Downtown Community Video Center

Educational Video Center

Ed Eisenberg

Dirk Eitzen

Cindy Feldman

Michael Fernandes

Pablo Frasconi

Arlyn Gajilan

Jeff Gates

Tami Gold

Frank Goldberg

Steven Gottlieb with Students from CS  
44, Bronx, New York

Dan Graham

Lee Grant

John Greirson

Mark Gross

Stephan Guinn

Spring Harlbut

Jamelie Hassan

Headlines Theatre

Betti-Sue Hertz

Dan Higgins

Alcina Horstman

Robin Hurst

Kenneth Jackson

Sally Jacques

John Jenkins

George Karshner

Shelagh Keeley

Julia Keydel

Hilary Kliros

Janet Koenig

Lech Kowalski

Steve Krinsky

Jacqueline Leavitt

Norma Leitzinger with Students from  
Central Park East 11, Harlem,  
New York

Loraine Lesson and Peter Dunn, with  
Sonia Boyce, Sandra Buchanan,  
Roberta Evans and Sara McGuinness

Erik Lewis

Nancy Linn

Mad Housers

Ginidir Marshall

Massachusetts Council on the Arts  
and Humanities

Louis Massiah  
Tony Masso  
Lynn Masterson  
Beni Matias  
David Merritt  
Ron McCarty  
Bob McKeown  
Robert McNealy  
Andrew Millstein  
Chonk Moonhunter  
Marilyn Nance  
Russell Nash  
Barbara Neal  
Andrea Neumann  
Robert Neuwirth  
New York State Council on the Arts  
and the New York Landmarks  
Conservancy, with Martha Gutman,  
Ghislainne Hermanuz, Richard Plunz  
Stuart Nicholson  
Christine Noschese  
Charles Butler Nuckolls  
Operation Move In  
Gerald Pagane  
Clayton Patterson  
Pratt Architectural Collaborative  
William Price  
Kristin Reed  
Sophie Rivera  
Pilar Rodriguez  
Rachael Romero  
Mimi Rosenberg  
Mel Rosenthal  
Martha Rosler  
Lori-Jean Saigh  
Nancy Salzer  
Juan Sanchez  
William Sarokin  
Laura Scheerer  
Paul Schneider  
Sebastian Schroder  
Allan Sekula  
Bonnie Sherk  
Greg Sholette  
David Steinbeck  
John Strauss

Strycker's Bay

Sam Sue  
Jim Supanick  
Skylar Switzer-Kohler with students  
from Class 6-2 at PS 261, Brooklyn,  
New York  
Third Street Men's Shelter (George  
Alston, John Bookhard, David  
Combs Country, Evert Fulton,  
Anthony Grimes, Victor Hazzard,  
Ramon Rivera, Barry Warren)  
Michael Thompson  
Seth Tobocman  
Angel Toro with teacher Geralyn Zink  
at JHS III, Manhattan, New York  
Nia Umoja  
Urban Center for Photography  
Camilo Vergara  
David Wald  
Bobby Watlington  
Barr Weissman  
Troy West  
Hilary White  
Rhonda Wilson  
Nettie Wild  
Dan Wiley  
Krzysztof Wodiczko  
The Zen Center

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