EDITORIAL STATEMENT

Cultural Studies seeks to foster more open analytic, critical and political conversations by encouraging people to push the dialogue into fresh, uncharted territory. It is devoted to understanding the specific ways cultural practices operate in everyday life and social formations. But it is also devoted to intervening in the processes by which the existing techniques, institutions and structures of power are reproduced, resisted and transformed. Although focused in some sense on culture, we understand the term inclusively rather than exclusively. We are interested in work that explores the relations between cultural practices and everyday life, economic relations, the material world, the State, and historical forces and contexts. The journal is not committed to any single theoretical or political position; rather, we assume that questions of power organized around differences of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, nationality, colonial relations, etc., are all necessary to an adequate analysis of the contemporary world. We assume as well that different questions, different contexts and different institutional positions may bring with them a wide range of critical practices and theoretical frameworks.

'Cultural studies' as a fluid set of critical practices has moved rapidly into the mainstream of contemporary intellectual and academic life in a variety of political, national and intellectual contexts. Those of us working in cultural studies find ourselves caught between the need to define and defend its specificity and the desire to resist closure of the ongoing history of cultural studies by any such act of definition. We would like to suggest that cultural studies is most vital politically and intellectually when it refuses to construct itself as a fixed or unified theoretical position that can move freely across historical and political contexts. Cultural studies is in fact constantly reconstructing itself in the light of changing historical projects and intellectual resources. It is propelled less by a theoretical agenda than by its desire to construct possibilities, both immediate and imaginary, out of historical circumstances; it seeks to give a better understanding of where we are so that we can create new historical contexts and formations which are based on more just principles of freedom, equality, and the distribution of wealth and power. But it is, at the same time, committed to the importance of the 'detour through theory' as the crucial moment of critical intellectual work. Moreover, cultural studies is always interdisciplinary; it does not seek to explain everything from a cultural point of view or to reduce reality to culture. Rather it attempts to explore the specific effects of cultural practices using whatever resources are intellectually and politically available and/or necessary. This is, of course, always partly determined by the form and place
of its institutionalization. To this end, cultural studies is committed to the radically contextual, historically specific character not only of cultural practices but also of the production of knowledge within cultural studies itself. It assumes that history, including the history of critical thought, is never guaranteed in advance, that the relations and possibilities of social life and power are never necessarily stitched into place, once and for all. Recognizing that 'people make history in conditions not of their own making', it seeks to identify and examine those moments when people are manipulated and deceived as well as those moments when they are active, struggling and even resisting. In that sense cultural studies is committed to the popular as a cultural terrain and a political force.

Cultural Studies will publish essays covering a wide range of topics and styles. We hope to encourage significant intellectual and political experimentation, intervention and dialogue. At least half the issues will focus on special topics, often not traditionally associated with cultural studies. Occasionally, we will make space to present a body of work representing a specific national, ethnic or social tradition. Whenever possible, we intend to represent the truly international nature of contemporary work, without ignoring the significant differences that are the result of speaking from and to specific contexts. We invite articles, reviews, critiques, photographs and other forms of 'artistic' production, and suggestions for special issues. And we invite readers to comment on the strengths and weaknesses, not only of the project and progress of cultural studies, but of the project and progress of Cultural Studies as well.

Larry Grossberg
Janice Radway

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You don’t need no painting on a wall. You might want a painting but you don’t need it. This is what we need. (Homeless woman commenting on the Homeless Vehicle, interviewed in Krzysztof Wodiczko: Projections [dir: Derek May, National Film Board of Canada, 1991])

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to be free:
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me
(Emma Lazarus, Inscription at the Base of the Statue of Liberty)

No Man’s land

New York 1991

A friend tells me how she’s at Union Square one morning waiting for the uptown express when a body rolls out from under the platform. She watches a middle-aged man climb up, stand, swaying unsteadily at first, getting his balance, as he pats the dust off his suit before heading off purposefully, a plastic attaché case jammed under one arm, towards the stairs and the EXIT. Cautiously, one eye on the tunnel out of which her train is due to plunge at any moment, she leans over to inspect the dark space squeezed between the side of the platform, tucked out of sight beneath the narrow concrete overhang, and the rails. Could anybody really sleep down there?
Waiting for his uptown express, Herzog made a tour of the platform, looking at the mutilated posters – blacked out teeth and scribbled whiskers, comical genitals like rockets, ridiculous copulations, slogans with exhortations: Moslems the enemy is white. Hell with Goldwater, Jews! Spicks eat SHIT. Phone, I will go down on you if I like the sound of your voice. And by a clever cynic, ‘If they smite you, turn the other face’. Saul Bellow (1974)

The other face

Today many city dwellers (in Latin America) live in shanty towns, and these have become the most telling and guilt-inducing image of ‘third-world poverty’, inviting the voyeuristic horror of the westerner (Elizabeth Wilson, 1991).

There are no dead spaces in today’s cities. In Manhattan where the ownership and use of every inch of territory is nailed down in the fine print of countless property deeds and city ordinances, those tiny temporary interstitial spaces that do open up get occupied immediately by PWAs (people without apartments). Buildings earmarked for demolition, construction sites, border zones where ownership or jurisdiction is blurred or in dispute – each can serve as a temporary landing pad. Hence the hobo cities of the thirties, hidden behind billboards on the edge of the freight yards. Hence too, the tent cities erected in municipal parks and transit points (e.g. Grand Central Station) in the eighties, pitched on the nervous urban line between leisure and work, departures and arrivals until, finally, the police arrive with bulldozers and razor wire to move them on again.

One morning in December 1991 I go to see what I’m told is the last remaining Tent City in Manhattan. The police have recently cleared an earlier settlement (established in June after the closure of Tompkins Square Park) dubbed ‘Dinkinsville’ by the evicts who resided there in ‘honor’ of the mayor. Now a friend tells me there’s a vast, haphazard city of canvas and lean-tos spread out under the grey bulk of the Manhattan Bridge as it reaches out across the East River into Brooklyn.

‘You should go,’ she says, ‘you’ll get a sense of the scale of the problem.’

I spend a couple of hours criss-crossing back and forth between East Broadway and the river, wading in the bridge’s dank shadow, hunting in vain for the city of nomads I’d imagined nestling round the concrete columns which at the riverside lift the bridge 100 feet or more into the air. Eventually I thread my way back up past the projects and the demolition yards, the chop-suey houses and Chinese gift stores – right back almost to the Bowery, to the point where the bridge begins its half-mile elevation before heading on in a sweep to span the river.

Here, at the bridge’s root, I get to see Tent City or what’s left of it in December 1991. A bunch of maybe ten or fifteen rusting corrugated iron shacks and packing cases crammed on to a narrow muddy triangle of land at the intersection of three busy roads. In the centre there’s a single canvas
wigwam. This location, beset by every imaginable inconvenience – lack of privacy (it's visible from every side), lack of drainage, proximity to traffic, noise, exhaust fumes, lack of cover from rain and snow – would hardly be anybody's first choice. No one would choose to put down roots here – however briefly – if they had any kind of alternative.

In retrospect, the spaces underneath the bridge look positively penthouse in comparison to this – roomier . . . quieter . . . more sheltered . . . better views. If a larger camp had existed once, then the police must have driven them back and back from the river until only a few seasoned veterans are left hanging on, dug in on this bleak, exposed peninsula pounded by a sea of traffic. The teepee at the centre of Tent City, the structure that perhaps gave this other miniature metropolis its name, is the landmark focus of this alternative ‘development’ – its single distinguishing feature. It towers over the other makeshift shelters – a cone of dirty undyed fabric held upright round a tall, treelike wooden pole. The megatent is functional. It no doubt offers rudimentary shelter to however many people crawl into it at night but it also functions as a beacon and a sign – a reversed reflection of Liberty’s torch held aloft in welcome out there in the Bay to light the tempest-tossed passage to the New World of the earth’s huddled, homeless masses. The Manhattan teepee has this disconcerting monumental aspect. It draws attention to itself as if it’s been designed like Tatlin’s Tower to make a historical point. Only the point this monument is making in its dingy 3-D grandeur is diametrically opposed to the one proposed by Tatlin’s model which, of course, remained just that – an unexecuted project stuck for all time at the design stage. For, whereas Tatlin’s utopian project was meant to herald the imminent (though as luck would have it, eternally delayed) arrival of the streamlined city of a heroic socialist future, Tent City’s wigwam announces the return of the repressed in the grimy nodes of New York’s ultra-rationalist grid system. It advertises the enduring failure of the capitalist city – and the abstract, technocratic regimes it represents and on which it depends – to cater for its own.

Made by the homeless for the homeless after a ‘primitive’ design that dates back long before New Amsterdam was acquired from the natives for the legendary handful of beads, Tent City’s teepee is both an invocation and an indictment – an invocation of the history of expropriation and genocide which accompanied the founding of the nation and an indictment of a system that continues to uproot, ‘vanish’ and dehumanize the ghosts that (against all odds) go on dancing in its margins. As such you could almost say it functions like one of Krzysztof Wodiczko’s projections to disrupt the architectural ‘order’ of the city by superimposing a temporary ‘counterfactual’ image on a familiar city landmark, by superimposing that memory on this site . . .

Perched on the central divide separating the two streams of traffic crossing the bridge as I stand for a moment self-consciously contemplating this architectural ‘statement’, a figure in a tracksuit steps from its interior into the cold winter sunshine. The black man stands there in the mud scratching for a moment, straightening the towel round his shoulders. Then he looks
directly up at me, dissolving in an instant with the intensity of that stare the distance between us so that the roar of the traffic seems suddenly to drop away and all I can hear is him drawing all the morning’s phlegm up into his throat, siphoning as much as he can squeeze out of himself and letting it collect there, viscous, on his tongue, before moving his head back slightly and sending out a great fat spume of spittle in an arc on to the road that separates him – a refugee in the City of Tents, interrupted in his morning ablutions – from me and the harder, higher ground I’m standing on . . .

Tramp steamer

As necessarily as it produces machines and men-machines, the bourgeois world . . . produces the Tramp, its reverse image. The relation between the Tramp and the bourgeois order is different to the relation ‘proletariat-bourgeoisie’. In particular it is more immediate, more physical, relying less on concepts and demands than on images. (Henri Lefebvre, 1991a)

TRAMP, v. 1. To walk with a firm, heavy step; to trudge. n. 1. a heavy footfall; b. A heavy rhythmic tread, as of a marching army 2. A walking trip or hike 3. A person who travels aimlessly about on foot, doing odd jobs or begging for a living, as a vagrant 4 a. A prostitute b. A promiscuous girl or woman 5. A cargo vessel that has no regular schedule but takes on freight wherever it may be found and discharges it wherever required. Also called ‘tramp steamer’. (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Houghton Mifflin, 1969)

The first time I saw Krzysztof Wodiczko’s Homeless Vehicle was in a square-cropped monochrome photograph on a black catalogue cover where it sat, suspended in the gloom, like one of Wodiczko’s nocturnal projections – ominous and dislocated – as if transplanted from another dimension. The image showed a streamlined four-wheeled metal object, reminiscent of a high-tech version of a supermarket cart encased in a skin of plastic or rubberized fabric stretched across a skeleton of metal hoops. A wire cage containing cans and plastic bags was visible, bolted or welded to the chassis. But what drew the eye instantly was the gleaming metal nose-cone pointing off over the viewer’s shoulder so that the whole vehicle bore a strong resemblance to a missile primed and locked on to some invisible target. Parked under direct light on the parquet gallery floor, its hard, reflective surfaces shone with the spooky luminosity of a UFO in a 1950s sci-fi movie. Exhibited in this image like a prototype in a pamphlet at a munitions or medical appliances trade fair, the Vehicle appeared imbued with a powerful mystique as ‘a superlative (designer) object’. ²

The parody of professional design and display codes in the presentation of the Homeless-Vehicle-as-late-modern-gadget is integral to Wodiczko’s critical probing of ‘the symbolic, psychopolitical and economic operations of the city’. ³ It is a key part of that larger strategy of projection which, as Rosalyn Deutsche has argued, might be chosen as an evocative title for all the work, once we acknowledge that the word ‘projection’ designates not just a
technical mechanism but also, ‘first, a symbolic operation by which concepts are visualised as external realities and, second, a rhetorical device for speaking with clarity at a distance’ (Deutsche, 1990: 31).

The Homeless Vehicle was unveiled before the gallery-going public in an exhibition in New York in 1988, though the rhetorical strategies it embodies had been prefigured in Wodiczko’s public projection works. Three earlier ‘event-pieces’ are of particular relevance. In 1984, Wodiczko projected images of a giant padlock and chain on to the exterior of the Astor Building on Broadway which houses the New Museum of Contemporary Art to draw attention to art’s complicity (as investment and decorative adjunct) in the logic of real estate development. (The inflated asking price for the empty luxury apartments stacked on top of the gallery had, presumably, been partly determined by their physical proximity to the symbolic capital art represents.)

Two years later Wodiczko proposed to ‘disable’ the statues of Lincoln, Lafayette, Washington and Charity which had presided over the recent ‘refurbishment’ of Union Square Park by projecting images of bandages, wheelchairs and derelict buildings directly on to them. The Homeless Projection Proposal memorialized the eviction of the homeless from the Park prior to the implementation of a renovation program designed to complement the new offices and condominiums springing up in the vicinity. By ‘dressing’ the statues in bandages etc., Wodiczko drew an analogy between commemorative architecture and that ‘new symbolic architectural form’ (Wodiczko): the homeless themselves. The Proposal was another attempt literally to ‘throw light’ on the process whereby architecture ‘denying the homeless as its own social outcome ... must continually repress the monumental condition of the homeless deeper into its (political) unconscious’ (Wodiczko quoted in Lurie, 1986; also Lajer-Burcharth, 1987).

In both projections, the homeless are revealed to be less the victims of their own inadequacies than of that linked process of economic and social transformation which Marshall Berman has dubbed ‘urbicide’ (Berman, 1986), whereby speculative property developments, the suspension of planning controls, redlining, blockbusting, gentrification, soaring rents, the casualization and deskilling of manual labor and drastically reduced welfare and public housing programs actively conspire to produce homelessness. 4

One example – the spectacular failure in the early nineties of Canary Wharf and parallel developments in London’s docklands – should serve to clarify the social and economic costs of ‘urbicide’. Since its inauguration in 1981, the state-appointed but not publicly accountable London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) had spent over £700 million of public money in a largely failed attempt to attract national and international capital to the area. With little regard for the housing and employment needs of the indigenous, overwhelmingly working-class population (30 per cent of whom were unemployed by 1987 after the closure of the docks), the LDDC erected luxury riverside apartments, private estates and office blocks aimed at wealthy buyers from the then burgeoning financial sector of the nearby City of London. The LDDC took over most of the land reserved for housing held by the Greater London Council, a since abolished publicly elected body,
along with its residual planning powers. Meanwhile, a virtual block was placed on the GLC’s house-building program by central government. The docklands area was declared an ‘Enterprise Zone’ and new businesses were exempted from paying rates for ten years.

By the end of 1987, homelessness had increased by 120 per cent in comparison with its pre-1981 level. Thousands of families were being housed in temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation at inflated rents paid by Newham Borough Council and it was estimated that only 1 in 30 local residents could actually afford to buy one of the ‘affordable homes’ the LDDC had pledged to provide. In Docklands, house values tripled in two years. By the late eighties the docklands ‘miracle’ was being routinely described in the media as a ‘fiasco’ or ‘disaster’. The Isle of Dogs, socially deprived for decades, was now a bleaker environment than ever: a socially divided landscape of half-empty office blocks, overcrowded public housing and unsold luxury apartments served by a pitifully inadequate infrastructure of half-finished roads and the aptly named Docklands Light Railway which soon proved unable to cope with the scale of commuter demand.

With the property market crash in 1989, many LDDC developers went into receivership including Kentish Property, the consortium responsible for the transformation of the old Bryant & May match factory (where Annie Besant had led the match-workers’ strike a century earlier) into the ‘Bow Quarter’, an exclusive residential sanctuary for young professionals. According to a recent report in the London Evening Standard, the two
swimming-pools, gymnasium, brasserie and running track promised in the brochures are yet to be completed.6

Wodiczko's projections expose the hidden costs of gentrification and 'slum clearance' by making the darkness surrounding such developments visible. They draw on photography's powers not just to expose or disclose material conditions but to redeem or resurrect the dislocated supplement. In the Homeless Projection Proposal, the vanished and the marginalized troop back like the ghostly casualties of some undeclared war to haunt the scene of renovation. Wodiczko here mobilizes what Roland Barthes 'would like to call the Spectrum of the photograph because this word retains, through its root, a relation to “spectacle” and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead' (Barthes, 1981: 9).

Specular relations become themselves the focus of attention in Wodiczko's 1987 Real Estate Project. In this piece, Wodiczko projected photographic images of three apartment windows on to the interior walls of Hall Bromm's gallery in Manhattan's East Village. The windows (taken from a model apartment in a neighboring condominium) overlooked buildings undergoing renovation and the projected images were framed by props (e.g. vertical blinds, a pair of binoculars, copies of real estate brochures etc.) (see Jones, 1987; Phillips, 1987).
If these situationist devices questioned common-sense understandings of homelessness, then the Homeless Vehicle Project disturbed such understandings still further by targeting an occupational subculture of single homeless men (those who survive by ‘redeeming’ empty cans and bottles for the 5 cent deposit) as potential user-‘consumers’ of an ostentatiously designed object. The prototype on show in 1988 consisted of a hinged metal unit which could be extended to provide sleeping, washing and toilet facilities as well as a can-storage compartment. The product had been tested by a panel of homeless consultants and adapted to the precise subsistence needs of its prospective users.\(^7\) This replication of design and market-research procedures parodied the ‘logic’ of the late capitalist equation between consumption and active citizenship and was carried over forcefully into the final ‘product launch’. The vehicle stood in its fully extended ‘sleeping mode’ at the centre of the exhibition surrounded by sketches of early prototypes and diagrams advertising its versatility and design features (e.g., the hinged nose-cone transforming into a washing bowl, the toilet-and-tarpaulin configuration for guaranteed privacy, the large rear wheels for
stabilizing the machine when mounting curbs and increasing maneuverability, etc.). In another room, slides of public spaces in New York were projected on to the gallery walls, the scenes overlaid with blurred images, blown up from sketches, of the vehicle being pushed through the city by a ghostly hooded figure in a track suit. Meanwhile extracts from Wodiczko’s taped discussions with the homeless consultants were relayed through loudspeakers. A document produced by Wodiczko and David Lurie was also on display. Like the vehicle itself this document has gone on circulating in slightly different forms ever since, its arguments refined and adapted in the light of further consultation with the client group for which it is intended:

This vehicle is neither a temporary nor permanent solution to the housing problem, nor is it intended for mass production. Its point of departure is a strategy for 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 personal shelter.

In 1988 and 1989 four variants of the homeless vehicle, differing in the materials with which they were constructed and resulting in various technical improvements were tested, used and publicly presented in the following places:

Variant 1: In City Hall Park and the parks across from the Criminal Court and the Municipal Building, New York.

Variant 2: Tompkins Square Park and the surrounding area; Wall Street; and the area around Battery Park.

Variant 3: Central Park; Grand Army Plaza; Fifth Avenue; across from Trump Tower; Battery Park City, all Manhattan and Greenpaint Park, Brooklyn.

Variant 4: Washington Square Park and the surrounding area; the area around Broadway – Lafayette, Manhattan. Dilworth Plaza; Rittenhouse Square; the area around the Liberty Bell; the area around City Hall; and
the National Temple Recycling Centre, all in Philadelphia. (Wodiczko and Lurie, 1988)

The machine is *Unheimlich*

I begin to see . . . an object when I cease to understand it. (Henry David Thoreau)

Wodiczko’s image-projections montaged on to buildings or concretized in three dimensions in the Vehicle itself produce a dreamlike effect. The first exposure to the Homeless Vehicle is likely to precipitate a sense of *déjà-vu*. Instead of you discovering *it*, it can – if encountered in the right circumstances – introduce itself to you provoking that shock of recognition you sometimes get when, wandering round a gallery in a daze, some object whose presence you’ve failed to register (despite the fact that you’ve been standing in front of it for several minutes) suddenly falls into focus and you seem to apprehend it in an instant in all its singular wholeness with an effortlessness that belies its unfamiliarity leaving you convinced for that one instant – (though you’re aware this isn’t really possible) – you somehow *know* this thing already, that you’ve *seen it somewhere else before* . . .

The Poliscar is designed for a particular group of homeless, those who earn their meager income from collecting resellable discarded objects
from the streets. . . . Not merely an emergency tool, it is an experiment in cultural and social communication and equipment. It is a machine for homeless self-representation and expression, a speech-act machine challenging fixed and a priori notions of homeless identity produced and reproduced by the media, a process of subordination of the homeless by the non-homeless (Wodiczko, 1991a).

. . . Wodiczko’s Vehicles actively invite this sense of déjà-vu. As Patrick Wright has pointed out they look ‘unlike anything that has ever existed before, and yet deliberately engineered out of resemblances to things familiar’ so that the solidity of the vehicle itself threatens to dissolve under the weight of its constitutive analogies (Wright, 1992: 13). For Wright the first Homeless Vehicle conjures up a conjunction every bit as bizarre as Lautreamont’s union of an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table: ‘[it] looked like . . . a cruise missile that had landed on a surprised shopper’s Baskart’.

The Poliscar, Wodiczko’s latest prototype on the other hand, suggests a: a hectic rehearsal of precedents for itself: allusions to Kafka, Goya, Aldo-Rossi, Tatlin’s famous tower . . . the visionary machines designed by Leonardo . . . fantastical robots . . . Dr Who’s daleks . . . the first tanks that went into action on the western front in 1916 . . . a mechanised Ku Klux Klansman and an automated wigwam. (Wright, 1992)

Elizabeth Hess, writing for the Village Voice is more restrained (and less sympathetically attentive) in the associations she suggests for the Poliscar:
'a cop from another planet . . . a souped-up tin man . . . a war toy for the homeless . . . a prop in search of a narrative' (Hess, quoted in Wright 1991: 12). But the sense of familiar unfamiliarity engendered by these objects – their capacity to go on 'making strange' our habituated ways of seeing – cannot be explained solely by reference to the connotative density of the objects in themselves. Instead, it is in the temporary conjunction of text and context – in the precise combination of image, site and object – that Wodiczko’s work acquires its peculiar resonance: that echo-chamber effect which can suddenly suffuse a neutral exhibition space or a dead historic building with new and unexpected meanings. For the homelessness of Wodiczko’s Homeless Project derives in part, like the spectral portability of film, from the nature of the apparatus through which the project as a whole is articulated. It is integral to his mode of operation as an itinerant artist and teacher. Wodiczko’s vehicles aren’t just metaphors or tools. They are not just ‘about’ homelessness any more than they are simply ‘for’ the homeless. They are also unheimlich (literally ‘unhomely’) in that other stranger sense to which Freud was alluding in his essay of that name. For although these peculiar aluminium contraptions come equipped with storage compartments for redeemable tin cans, they are also at the same time uncanny vehicles.

Like the Trojan Horse they work under cover in the labyrinth which, wherever you find them in the real world, remains their only true location. And it’s as well to remember at the outset that the full disturbing impact of the Homeless Vehicle Project only gets disclosed once the projectors have
been switched off, after the machines have been wheeled through the gates of our attention and left to stand there in the silence unloading their secret cargo while the guards are still asleep. For the power of insinuation is by no means incompatible with the process of interrogation the Project sets in train. In Wodiczko’s cryptic phrase ‘something is damaged’ (Wodiczko quoted in Maxwell, 1982): after seeing his work a supermarket trolley, a homeless person, a public statue or war memorial will never seem quite the same again. The shadow of his imagery goes on playing on the buildings he has ‘dressed’ like the unadmitted Other lingering at the threshold of the frame. Rather than diminishing the urgency or bite of Wodiczko’s timely interventions, it is this dreamlike incandescence of the after-image — its chilly, smiling aftermath — that in the end makes the agenda he proposes for art’s critical relation to the city really stick.

Interrogative machines

When you close your eyes, you lose your cans. (Mr Cliff Chapman, homeless ‘redeemer’ referring to his nightly vigil over his can and bottle haul [Globe and Mail, 25.10.91])

They look at us like a lot of empty bottles that they don’t intend to fill . . . Imagine all the decent things that they could do with just a little common sense if you were not thinking of this situation as a penalty for failure. (Homeless woman interviewed by Jonathon Kozol in Kozol, 1988)

This review of first impressions is meant to draw attention to those aspects of Wodiczko’s work — its playfulness, the uncanniness of some of its effects — which tend to get overlooked in the more politically engaged accounts of the Homeless Vehicle Project. Yet it could be argued that it is precisely these aspects which draw us in and prevent us from jumping to conclusions in our efforts to assess the status of Wodiczko’s strange proposals and the seriousness or otherwise of his overall intent. For it is the equivocal or interrogative status of the Project which provokes (or scandalizes) and intrigues (or attracts) its various potential audiences.

The appeal of Wodiczko’s work is that it steps straight into the breach left by the continuing trend within much acclaimed contemporary art away from direct engagement in the war zone of today’s metropolitan scene. Its beauty consists in the tact, precision, elegance and wit with which it highlights — literally in the case of the public projections — not just the hidden face of power in the city but ways of approaching ‘problem issues’ and addressing audiences and constituencies which have remained resolutely unapproachable within the terms laid down by seventies and eighties ‘art language’. And its interrogative power derives from the way Wodiczko facilitates multiple and sustained questioning of the authority of social ‘probabilities’ by turning his art into a rhetorical tool which, in marked contrast to the ‘empty’ rhetoric of morally outraged ‘political art’, is designed to work directly in the world rather than upon it.

We are forced by the interrogative mode in which Wodiczko frames the
Homeless Project to ask the question what exactly are the Homeless Vehicles for? Are they, as one critic asks of Wodiczko’s earlier series (e.g., the Sisyphus, Democracy and Artist machines), ‘working prototypes, functioning models or engineering blueprints’? Do we regard them, first and foremost, as provocations to future thought and action – what Harold Garfinkel has called ‘aids to sluggish imaginations’ – or as temporary stop-gap measures for dealing with the housing problems of single homeless men? Alternatively, are they intended as a communications aid for an emergent homeless ‘constituency’? Or are they conundra in a broader sense – open questions, impediments to closure, propositions designed to lengthen the hiatus between what we think is probable and what we imagine might be possible. In the awkward process of interrogation which they initiate, the vehicles make everybody feel uncomfortable (apart, that is, from the many homeless nomads who see them as a godsend – an ideal-utilitarian [rather than uselessly utopian] answer to their immediate housing needs). What makes it so difficult to dismiss the project out of hand is the challenge it issues to all of those who enter into dialog with it to improve upon Wodiczko’s own ‘modest proposals’. For, like Jonathan Swift’s ‘solution’ to the ‘Irish problem’ put forward in his famous essay written for (or rather at) the English that impoverished Irish peasants should raise children to sell as food (Swift, 1991), Wodiczko’s machine-offensive on the streets of US cities demands that we acknowledge the existence of a specific crisis, reflect upon its causes and respond to the question it provokes: if not this, then what do you suggest?

In the areas where (the homeless) live you will find there is shelter for them and they simply will not go to that shelter. (Prime Minister John Major interviewed on BBC Radio 4, 2.2.92)

But even at the day centres and the hostels it’s dangerous. It is dangerous on the streets, anyone who says it isn’t dangerous is full of shit. I’m sick of it. I’m sick of men bothering me. (Joanna, 21-year-old homeless woman interviewed in the London Independent, 16.2.92)

Ever since Martha Rosler’s caustic demolition of photography’s claim to ‘represent’ the inhabitants of Skid Row in her installation, The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems (1974–5), the force of Deleuze’s remark about ‘the indignity of speaking for others’ has been felt throughout the art world. Rosler’s two systems comprising ‘intentionally flat-footed’ (Owens, 1985) snaps of Bowery store fronts and typewritten words connoting drunkenness redirected the focus of concern away from ‘the People of the Abyss’ on to the representational codes governing their depiction and the power stakes masked within those codes. For, to quote Craig Owens in his explanatory gloss:

‘concerned’ or what Rosler calls ‘victim’ photography overlooks the constitutive role of its own activity, which is held to be merely representative . . . Despite his or her benevolence in representing those who have been denied access to the means of representation, the
photographer inevitably functions as an agent of the system of power that silenced these people in the first place. Thus, they are twice victimized: first by society, and then by the photographer who presumes the right to speak on their behalf. In fact, in such photography it is the photographer rather than the ‘subject’ who poses — as the subject’s consciousness, indeed, as conscience itself (Owens, 1985: 69).

Rosler’s project and its motivating intentions, cogently summarized here in Owens’ analysis, were of undoubted value in their time. Moreover they were prescient in signalling the now long-established shift of engagement within critical cultural work away from substantive to discursive issues and concerns. And eventually, new etiquettes of practice and critique were developed to accommodate the silence produced by the evacuation from art and debates around art of what used to be called the ‘social’. Nowadays nobody attempts to approach the ‘other’ without first taking a body-dip in psychoanalysis and French poststructuralist theory. Yet in the intervening years, social and economic polarization has intensified at a rate which by the mid eighties had left contemporary art (including much ‘political’ work) commanding hyperinflated prices and ‘Skid Row’ (i.e., the streets of most big American cities) more desperate and more desperately overcrowded than at any other time in living memory.

By the time of the first Homeless Vehicle exhibition in 1988 at the city-owned Clocktower Gallery in lower Manhattan, the streets of New York played ‘host’ to an estimated 70,000 homeless individuals, many on the run from the violent, insanitary municipal ‘shelters’. A year later it was estimated that the number of families doubled up illegally in public housing had risen from 17,000 in 1983 to almost 300,000. By 1988 there were 200,000 names on the waiting list for apartments in New York City housing projects. Any vacancies in subsidized temporary accommodation were reserved for higher priority homeless families. At the time of the exhibition’s opening some 15,600 people including 10,000 children were living in 82 welfare hotels citywide.

The presence of large numbers of displaced individuals on the city streets had been a national scandal since the mid eighties, producing spectacular proof of a ‘crisis in caring’ matched only by the parallel rise in visible homelessness in central London – most notoriously in the ‘cardboard cities’ adjacent to Charing Cross railway station, along the Thames Embankment, the Strand, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Kingsway and Covent Garden.

In London, the number of households officially designated ‘homeless’ had doubled between 1982 and 1985 rising to 28,000 (Shelter, 1985) with 8,500 families in minimal bed-and-breakfast accommodation two years later (London Guardian, 15.12.87). The number of new houses built in central London fell by 60 per cent in the period from 1982–8. Meanwhile the Local Government Housing Act stipulates that no more than one quarter of the earnings made on selling formerly publicly owned council (i.e., Project) houses can be spent on the construction of new homes (see McKintosh and Wainwright, 1987).
Comparisons between London and New York as ‘dual cities’ indicate similar though not identical patterns of development. Both New York and London have the highest house prices and highest levels of homelessness nationally, and among the unemployed sector, the highest levels of inequality of earnings and highest rate of increase of inequality. (Sassen-Koob, 1988; Castells, 1991). Demographic studies indicate that a disproportionate number of homeless individuals and single-parent families in London and New York are non-white. At the same time the number of single homeless sleeping in the streets of both cities has been swollen by the closure in the 1980s of long-stay mental institutions and public hospital psychiatric wards which signals the shift into (largely non-existent) ‘community care’.14

The Homeless Vehicle (which incidently also looks like a cross between an iron lung and a surgical trolley) parodies this ‘rationalization’ of health-care provision and the ‘streamlining’ of public health and housing costs. Abandoning both the fiscal/budgetary ‘reasoning’ behind eighties and nineties ‘new (conservative) realism’ and the mirroring tactic of denunciation, Wodiczko offers ‘rational’ design solutions to the practical exigencies of living on the streets, solutions attuned to the economic logic of subsistence scavenging:

Oscar (a homeless consultant for the project): Alright, this is the front of the vehicle. This right here is the opening of the front, right? This is where I’d put my bottles; you get more bottles than anything else.
Kryzstof: And plastic bags on top?
Oscar: No, if possible, cans and plastics; but you see, you have beer cans, tall and small, tall cans, little cans, soda cans. So you want to keep your soda cans to the soda cans, tall cans with tall cans, little cans with little cans, glass with glass, beer bottles with beer bottles ... You want the simplest way to unload your cart, get everything processed, get your money and get out. As soon as you turn that first corner you come to, there’s another can – you can actually work in a circle. I could circle this park three times and come up with shit every time ... I can fill up one cart in one block ... (Wodiczko and Lurie, 1991).

Rather than representing either ‘homelessness’ (by framing it iconically) or homeless people themselves (by ‘standing in’ or ‘speaking for’ them) Wodiczko conducts enquiries into the conditions that produce and reproduce the displacement of evicts from physical and social space and offers survival and self-imaging strategies for homeless men and women – strategies developed and adapted in consultation with relevant homeless organizations (e.g., New York’s WECAN Redemption Center15) and evicts on the street. Each variant of the Homeless Vehicle incorporates design modifications suggested by the homeless themselves (e.g., larger front wheels; much larger rear wheels closer to the Vehicle’s centre of balance; a brake; an enlarged ‘seat’ section [which doubles up as a toilet seat] on the collapsible handle; reinforcement of structural components; a reshaped back for easier collecting; incorporation of semi-translucent reinforced plexiglass roof sections to enhance visibility at night; curtains for privacy; a
fire escape). As Julie Courtney (1990) has explained, the vehicles are also adapted to the local conditions pertaining in particular cities:

The Vehicle that was designed for use in New York, where there is a bottle-and-can law (1984), is different from the one built in Philadelphia. In New York anyone can return any can or bottle to any store that sells those cans and bottles. In Philadelphia people must travel, and often some distance, to recycling centers. The Vehicle’s basket holds more than an ordinary shopping car, and in Philadelphia, where cans may be crushed and a variety of scrap metal materials are accepted for cash at a recycling center, the basket has been redesigned to accommodate a larger load.

The vehicles are thus hybrid propositions which bear an organic relation to the ground on which they move, i.e., the concrete conditions facing people without apartments, specifically in the case of the first series, single homeless men. 16

It is this originary entanglement of the vehicles in the actual lives of the evict (can) ‘redeemers’ that endows them with their (other) worldly force. Wodiczko is designing for a ‘fallen’ world and it is this acknowledgement of complexity and imperfection that distinguishes his project, its motivations and objectives from both the start-from-scratch heroics of the Modern Movement and the cynical indifference to social inequality, scarcity and waste of today’s designers-for-consumption. At the same time the work and the rhetorical strategies it embodies are predicated on a recognition of the limited effectiveness of ‘radical’ polemic (its partial use/truth value). One of the questions Wodiczko’s work raises, almost incidentally, concerns the ‘radicalness’ of ‘radical’ proposals in the arts: where (if anywhere) should politically engaged work ‘lead’ (i.e., towards which effects, e.g., policy change, ‘consciousness raising’, pragmatic expediens to ameliorate conditions for specific groups at a local level, the opening up of discursive positions from which new kinds of political subject can speak? To which audiences? Towards which institutional ‘homes’: the gallery, the art market, the private collection, the ‘street’?). By starting with a concrete given – the condition of the single homeless – by allowing that condition to dictate the terms of the enquiry and the shape of the ‘solution’, Wodiczko moves away from the didactic mode which secures the self-identity of much ‘political art’ (and thus frees himself to act as an educator). The uncanny appropriateness of his proposals indicates that he is taking that dictation in his sleep. Either way, by working microscopically on a grand scale, Wodiczko challenges implicitly the radical abstractions inherited from seventies art and social theory while moving beyond but through more recent critiques of the construction of Otherness by directly addressing those others who live out on the streets and by listening carefully to what they have to say.

Evaluations of the Homeless Project’s usefulness and purpose have been as varied and as mobile as the vehicles themselves. Uniquely for a set of artworks, it has helped to spark an important debate on the transformation
of the city which has ranged over issues as diverse as the capitalist ‘production of space’ and its implications for inherited models of political organization and resistance; the meaning of citizenship and community in the contemporary urban context and the hidden relations between eviction and ‘flexible accumulation’, between the art and real estate markets.\textsuperscript{17} The process of critical and reflexive questioning engendered in that debate has changed the terms in which the art-city nexus is discussed in critical theory journals in North America today.\textsuperscript{18} But beyond the confines of \textit{October} magazine and despite Wodiczko’s explicit caveats about the vehicles’ wider signifying functions, many critics understandably continue to use the Project first and foremost as a pretext for reflecting on the immediate conditions in which homeless people live. Other critics have condemned the artist’s ‘failure’ to offer political solutions capable of transforming current social realities. One of the most common objections levelled at Wodiczko’s work, especially by those involved with professional agencies representing the homeless or catering to their perceived needs are that the Homeless Project threatens to trivialize or reify homelessness by appearing to offer pragmatic solutions to a problem which can only be tackled at its root, i.e., through the provision of permanent accommodation. These objections continue to haunt reception of the work despite Wodiczko’s insistence that, as Deutsche puts it, ‘implicit in [the vehicle’s] impermanence is a demand that its function become obsolete’ (Deutsche, 1990: 51).

It is here, perhaps, that we begin to touch on the deeper sources of the discomfort many people feel when confronted by a vehicle which moves with apparent ease back and forth between sedimented categories (art/not-art; use value/sign value; play/problem). The Project’s provenance within the institutionalized realm of art and ‘Art Theory’ can only confirm this feeling of awkwardness. For the fundamental problem which is likely to dog anyone out to get a purchase on Wodiczko’s work with and on the homeless remains not just the impossibility of the vehicle-as-practical-solution but the qualitative discrepancy between the space of legitimated art and the day-to-day experience of actual evicts, between Wodiczko’s signifying strategies and their displaced (and terrifying) referent, homelessness itself. An unbridgeable gulf inserts itself between the muted, plush if tastefully ‘austere’ interiors of art galleries and catalogs and the catastrophic, unwalled, uninhabitable exteriors in which homeless people struggle to survive. Any critical engagement with the Homeless Vehicle Project is obliged to acknowledge the existence of that gulf in whatever way it can.

\textbf{No place like . . .} 19

Start spreading the news,
I’m leaving today.
I want to be a part of it –
New York, New York.
These vagabond shoes
Are longing to stray
Right through the very heart of it –
New York, New York
(Fred Ebb and John Kander, ‘New York, New York’).

New York 1988
I am staying here at Angel’s first-floor, one-room apartment in the Lower East Side on East 4th Street between avenues C and D just a few blocks along and down from Tompkins Square Park where the young black men play basketball behind the wire mesh. A Kathy Ackers type strides past the game one afternoon, head shaved, studiously indifferent to the looks from the guys hanging out of the bar on the corner. She’s dressed top to toe in black leather. Her black Japanese boots trace a line down the sidewalk as tight as the leash that ties her to the bull terrier a few paces in front. The dog’s bucket head is encased in a muzzle that matches the lederhosen strapped on to its hindquarters.

In the park at certain times of the day the bag men and women go walkabout. Bundled in coats, they push their prams loaded down with empty cans and bottles: not one or two but five or six – a pack, a peasant’s army . . . One early morning I saw a dozen standing in a silent circle. From a distance they look squat and round, their outlines swollen by the layers of clothing like Polish peasant women at a winter market.

Across from the park in the streets of Tompkins Square there are a growing number of galleries, restaurants that look like galleries, chic postcard, gift and retro clothes shops nestling alongside the old Polish bars and eating houses, the old apartment blocks and the Russian steam baths. You can eat sushi off the square, buy designer furniture, read the latest issue of Flash Art. Facing the park a row of shops is being transformed behind the screens of hoardings into luxury condos. In a year, Angel tells me, this place will be a Wasps’ nest . . .

The park feels safe enough, but 15 yards away down the stretch of streets that run from Tompkins Square to Angel’s apartment doesn’t. The place feels sunk in shadow even at midday. Hand-painted signs warn that CRACK KILLS . . . that THIS IS A CRACK-FREE ZONE while on the edge of doorways notices scrawled in chalk indicate with arrows CRACK SOLD HERE or CRACK DEN . . . Men stand stoop-shouldered and strung out under every other lamppost. If you linger at the junction, waiting to cross, they fall out of the yellow light and block your path: ‘Change? You got change?’ or ‘You wan’ crack? Smack? Blow?’ . . .

One day a young Hispanic couple, with a kid of about nine in tow, stumble past us up the street arguing. The kid breaks away, runs ahead and starts yelling. His eyes are half closed, swimming slightly, and he is grinning through the deafening noise as if the sounds coming out of his mouth have nothing to do with him, as if he’s standing at the other end of the block watching some other kid hollering.

I’ve stayed in New York before but it was never like this. In the early eighties I even got a glimpse of the very different New Yorks immortalized

THE HOMELESS VEHICLE PROJECT 191
respectively by Jay McInerney in his yuppie West Side novels and by Miles Davis in his trailing, angry trumpet solos. But none of that was anything like this. This was worse than Hubert Selby Jr, George Romero, William Burroughs.

The floor of the apartment sloped crazily so when you got out of bed you literally fell into the day. A vacant lot stretched out behind the apartment. I would stand at the window in the mornings listening to *The Prairie Home Companion* on public radio, listening to Garrison Keillor’s soft, bass voice bringing the news from Lake Wobegon, the mythical midwestern town ‘where the men are strong, the women handsome and all the children are above-average’ and I would watch human figures literally crawling out of holes in the one remaining wall of a demolished apartment block where they’d spent the night, and slowly easing themselves down the broken fire escapes towards the fires started by the early risers.

On the night before I was due to fly back to London, an ugly argument broke out between me and Angel as we walked back from a bar. She’s lived in the neighborhood for years and watched it go down and up simultaneously, block by block, as the white powder and the yuppies moved in and the old residents got shunted off the island or on to the streets. As we came off the square in silence she turned abruptly on me and told me not to walk in that ‘dumb way’. She parodied a kind of hokie smalltown amble, swinging her arms, swaying her head loosely back and forth from side to side. It was the wide open gait of a country boy climbing down from the Greyhound bus and heading off to Times Square to get robbed.

‘This is how you walk’, she snapped. Head down, purposeful, short quick steps, the body hunched in on itself like a compact, hard projectile. ‘And when you come up right alongside the apartment house door, you turn like this’ . . . and she demonstrated . . . ‘ninety degrees . . . and your key’s already in the lock. Then when you’re inside you get time to relax but you don’t really relax till you’re out of the lobby, up the stairs and inside the apartment with the door locked and bolted behind you.’

It was as if she had been watching me all week, had seen that I still hadn’t sussed that this was for real. I bit back like a fractious child lashing out at an irritated parent at the end of some unsuccessful holiday excursion: ‘Don’t tell me how to walk! I grew up in Fulham!’ Later on, at the airport we could both afford a laugh. Fulham was still a working-class inner London borough in the fifties and sixties of my childhood and adolescence but, whatever it had been back then, we both knew that Fulham nowadays means property prices way up at the top end of the market. It means wine bars with real cellars, art galleries and restaurants that look like art galleries . . .

And your origins? Talk to us about them, they must be thrilling! The untravelled do not miss an occasion to ask this question. Their apparent kindness hides a sticky heaviness which exasperates the stranger. At the
'origin', precisely the stranger – as a philosopher in action – does not attach importance to the origin as common sense does. This origin – family, blood, soil – he has fled from ... He is foreign: he is from nowhere, from everywhere, a world citizen, cosmopolitan. Do not send him back to his origins. If the question burns you, go and ask it of your own mother. (Julia Kristeva, 1988)

No place like (home)

She wakes up early every morning just to do her hair now
Her hair wouldn’t be right without her make-up
She’s just like you and me but she’s homeless, she’s homeless
And she stands there singing for money
La da dee lal lal La da dee lal lal (Crystal Waters, ‘Gypsy Woman’ ['She’s homeless'; Polygram Records Inc, 1991, written by C. Waters/ B. Collins]).

The Berlin Wall has nothing on this (Ms Yve Amor, chair of London’s West Ferry Tenants Association referring to the construction in 1990 of an 18 foot wall erected around a luxury Docklands development abutting West Ferry council estate.)

Far from seeking to reduce by pious hoping or ‘political’ rhetoric (claiming ‘shared humanity’ or ‘solidarity’) the distance between the homeless and the domiciled (or ‘evicts’ and ‘non-evicts’ to use Wodiczko’s preferred vocabulary) the Homeless Vehicle Project, through all its evolutions, accentuates the irreducibility of the distinction between having and not having ‘a place’ (to live in/speak from). This double exile (from the community of non-evicts/the body politic) is in itself hardly new. But the registers in which it’s currently experienced together with the wider socio-political and ethical conundra such extreme forms of exile pose for artists and intellectuals intent on intervening critically in today’s urban arena are peculiar to the late modern scene.

While the ‘homeless’ label may, as Wodiczko indicates, be ultimately of doubtful use (it lumps ‘Them’ all together, detaches causes from effects and tends to reinforce victim-status by making a lack, i.e., the absence of a ‘home’ into an identity marker), the category remains active in policy terms and it needs to be historicized before it can be dismantled or replaced. It is often pointed out that the picture of the homeless found in most contemporary fiction, reportage, charity appeals and policy documents has its historical roots in the nineteenth-century literature of ‘social concern’ and ‘social exploration’ (Mayhew, Dickens, Booth, Zola, etc.) and in the photographic imagery of early practitioners like John Thompson, Jacob Riis and the inheritors of that tradition in the 1930s: the FSA Depression documentarists (e.g., Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans) and softer-focused European photo-flaneurs like Brassai.21 The fixing of the image of
Please help us feed more than 35,000 hungry men, women and children this Thanksgiving season. Most have no place to go. Many have no family. No real friends. Many do not even have a decent place to lay their head.

Your generous Thanksgiving contribution of any amount will feed the hungry and shelter the homeless. Please fill in the coupon, clip and mail with your gift today.

Thank you for caring for the hungry at Thanksgiving.

Mark Holsinger
Executive Director
Los Angeles Mission

Dear friend,

During the next two weeks, literally hundreds of destitute, homeless and hungry people will come to us seeking help. They're afraid... anxious... alone... hurting... sick.

Many will try to drown their loneliness in alcohol and drugs—running from the memories of the past, which are especially painful as Thanksgiving approaches.

When these people come to us, cold, hungry and in despair, they are often shocked when they're not turned away, or treated like worthless junk.

When we reach out to them in love and compassion, binding up their wounds, providing clean, serviceable clothing, warm beds and hot, nutritious meals, they often can't understand.

Especially at Thanksgiving.

And, during this Thanksgiving season, we expect to provide more than 35,000 holiday meals for the hungry and safe shelter for the homeless.

For our Thanksgiving dinner, we'll serve traditional home-cooked turkey dinners with all the trimmings... candied yams, mashed potatoes and gravy, sage dressing and cranberry sauce, topped off with a slice of pumpkin pie.

Because so much of our food is donated, we can serve these nutritious meals for just $15.70 each. That means...

$15.70 will serve 10 hungry people
$31.40 will serve 20 hungry people
$62.80 will serve 40 hungry people
$157 will serve 100 hungry people

These figures represent what it costs the Los Angeles Mission to provide food and shelter. We do not charge for our meals. All our services are offered to the poor and needy without cost.

Please help us feed more than 35,000 hungry men, women and children this Thanksgiving season. Most have no place to go. Many have no family. No real friends. Many do not even have a decent place to lay their head.

Your generous Thanksgiving contribution of any amount will feed the hungry and shelter the homeless. Please fill in the coupon, clip and mail with your gift today.

Thank you for caring for the hungry at Thanksgiving.

Mark Holsinger
Executive Director
Los Angeles Mission

YES, MARK! I want to help provide free Thanksgiving dinners for the hungry and safe shelter for the homeless during this Thanksgiving season and throughout the year. Here is my gift of:

☐ $15.70 ☐ $31.40 ☐ $62.80 ☐ $157 ☐ $1,029
☐ Other $:

Name: ____________________________

Address: ____________________________

City/State/Zip: ____________________________

Thank you for your Thanksgiving gift. You will receive a receipt for tax purposes. All our services are offered to the poor and needy without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, or handicap.

LOS ANGELES MISSION
P.O. Box 21408, Dept. BTO10K
Los Angeles, CA 90021
Locate in 301 S. Fifth Street
today’s homeless within archaic nineteenth-century discourses has direct consequences on the diagnosis and ‘treatment’ of the homeless-as-problem not least in Britain where homeless teenagers are still routinely charged as ‘rogues and vagabonds’ under the provisions of the Vagrancy Act (1823) introduced to clear London’s streets of destitute veterans of the Napoleonic Wars. However, the construction of the outsider-tramp as civilization’s repudiated (or scapegoated) Other – the object variously of compassion, fear, desire and disgust – has, of course, a much longer history.

The exclusion (hence mythologization) of the nomad and the wanderer-pariah is as old as the walls around the first city. Full or ‘proper’ citizenship has always implied not just rootedness in place but property ownership. In classical Mediterranean cultures, once the hospitality traditionally extended to the stranger had been exhausted, access to the civitas – the community and its sustaining networks of ritual, privilege and obligation – remains contingent on a more primeval order of belonging: an investment in the urbs, literally the stones of the city. With the establishment in eighteenth-century Europe of a bourgeois public realm where differences, ideally, were to be ‘aired’ – hence reconciled by Reason as they circulated openly in the new coffee shops and classically proportioned squares – owning property and speaking ‘properly’ became the dual prerequisites for being heard at all. The democratic injunction: ‘Stand up and be counted’ requires, after all, a place to stand up on. Later, the two fundamental bases of human ontology – language and habitat – became further (con)fused at the point when the state began demanding a ‘fixed address’ in exchange for citizenship rights.

Now – at the end of the twentieth century – this bourgeois bottom line is set everywhere in concrete, in a spatial order which disarticulates social forces from potential strategies of communicative action by naturalizing the unequal allocation of resources (including information-as-resource) and the power hierarchy in whose interests that order operates. And it achieves this partly like Jerzy Kosinski’s bland-faced gardener-president by simply ‘Being There’ (Kosinski, 1970), through the ruse of architecture’s self-effacing ‘silence’ – the disarming ‘innocence’ of its ‘imposing’ or ‘anonymous’ façades. The built environment appears simply to exist outside of the interests it was built to serve. The professional alibi of ‘function’, ‘form’, ‘investment’, ‘enhancement’, ‘improvement’ and so on further mystify the complicity of speculative property development in social and environmental disaster (e.g. the systematic destabilization of low-income neighborhoods prior to redemption-through-gentrification, insurance fires, rent rises, evictions, etc.). Design discourses and development proposals accomplish this mystification by burying the key which could decipher what Wodiczko calls the pervasive ‘state and real-estate symbolism’ of an emergent global economy (Wodiczko, 1990) in a bogus language of pure aesthetics and narratives of self-evident necessary progress.

The social and economic polarization of today’s ‘dual cities’ (Mandel, 1991) where during the eighties, the survival of a growing mass of low-paid casual service workers came to depend on the consumption choices
and discretionary tips of high-salaried finance and communications elites has made those alibis appear all the more cynical. At the same time it has produced new forms of disenfranchisement for an outsider class whose visible lack of means prevents it getting past the security guards stationed at the entrances to the air-conditioned shopping malls and luxury estates. This pattern of selective exclusion, denial and withdrawal is reproduced at other levels through less immediately trackable forms of spatial restructuring.

Today when the ‘universal placelessness’ (Meyrowitz, 1989) of electronic communications technologies together with cheap air travel and the globalizing pressure of ‘nomad capital’ (Williams, 1989a) have conspired to produce the ‘exploded’ or ‘over-exposed city’ (Virilio, 1987), the demands of state surveillance and the security policing of private enclaves in the city have become that much more insistent and intrusive, and the exile of the homeless that much more complete. At the same time, the language of eighties and nineties political populism operates a subtle though no less effective door-keeping policy. The centering of the contemporary metropolis and ‘the ruling image of the (TV, VDU) screen’ (Hewison, 1990) may mean, as Todd Gitlin puts it, that ‘uprooted juxtaposition’ is simply ‘how (all) people live’ these days (Gitlin, 1986). But the countervailing stress in populist discourses promoting individual ‘responsibility’ and ‘community belonging’ on the values and virtues of the homes automatically disqualifies the literally uprooted evicts from even entering the game. The language of ‘rights’ and ‘natural justice’ has been so thoroughly diverted from its origins in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century social radicalism that the columnist George Will could argue in a TV discussion on the urban homeless in 1986 that the presence of beggars in front of midtown New York office buildings constituted an ‘infringement of the rights’ of the already harassed executives who worked there. In the same spirit, Norman Lebrecht writing in the London Sunday Times (26.2.89) took the Board responsible for administering the Thameside South Bank Arts complex to task for failing to ‘protect the fundamental rights of concert patrons’, harassed by vagrants ‘pestering them for small change and pursuing them far into the lobbies’ in an ‘intolerable’ ordeal which ‘takes the civilised experience of concert-going out of the realms of Orpheus and plunges it deep into an underworld of dereliction’. In this hyperbolic account, beggars and public buildings become interchangeable as the ‘ageing concrete . . . jungle’ of the South Bank Centre (opened 1960) merges with the transients who occupy its ‘sheltered . . . underbelly’ to produce a visceral metaphor of public sector values in pungent decline. The whole place is an ‘eyesore where foreign guests avert their eyes politely and music lovers learn to hold their noses’ (Lebrecht, 1989).

Rhetorical excesses such as these are predicated on a Kleinian splitting of social space into two antagonistic camps (public/Them v. private/Us) organized around a set of oppositions which have already been institutionalized in the fiscal, housing and law and order policies of successive British and US administrations. The dominant moral order becomes spatialized, to
borrow at length from Mike Davis’s description of ‘Fortress LA’, in the division between: ‘good citizens, off the streets, enclaved in their high security private consumption spheres . . . [and] . . . bad citizens, on the streets (and therefore not engaged in legitimate business) caught in the terrible, Jehovan scrutiny’ of police helicopter surveillance (Davis, 1990: 233). Some of the most dystopian design and policing initiatives to date derive from this pathological terror of the (revenge of?) the disenfranchised Other. Davis lists a few local examples: painfully uncomfortable ‘bum-proof’ barrel-shaped bus benches, parks in the exclusive San Marino district locked at weekends to keep out Latino and Chinese families from adjacent neighborhoods; beaches closed at dusk patrolled by police dune buggies; and the ultimate mean-machine stationed outside a fashionable seafood restaurant: a ‘$12,000 baglady-proof trash cage made of ¾ inch steel rods with alloy locks and vicious outturned spikes to safeguard priceless mouldering fishheads and stale french fries’. In Fortress LA, the removal of public toilets to deter ‘unsuitables’ is inevitably followed by the introduction of a by-law throughout Southern California making public washing of the arms ‘above the elbow’ illegal. The same double bind is blithely activated to keep the homeless perpetually on the move: the head of LA’s city planning commission explained to reporters in 1987 after the mayor had ordered police to clear the ‘cardboard condos’ that it was not illegal to sleep on the streets ‘only to erect any sort of protective shelter’ (Davis, 1988: 37–60): ‘The camping aspect is what we are trying to get at, the jumble of furniture on the street, the open fires.’

In this paranoid, bisected universe, the dereliction of both public space and the outsider class who ‘own’ (i.e., have ‘stolen’) it is contrasted with the perfectibility of the private realm where rightful ownership is (ideally) never in dispute. We hardly need reminding in the late twentieth century of the success of ideological appeals to the ‘primary’ commitments of home and homeland or of the abiding power of the deep psychic (and financial) investments people everywhere continue to make in private domestic space. Those appeals and investments become increasingly tangled and confused as rival agencies and institutions seek to enlist individual and collective subjects to competing ‘identity’ projects (e.g., as consumers, citizens, national/ethnic/family/memberships, voters, etc.).

Thus as east and central Europe disintegrate under the pressure of massive shortages and microscopic ethnic rivalries, the immigration and housing policies of the EEC states look set to engineer the ‘South Africanisation of spatial relations’ (Davis, 1990) already under way, in racially segregated LA, while at the same time, the retail returns of the giant DIY and home-improvement chains in western Europe remain buoyant despite the current cash and credit crisis. To concentrate on matters even closer to home, the rhetorical construction under Mrs Thatcher of the imaginary community of the United Kingdom as both ‘national [nuclear] family’ and ‘property-owning democracy’ may have worked in the eighties to secure popular consent for her project of ‘regressive modernisation’ (see Hall and Jacques, 1983; Hall, 1986). But that consensus is today falling apart in the wake of an

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economic recession which left anti-Tory Scotland, in the run-up to the last election, threatening to secede from the Union and thousands of ‘ordinary [British] families’ out on the streets or in emergency bed-and-breakfast accommodation as more and more homes are repossessed by loan companies because unemployed ‘breadwinners’ find themselves unable to keep up with the mortgage repayments. 29

None the less, despite the failure of Thatcherism at this level, the longer-term historical trend towards ‘mobile privatisation’, 30 in which the old public, collective forms of cultural and political identity are supplanted by market-driven consumer lifestyles based round ‘personal choice’ and home-and-family-centered leisure shows few signs of abating. And whatever contortions are produced in national populations by the manipulation of the ‘homing instinct’ for political or commercial gain, the imbrication of libidinally charged images of heimat as first place and safe place in constructions of legitimate belonging seems immune to historical or geographical variation. 31 The idealized shelter as recollected ‘firm position’ (Agnes Heller), ‘the territorial core and fixed point of reference’ (J. Douglas-Porteous) 32 is, perhaps, the fundamental trope in narratives of identity-formation. The lost time-space of the nurturing source remains the radiant wall on to which all our fantasies of closure, all our desires for ontological security get ultimately back-projected. The overwhelming sense of shame most of us experience when confronted by the spectacle of Manhattan’s homeless shanty towns and London’s cardboard cities must stem in part not simply from the affront they represent to any sense of achieved social justice but in the ragged edges they impose around the frames of our most cherished fantasies, in the cracks they open up in our fundamental sense of what and who we are as human beings. In the words of Crystal Waters’ ‘Gypsy Woman’, the first homeless hit song of the nineties, quoted at the opening of this section, ‘she’s just like you and me but . . .’

The Hate Man

. . . she’s homeless, she’s homeless

California 1991

In Berkeley on Telegraph Avenue, down among the coffee shops and clothes stalls, an evangelist counsels the small crowd of Saturday afternoon window-shoppers halfheartedly in attendance to repent and take Christ into their lives.

‘God loves you,’ he barks, jabbing his finger in the air ‘and you and you.’ At the mention of the word ‘love’ a voice barks back, ‘I hate you.’

Its source, bulky, bearded, lurks half hidden in the doorway of the psychedelic T-shirt shop opposite.

As if responding to a prearranged signal, the preacher swings round to face his ‘fraternal’ adversary:

‘God loves you, friend.’

The voice yells back: ‘I HATE you’.
Preacher: ‘God loves EACH and EVERY ONE of us.’
Doorway: ‘I HATE you.’

This is the Hate Man, my new friends tell me as we drift off to find a bar. And he’s always here on preachers’ corner, standing in a doorway dressed in John the Baptist rags, waiting to pounce on the hated LOVE word . . .

Later that afternoon we stand in a bunch on the sidewalk exchanging addresses, a minor obstruction holding up the flow of pedestrian traffic. Just as we’re shaking hands and getting ready to move off, a figure barges past, shoulders draped in a grey blanket, head down, muttering, rattling a polystyrene beaker full of change. Another enraged mendicant. Once clear, he pauses to straighten the blanket and our eyes lock – aggressively at first though something (maybe the out-of-towner’s look on my face, the question-mark expression) seems to break through, to break the curse he’s placed on us and all the other strangers on this street, so that we stand – unexpectedly – the two of us, smiling broadly, aware of the differences in each other’s status as outsiders, amused for once, perhaps, not angered or intimidated or ashamed by that awareness. I remember feeling simultaneously abused by his elbow and honoured by that look, by this invitation to step for a few seconds out of the role of tourist or crazy nomad, to stand backstage reviewing our respective performances. Instead of demanding cash or offering insults he looks at me looking at him and for a few seconds we hover on the threshold of some kind of confidence – an exchange of ironies at least if not of intimacies. Still holding the grin, he says: ‘Excuse me, sir. I’m just tryin’ to fuck up someone’s day.’ Then he wheels round, wild-eyed again and resumes the swaying walk, the incoherent barrage.

She’s homeless (la da dee lal lal) . . .

People with supermarket carts. When did these things come out of the stores and into the streets? She saw these things everywhere, pushed, dragged, lived in, fought over, unwheel, bent, rolling haywire, filled with living trivia, the holistic dregs of everything if that is correctly put. She talked to the woman in the plastic bag, offering to get a shopping cart for her, which is something I might be able to do. The woman spoke out at her from inside the bag, spoke in raven song, a throttled squawk that Karen tried to understand. She realized she understood almost no one here, no one spoke in ways she’d ever heard before. The whole rest of her life had been one way of hearing and now she needed to learn another. It was a different language completely, unwritable and interior, the rag-speak of shopping carts and plastic bags, the language of soot, and Karen had to listen carefully to the way the woman dragged a line of words out of her throat like hankies tied together and then tried to go back and reconstruct.

The woman seemed to be saying, ‘They have buses in this city that crouch for wheelchairs. Give us ramps for people living in the street. I want buses that they crouch for us.’

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She seemed to say, 'I want my own blind dog that it's allowed in the movies.'

But maybe it was something else completely.

... She said, 'Let me into vibration' or 'Get me annihilation', and when Karen brought her hot food on a pie plate she took it into her bag and disappeared (Don DeLillo, 1991: 180).

The Poliscar: an articulated vehicle

In England the term [articulation] has a . . . double meaning because 'articulate' means to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate. It carries that sense of language-ing, etc. But we also speak of an 'articulated' lorry (truck): a lorry where the front (cab) and back (trailer) can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. The two parts are connected . . . but through a specific linkage, that can be broken. An articulation is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? So the so-called 'unity' of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary 'belongingness'. The 'unity' which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily be connected. (Hall, 1986)

VEHICLE: n.1 medium of application or transmission; 2. means of conveyance or transport (Oxford Dictionary of Etymology).

The name of the vehicle, 'Poliscar' comes from the same root as police, policy, and politics, namely from the Greek word for city-state, polis. In ancient Greece the word referred more to a state of society characterised by a sense of community and participation of the citizen (polites), than to an institution or a place. (Wodiczko, 1991a)

Wodiczko's project has always been about articulation in the double sense outlined above by Stuart Hall — as both performative utterance and non-necessary linkage. From the proposed series of 'rhetorical vehicles' in the seventies, some literally powered by the human voice (the 'Coffee Shop' Vehicle, the 'Orator's Vehicle' to today's Homeless 'speech-act machines', he has produced a fleet of moving metaphors explicitly designed to provoke dialogue amongst diverse audiences across multiple boundaries. The routes these vehicles take are, like the act of utterance itself, erratic, unpredictable, driven by contingent factors. The metaphors bite back (for Wodiczko the passage of the Homeless Vehicle through the city 'symbolises . . . (an) act of aggression') (Wodiczko, 1991a). The dialog is as much about identifying points of conflict and uncovering sublimated social violence as it is about forging specific alliances. In Wodiczko's universe there can be no
ideal consensus. Habermas’s hypothetical ‘ideal speech situation’ remains suitably remote. The utopian public space imagined in modernity – neutral, transparent, open to all – is replaced by social space which is always already inhabited hence always circumscribed, contested, interdiscursive. As emigré and artist, as one of Julia Kristeva’s ‘permanent strangers’ and ‘philosophers-in-action’,35 Wodiczko’s point of origin remains for him the war zone of the (global) city where multiple accents and conflicting interests clash and mingle producing lines of antagonism which cut into the social body in ways that can never be guaranteed or predicted in advance. Wodiczko renounces the ‘politics of representation’ in which much ‘political art’ remains lodged in favour of a performative politics of articulation. The ‘art of politics’ made possible by the speech-act theory to which he subscribes undermines the neat Kantian separation of the (moral, aesthetic and scientific) spheres on which our lazier assumptions of what art is and ought to be still rest.

The Homeless Vehicle – as an interrogative tool for examining social relations rather than as yet another ‘engine of history’, yet another utopian deliverance-machine – is perhaps the key articulating metaphor within Wodiczko’s politicized aesthetic. The various prototypes operate rhetorically insofar as they actively effect changes in the way the homeless see themselves and are seen by the non-homeless. As they move around the city the vehicles and the discussions they engender work to shift the terms in which homelessness is discussed and understood so that the concealed structural links between development and displacement can be exposed and subjected to concerted challenge. At the same time, Wodiczko uses the Project as a whole to articulate a nexus of blocked or disavowed connections between art’s ethical and aesthetic vocations, its analytical and performative functions, between the formal grandeur of a new public building and the social squalor that collects around its base. These strategies and concerns come together in the Poliscar, an articulation device for countering the infantilized status (infans: speechless) of homeless men and women through the establishment of a homeless network adapted to the communicative conditions prevailing in the horizontal ‘information’ cities of the late twentieth century.

From the outset, Wodiczko and Lurie have taken pains to stress the Januslike character of the Homeless Vehicle Project: the way it both feeds into the local economy of (can and bottle) redemption while at the same time providing the visibility which is the necessary precondition for the eventual enfranchisement of evict communities. In the most recent model, the double-sided (or two-faced) disposition of the Project is retained though the vehicle’s practical and communicative functions have been brought into even closer alignment. The Poliscar is a Jodrel Bank on wheels. It is a tramp steamer designed for tomorrow’s world.

In addition to the now expandable storage compartment and sleeping spaces, the vehicle bristles with CB radio aeriel, electronic sensors and video transmitters. Driven by an auxiliary battery-powered motor, the Poliscar comes complete with specially designed wheel and track systems for
negotiating curbs, potholes, soft ground etc. The rotatable triangular 'communications unit' (which looks like a witch's hat) located at the top of the cab contains a TV monitor, loudspeakers, electronic signboard, solar panel, a video camera that also functions as a surveillance camera, an unfolding TV-broadcast antenna and hazard lights. The operator, enclosed within the reinforced fibreglass chassis becomes invisible, shielded from the elements and the scrutiny of passers-by, while having visual access to the street via the video cameras and removable windshields made of Lexan ('a very strong material similar to Plexiglass and used for space-suit helmets' (Wodiczko, 1991a)).

In a move that exposes through mimicry the design-led strategy of 'planned obsolescence', Wodiczko applies the 'progressive' dynamic of product development to the lifeworld of evicted men and women, and in the process consigns the supermarket trolley to the dustbin of history. The Poliscar is an ironic rhetorical statement conjugated in the future perfect tense so beloved of techno-freak designers. Here Wodiczko introduces us to a new social category – the accessorized evict. He lists the essential items 'that the urban nomad must carry with him or her at all times', to be secured in the locker situated beside the motor:

- water and other beverages; food supplies (e.g., special diet food); baby food; dog food; cooking tools; equipment for washing; emergency medical kit (including emergency shots for infections; medication for
asthma, diabetics and for malnutrition, poisoning and drug or alcohol overdose; sleeping aids; vitamins; birth control; pregnancy tests; AIDS tests etc., along with a medical history); gas mask; umbrella; suntan lotion and sunglasses; alarm clock, stationery; books; toys and games; audio and video tapes; disposable bags; spare parts; tools (e.g., flashlight, binoculars, tools for emergency repairs and for attaching the vehicle to other Poliscars); and valuables (money, personal and official documents, food stamps, drug and alcohol reserves etc.). (Wodiczko, 1991a)

A whole way of life is conjured up in detail round the Poliscar which functions as vehicle of transmission for a new set of demands on the part of an emergent ‘proto-community’. (A proto-community can be defined as a ‘community without propinquity’,37 an alliance of spatially dispersed groups and individuals united by common interests). Inscribed in Wodiczko’s list of things is another list of rights: the right of homeless people to operate equipment, to bear children, wear sunglasses and condoms, to own valuables and pets, to protect themselves from pollution and poison-gas attacks, to drink alcohol and keep appointments (the alarm clock).

The most important entitlement remains the right to speak from a position, to initiate dialog and to ‘beg to differ’. There can be no identity without difference, no community without a metaphorical frontier-effect, no boundary without culture, no culture without language and exchange and ‘no alliance without treason’ (Brendan Behan). The Poliscar offers a position from which nomadic evicts could begin to talk back – to resist or reverse police surveillance, exchange information, and co-ordinate tactics. It
represents a mechanism for activating the latent networks of the heterogeneous community of evicts so that control over territory can be exercised internally over time and at a distance. Wodiczko envisions using the repeaters on the Empire State Building to establish direct video links between Poliscars via an IF Through-Relay System positioned on a nearby rooftop (Wodiczko, 1991b).

However he remains a (fantastical) realist. Access to the Poliscar, he suggests, would be restricted to potential evict-organizers – organic intellectuals, people with technical training, etc. In the hands of competent volunteers drawn from the ranks of the homeless, the vehicles would be able to perform the more general service of establishing a homeless network within the larger polis of active, legally protected citizens. The Poliscar as mobile (homeless) home could in this way give back voice and agency to a group condemned to silence and inaction. Insofar as the homeless population literally lives on the street, the Poliscar as speech-act machine promises to restore ‘the only true public of the city’ (Wodiczko, 1991a) to itself. Since the Homeless Projection Proposal in 1986, Wodiczko has used the analogy between physical and metaphorical ‘public space’ and the homeless condition, referring to both commemorative monuments and homeless evicts as ‘silent witnesses’ to the betrayal of the promises of urban planners and developers and the civic ideals supposedly encoded in public architecture (Wodiczko and Lurie, 1991). Now through the Poliscar he exposes the exclusion produced by that betrayal not just of the homeless but of ‘us – the “community” – from those real masses of “strangers” from whom we are estranged and with whom we presume to have no common language’ (Wodiczko, 1991b).

In the world of the ‘as if’ which is where the Poliscar operates, the rootlessness (or, more accurately, uprootedness) that distinguishes the homeless from the non-homeless is turned to their advantage. The concentration of (solar-powered) communications devices within the cab of the vehicle has less to do with Wodiczko’s interest in technology per se than with his recognition that in the electronic fin de siècle city the three-dimensional structures of the built environment are overlaid by another ‘architecture of light’ (Virilio, 1987). In a global space of image-people-information flows, the imagined ‘groundedness’ and ‘sanctity’ of place seem increasingly spurious and irrelevant.

And in a typical inversion of common-sense approaches to ‘The Homeless Problem’, Wodiczko presents the Poliscar as a Brechtian history lesson directed at those of us with homes who step over the bodies of the ghosts who line the street without, perhaps, pausing to think not where they come from or who they are (after all, most citizens are moved to ask those questions) but what it is they know. The Poliscar, as the ‘advanced’ model of nomadic transmission and self-imaging forces us to pause and look again.

We are stopped in our tracks as Wodiczko turns the tables on our most cherished assumptions about our ‘place’ in the social order by posing another set of questions: what if people without apartments constitute a diaspora more effectively adapted than most to the new conditions of the
city? Supposing that, as bearers of the brunt of the upheavals which are
remaking urban space everywhere, they have learned their lessons and are
keeping what they've learned – the value of their witness – strictly to
themselves? As Wodiczko writes, 'to us they may seem strange in the city,
but are not strangers to the city' (Wodiczko, 1991b). What if they know not
just the world outside our doors but us far better than we could ever hope to
know them? In other words, supposing we've become the objects of their
predatory, pitying or indifferent gaze rather than vice versa?

The Poliscar reminds us that in any dialog or exchange all positions are
reversible. It reminds us, too, that this reversibility should be regarded less as
a threat to the security of those boundaries that seem to guarantee our place
in the world than as an invitation – the fundamental dialogic promise of all
sociality – to step outside ourselves, to give ourselves up, to be carried by the
other like a bride across the threshold of the fractured and divided habitat of
language, which remains for each of us, a common point of origin, an always
broken home. That promise is sufficiently important to warrant one last
‘digression’.

Conclusion: Reversibility and Witness (caught in the eye of the object)

Certainly one can see them early in the morning, gathered together on a
bench, their movements slightly exaggerated and slow as the first cider
bottle of the day begins to release its destructive magic. But the complexity
and coherence of the world through which they move – the round of
begging, drinking, sleeping, fighting – was something I had never
imagined. Nor . . . had I ever considered that invisible social area where
these most marginal of people encounter the central power of the State
(Colin McCabe, in Healey, 1988).38

‘Witness’, an Anglo-Saxon word of ancient religious usage, adopted again
in our time, has been used to name our human, and therefore imperfect,
attempt to impart to others the grace and perhaps the excitement
perceived in the personal and partial experience of the divine . . . (T)he
word derives from the root whose survivals today include ‘wit’, ‘to wit’,
and ‘wittingly’ and which meant to know. Literally ‘witness’ is an abstract
noun having to do with the condition, degree, or quality of knowing, in
that sense of the word which implies both perceptivity and ‘wisdom’,
another word from the same root (Thomas A. Dooling, 1986).

Debates on the validity or otherwise of ‘participant observation’ research
conducted by displaced scholar-experts into ‘other’ ways of life (e.g., urban
subcultures and ‘traditional’ societies) have moved away in recent years
from an exclusive concern with epistemological or ethical issues (the
question of whether the ‘professional stranger’ can ever ‘get it right’ or ‘do
justice’ either to the people or the lifeworlds under study). Instead the focus
falls more directly on the act of writing itself as an instance of power (see,
e.g., Clifford and Marcus, 1986). Clifford Geertz lists the favored rhetorical
strategies of the new reflexive anthropology (‘ethnographic ventriloquism’,

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‘heteroglossia’, ‘confessionalism’, etc.), but remains skeptical of attempts to deconstruct the authority of ethnographic accounts or to relieve the writing subject of ‘the burden of authorship’ (Geertz, 1984).

Controversies surrounding the probity and value of I-witnessing in anthropology supply a useful counterpoint to Wodiczko’s project. For Wodiczko’s work with the Homeless Vehicles offers a different way into questions of discursive positioning and otherness from approaches preoccupied with the dilemmas of reflexivity. Not only does Wodiczko take the worldly imbrication of discourse and cultural and artistic production in social, hence power, relations as given. He also acts to initiate (rather than passively ‘frame’) relatively open-ended, inconclusive forms of dialog, the outcomes of which cannot be anticipated in advance. It is in this sense that Wodiczko’s contraptions can be described as ‘probes’ or ‘self-estrangement devices’ or ‘speech-act machines’. As objects, they concretize rhetorical strategies via metaphor while as objects-in-motion they string disparate sites together syntagmatically in their erratic passage from point to point across the city. The Homeless Vehicles thus work metaphorically and metonymically to delineate social-spatial divisions and to articulate prohibited or unadmitted social possibilities by provoking discussion and establishing lines of effective linkage.

The contrastive analogy between the Vehicle-as-stylus and ethnographic writing and the implications of the different models of surrendered mastery suggested by a practice based on the reflexive ‘transcription’ of encounters ‘in the field’ and one based on what I would like to call ‘articulated witness’ deserve fuller elaboration than is possible here. Suffice it to say that the word ‘witness’ possesses charged connotations—both legal and religious—which make its invocation peculiarly loaded in this context. Intuitions of apocalypse and impending judgment are, after all, intrinsic to the indigenous puritan culture, especially to the ‘noir’ tradition of American gothic which still frames today’s perceptions of the ‘terminal’ or ‘fallen’ US city. We should question the plausibility of these apocalyptic narratives and the teleology that seems to underpin them (e.g., the expectations of Revelation/resolution and divine retribution). It would simply be wrong, for instance, to imply that the often bloody conflicts between legally enforceable property ‘rights’ and the ‘black economy’ of recycling and ‘redemption’ or between the socially sanctioned discourses of the ‘proper’ and the ‘tidy’41 and Don DeLillo’s deranged-but-indelible ‘language of soot’ are in any way reducible to the symmetrical reversals-of-fortune narrated in a traditional fairy-tale (where the only truths worth telling exist heroically ‘beyond the pale’, ‘beneath contempt’, etc.). The superimposition on the figure of the ‘tramp’ of various outsider-seer ‘types’—the religious ascetic, the schizophrenic, the flâneur/nomadic intellectual—is a familiar enough roam-antic slippage uniting texts as diverse as The Fisher King and Anti-Oedipus. It may well be that the present essay (and Wodiczko’s leading ‘homeless’ metaphors) effect similar projections.

However some of the eschatological nuances are worth hanging on to. The linked collapse of the bi-polar world order, the US domestic economy
and ‘Big Picture’ predictive theories (e.g., Marxism) together with the unprecedented scale of the national debt ($4 trillion and rising) all serve to overdetermine the significance of homelessness as sign-of-the-times and portent of the Last Days (of guaranteed economic growth in North America). Moreover, if the current epoch is characterized by a general decline of faith in the secular epistemologies of modernism, it also spells the end of that disavowal of contingency and immanent affect which has always marked the more ‘systematic’ variants of political and social theory. From this perspective, part of the value of a term like ‘bearing witness’ resides in the emphasis it places – even after the ‘death of the subject’ – on the attainable integrity of what will always be partial and imperfect individual testimony, on the importance of individuals taking responsibility for resisting (if only by recording and attending to) the multiple injustices perpetrated in temporal proximity to their lives.

Notwithstanding semiotic and/or hermeneutic critiques of the appropria-
tive and representational strategies of documentary realism and empiricism, I would argue for the value of witness as positioned testimony in rather than (un)positioned knowledge of a field. Whereas models of ‘observational science’, even those which underpin symbolic interactionism, remain tied, however loosely, to the idea(l)s of typicality, abstraction and generaliz-
ability, witnessing is anthropocentric, conjectural, embedded in epiphanous experiences that remain irreducibly concrete and particular. We could say that witnessing, in the sense I am using the term here, refers to the possibility of a ‘third space’ beyond, beneath or inside (transcendence is by no means implied here) the opposition between watcher and watched (i.e., neither subject nor object [nor Kristeva’s ‘abject’]). The experience of (the encounter with and surrender to) otherness, however mundane the medium of contact, might be said to constitute this space for the duration of whatever is seen to occur ‘inside’ it. If ‘classic’ participant observation studies are founded on a realist epistemology (albeit, in the ‘new ethnography’, a qualified and dialogical one), then the kind of transitive witnessing which I am attempting to outline here might be said to rest on an ‘epistemological’ base which is, by way of contrast, ‘magically realist’. Though anything can happen in the witness-space of mutual implication that binds two or more subjects in a ‘telling’ encounter, the significance or truth-value of this ‘anything’ cannot be tested by the extrinsic criteria of scientific method (e.g., ‘typicality’, ‘repeatability’, ‘falsifiability’, etc.).

Whether or not such a distinction is seen as useful or viable, the principle of reversibility (rather than identification-with or fetishization-of-otherness) which crucially informs Wodiczko’s ethic and aesthetic is itself encoded as a latent possibility in the ethnographic experience in ways which justify a brief return to the comparative example. It is through this comparison that the psycho-political connotations of terms like ‘projection’, ‘transference’ and ‘resistance’ as applied to Wodiczko’s work can be brought, at last, fully into view. For we could say that the classic texts of anthropological fieldwork and social exploration testify to the ambivalence of the writing subject’s relation to the tabulated Other who, whether knowingly or not, constitutes
the object that draws the subject on. The prospect of dissolving the distance that separates the watcher and the watched is what motivates both the quest for knowledge and the fear of ‘going native’ which always dogs the knowing subject from the shadows.

Yet we could say that it is only when we fall beneath the shadow of the object, in that switching of positions, that something else gets through. What we call a ‘genuinely educative experience’ is what comes back in the wake of that descent (education n. a leading out):44 a return (though never to the same place) and a return, too, in that other sense — a return on an ‘investment’ which, like the coin paid to the ferryman, represents a debt redeemed — the price extracted for the passage. It was, after all, not until Jack London stepped quite literally into ‘the other person’s shoes’ during the course of his investigations into conditions in the East End of London in 1903 that he got to see what life was like in the ‘abyss’. Disguised as a ‘common workman’, he learned at once that

In crossing crowded thoroughfares . . . I had to be, if anything, more lively in avoiding vehicles, and it was strikingly impressed upon me that my life had cheapened in direct ratio with my clothes.45

Only by merging with his shadow, the ‘reverse-image’ of the class to which he belonged, could London find that other London and the homely, ‘heimlich’ violence of an order that insisted, then as now, that its shadows get out of the way.

Wodiczko’s vehicles move differently on different principles. As they are pushed or driven through a succession of physical spaces, discursive frames and contexts, as they trundle on towards Paris, Barcelona or Minneapolis from 5th Avenue via Tompkins Square Park or the streets of Philadelphia or Sheffield, they attract non-evicts like a lure attracting fish. Wodiczko writes:

The middle classes are well trained as consumers. As good consumers they know how to quickly and accurately evaluate the ‘value’ of every new functional and symbolic form that appears before their commodity-tuned eyes. Many non-evicts were engaged and approached us to ask ‘What is this for?’ These same people see evicted individuals every day on the street and never ask questions. Now they are provoked to ask questions (Wodiczko and Lurie, 1991).

With the Polis car the splash of the lure in the water has become that much louder, the rhythm of seduction and enquiry that much more pronounced. We have all been led to this. At the end of the line, in the heart of the labyrinth, we find ourselves confronting a tanklike communications center operated by unseen hands. This, perhaps, is not what we were expecting at all. Through every stage of the Project, Wodiczko has set about educating us as to what is at stake in the ‘homeless question’ not by relaying the ‘findings’ gleaned from his prolonged researches into homelessness or by parading the homeless as victims or objects or (barely) animate ‘issues’ but by looking back at us from the other side of property, by hailing us, so to speak, through the loudspeakers mounted on the front of the Polis car and making us turn
round. We should hardly be offended to discover when we turn to face the face whose eyes (perhaps) we’ve been avoiding in the street that there is no one there (that we can see) just a speech-act machine, that it is, precisely, no one that is looking back at us.

Appendix

For various reasons (primarily restrictions on word-length) I decided to drop the I-witnessing sections from the version of the preceding article that appears in the Wodiczko catalog, Public Address. A few months later I included the description of the Manhattan teepee in another article entitled ‘America is an old country’ (Art Forum, October, 1992). The letter reproduced below – from Nick and Gabriele Manhattan, the artists who, as it turns out, put the teepee up in 1990 – came through the office fax soon after publication. I include it here because it adds another strange loop to the ‘tramp’ undertaken in the essay through Art’s place vis-à-vis the urban war zone, homelessness, the ethics of disclosure, reversibility, the politics of representation/speech act theory.

New York
October 1992

Re: Article in Artforum, October ’92

Dick,

A couple of days after Gabriele and I put the tepee up, I was walking across Chrystie Street at Canal when a 5 x 8 print blew up at my feet. Curious, I picked it up and continued walking. As I studied it more closely, I suddenly stopped and looked around quickly to see who had ‘planted’ this photo on me. Of course, no one was there but the wind. I walked up on the Manhattan Bridge carrying the image, past your final perspective as described in the article, trying to find the perspective of the camera that had shot the print I was holding. Difficult, because the image was at least five years old. Walking back into time, I finally found it.

It. Where the tepee now stood there used to be a scrawny tree. The rest of the triangular lot was barren. No shanties. I would learn later from some of the residents who had been there the longest, that at Christmas one year, they had put ornaments on the tree and some mornings when they woke, they had found different kinds of gifts under it. When we put the tepee up on Thanksgiving, 1990, there was no physical evidence of the tree, only the memory that it was once there, right where the tepee now sat.

Gaby and I had been trying to ‘work with’ ‘the homeless’ ‘work for’ ‘work by’ for quite a while. Us/Them was always the problem. But after living in the tepee for a few months, we became very much like ‘the homeless’. The drama
of ‘the Hill’ was our drama as much as theirs. The police, the tourists, the press, all those eyes out there. Them and us.

Around the fire in the tepee at night, we told our stories. Gaby and I told of how there used to be a large freshwater pond called Collect Pond just to the west and south. The only known Indian settlement in southern Manhattan was high ground near the edge of Collect Pond. The chief or the tribe or the village was named Warpoes. The translation meant ‘little hill’. The story amazed everyone, for where we now were was colloquially called ‘the Hill’ for as long as anyone could remember. We told them how the Dutch had bought Manhattan from the Warpoes for $26 in beads. During the days from then on, visiting tourists were told this story with the enthusiasm and imaginative embellishments of children excitedly repeating the day’s history lesson for their parents.

We added a postcard to sell. Photographs by press and tourists were still forbidden, but instead of throwing rocks, cursing and scaring away the peepers, everyone was armed with disposable cameras. The game was to sneak up on the unsuspecting voyeurs and snap them in the act. Hundreds of prints of these surprised, horrified, embarrassed, angry faces were sewn onto fur and hung on the scalp pole outside the tepee. ‘Counting Coup’ – more a dialog than war between us and them.

In May, our friend and neighbor on the Hill died in one of the many fires. Only then Gaby and I realized who our true peers were. Not the dozens of artists of various disciplines who had visited us in the tepee, suggesting this that or the other film, project, story, etc. But Mr Lee and others like him. Our grief was overshadowed only by our former ignorance in not recognizing who he was.

Reviewing the enlargement of the photo that blew up on my feet, I found that the large billboard in it was ‘Winston – America’s Best’.

The tepee today is only the 17 poles in a cone with no cover. Skeleton. The big billboard has changed a couple of times now and I can’t recall what it is at ‘present’. It has been 4 months now since Mr Lee’s death. I have been smoking a lot of Winstons. They’re getting me through. Not the tobacco, but the new campaign for Winston Select: a gold eagle silhouetted against the red background. Gaby and I bought a brand new 1992 Eagle Summit Wagon last month. As I’m writing this, she and 2 friends are painting the new cover for the tepee. The vision is that of an eagle carrying a turtle.

The sticks will walk again. Ten feet over to where the old warrior lived and died. On Columbus Day we will cover the power of his memory with as much sincerity as we can achieve. Then try and live true to the vision given.

When you were on the Manhattan Bridge in December, Gaby and I were either in the Black Hills or at Wounded Knee. We were out there that whole month. We found out that the people had forgotten how to make the tepee, but that they had learned to talk again to the other four-legged and two-legged people. New stories were being told. The turtle people were telling why and how they carried their house on their back. The eagle people brought the sticks from their nests and told their secrets. The people were learning to build the tepee again. The Medicine Wheel was forming the Sacred Hoop.
After the fire, I was in the Assistant DA’s office. He had ruled it arson. I was talking to him about Mr Lee. He was trying to decode who Mr Lee was from all the homemade passports and pictures and writings in Chinese characters that I had collected from the rubble and brought to him. He was half ass trying to work Mr Lee’s immigration from China to Cuba and then to the US at the time of the takeover by Castro into something which would explain the unintelligible passports, writings, and hundreds of nameless pictures Mr Lee possessed. I told him about the picture that had blown up at my feet and the rest of the story: how I found out that a photographer ‘artist’ was displaying a ‘stolen’ photo of the tepee at a gallery; how I had gone to the gallery and taken measurements of the print and matting and then enlarged my found print and put it into the correct sized matting; how one of the residents of the Hill and I went to the gallery and did the ol’ switcharoo. It stayed there for the run of the show. So the photographer got back not the photo he had taken, displayed and tried to sell for $400, but a photo of the same place from a different perspective and time. ADA Greenbaum was smiling as I told him this. I said ‘Now, you can imagine how that photographer felt when he found that photo instead of his. He would have thought some kind of magic and voodoo were happening, at least momentarily. He would never find out what really happened. So more than likely he would be plagued with doubts and paranoia. He would exhaust rational explanations every time he reflected on it. But of course it wasn’t magic. I’m not a magician. The magician was the person who blew that print up to my feet a year and a half ago.’

Mr Greenbaum lost his smile and then gave a nervous laugh. Later on he would target and intimidate me with his arson investigation to the point where I no longer knew who were the police and who were the criminals. To be fair, he didn’t know either. It was obvious that nets were going over other nets at the time. That’s always the case or at least the fear: No one is safe. Anyone can be set up.

For my part, I found some children’s drawings in the garbage and started painting and altering them. One a day keeps the doctor away. Until I healed. The final one had a tree in it. I wrote GREENBAUM into the trunk and branches, baum being German for tree.

The branch of a large tree had reached over Mr Lee’s house. The intensity of the fire scorched and perhaps destroyed it – hard to tell. The poles of the tepee will reach up into that branch.

There’s always some kind of quincentennial happening. Goodbye, Columbus.

STREETS BLOSSOM WHERE YOU STROLL UNTIL TIMELESS SPRING NOW GOLDEN WINGS UNFOLD

Thank you for seeing this.
Sincerely,

Nick Manhattan
Notes

1 This is a revised and extended version of an article entitled ‘The machine is Unheimlich: Wodiczko’s Homeless Vehicle Project’ published in Public Address: Krzysztof Wodiczko (Walker Art Center, 1992), the catalog accompanying a retrospective exhibition of Wodiczko’s work at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota (11 Oct. 1992-3 Jan. 1993) and Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas (22 May-22 August 1993).

2 ‘The new Citroën’ (Barthes, 1972): ‘It is obvious that the new Citroën has fallen from the sky inasmuch as it appears at first sight as a superlative object. . . . The D.S – the ‘Goddess’ – has all the features . . . of one of those objects from another universe which have supplied fuel for the neomania of the 18th century and that of our own science-fiction: the Deese is first and foremost a new Nautilus.’


4 See Berman (1986). See also, e.g. Deutsche (1986, 1988, 1990); Smith and Feagin (1988); Sassen-Koob (1988); Smith and Williams (1986); Smith (1987; 1990); Palen and London (1984); Gottdiener (1985). The causal connection between speculative development and homelessness was, perhaps, more immediately visible in the nineteenth-century as this verse from The Builder (Vol. ix), published in 1851, demonstrates:

Who builds? Who builds? alas ye poor!
If London day by day ‘improves’
Where shall ye find a friendly door
When everyday a home removes?

5 For example, the construction in 1989 of an 18 foot wall separating a new Docklands housing development from the neighboring complex of ‘soulless
30s (council) flats' symbolized 'a border line... the Berlin Wall' for one council tenant interviewed in the Guardian:

There is room for 400 properties to rent, but nothing has happened. All we get are glossy brochures shoved through the door. You think what they spend on those: if you add it up over the 8 years, you could probably have refurbished every council house in London. (see 'Border wall division for island communities' and 'Thatcherite success story or social disaster' in the Guardian, 9.12.89.)

6 See 'Debacle in Docklands', London Evening Standard (2.8.89). See also King (1990); McKintosh and Wainwright (1987); Hebdige (1988a); Wallis (1991); Wilson (1991) and The East London File, Four Years Review of the LLDC (Docklands Consultative Committee Support Unit, 1985).

7 Operators and consultants for the project have included: 'Allan, Benjamin, Pierre, Oscar and Victor, residents of Tompkins Square Park; Alvin, a homeless person in San Diego; homeless workers at the WE CAN Redemption Center, New York; Vanessa Brown, John Alston and Vernon Wilson, operators in Philadelphia; Arlene Wilson, Margaret Stevens, Marie General and Harvey Wilson, from the National Temple Recycling Center, Philadelphia' (Wodiczko and Lurie, 1991).

8 See Deutsche (1986, 1988, 1990). Transcripts of these conversations are included in both the Exit Art and ArTRANDOM catalogues. See also the transcript extract of a conversation between Oscar and Krzysztof (page 21).

9 Freud (1919: 729):

The German word 'unheimlich' is obviously the opposite of 'heimlich' ['homely'], 'heimisch' ['native'] - the opposite of what is familiar... In Daniel Sanders's Worterbuch der Deutschen Sprache (1860, Vol. 1, 729), the following entry... is to be found under the word 'heimlich':

Heimlich, adj., subst. Heimlichkeit (pl Heimlichkeiten): 1. Also heimelig, heimlich, belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly etc.

Note especially the negative 'un-': eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear: 'Seeming quite unheimlich and ghostly to him...' 'These pale youths are unheimlich and are brewing heaven knows what mischief.' "Unheimlich" is the name for everything that ought to have remained... secret and hidden but has come to light" (Schelling).

Freud takes off with an example from Gutzgow in which the meanings of heimlich and unheimlich are interchangeable so that the word 'heimlich' 'is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar, agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight.'

It is in this sense of an ambivalence or oscillation between the familiar and the unfamiliar, disclosure and concealment, that I'd suggest Wodiczko's projection-machines are unheimlich.

10 Coutts-Smith (1979). Alisa Maxwell's suggestion that we 'understand Wodiczko's vehicles as interrogative models of social realities, not as utopian models' has influenced the arguments put forward in the present essay. The Sisyphus, Democracy and Artist vehicles were part of a series of models produced by Wodiczko between 1973 and 1979. The Sisyphus machine was so named by Kenneth Coutts-Smith because 'forward motion is achieved as a result of the operator pushing a heavy weight up an inclined plane, which, turning under
gravity on a fulcrum, returns both weight and operator ceaselessly once more to
the lower level where he constantly faces the slope before him and the necessity
to repeat his actions.' (Coutts-Smith, 1979) The Democracy machine consists of
a large square platform capable of holding a crowd of people. The undirected
movements of the crowd are translated through mechanical and pneumatic
systems installed in the floor into energy which rotates the wheels though the
vehicle can only move slowly in one direction. The Artist vehicle (the only one of
this series actually produced as a working prototype) again moves in a unilinear
direction and is powered by the artist who walks up and down a tilting platform
with his hands behind his back in a posture of Napoleonic isolation. The artist's
solitary ramble causes a seesaw movement which generates energy transmitted
by a system of cables and gears to the wheels. Again progress is unilinear. In each
case there is an 'elaborate discrepancy between energy expended and work
achieved' (Coutts-Smith, 1979) and the vehicles can be regarded as 'ironical
learning tools' (Maxwell, 1982) for the critical examination of both technocratic/instrumental rationality in general and specific ideological constructions
of labour, utility and progress.

11 The comment was made with reference to the work of Michel Foucault: 'In my
opinion, you were the first — in your books and in the practical sphere — to teach
us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others.' As
Craig Owens indicates in a footnote, Foucault responds by citing the work of the
'Groupe d'information de prisons' and the political importance of the process of
empowerment that begins when prisoners themselves begin speaking: 'the
counter-discourse of prisoners and those we call delinquents — not a theory
about delinquency'.

See 'Intellectuals and power: a conversation between Michel Foucault and
Gilles Deleuze' in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice cited in Owens
(1985: 801, n.7).

12 The barracklike EAUs (Emergency Assistance Units) were one of the scandals of
Mayor Koch's public 'housing' provision exposed in Jonathon Kozol's book,
Rachel and Her Children. One of Kozol's homeless respondents gives the
following description of the 'shelter' afforded by the local State:

I'm alone there in this place with about 200 cots packed side by side. Men and
women, children all together. No dividers. There's no curtains and no screens.
I have to dress my kids with people watching. When my girls go to the toilet I
can't take them and they're scared to go alone. A lot of women there are
frantic. So I stand and wait outside the door. (J. Kozol, 1988)

Hostel, 'spike' and 'doss house' accommodation in Britain has an equally bad
reputation. The Independent quotes Charles King, a captain in the Salvation
Army:

We will never again build a dormitory hostel . . . There are many reasons why
people are homeless — underlying emotional and mental difficulties exacer-
bated by living rough. Put together in a hostel which is under-staffed, with no
on-site care, they can only cause problems. People would either not go or
would leave, preferring the safety of Lincolns Inn Fields and streets. We don't
need another doss-house. (See Sean O'Neill, 'The £27m hostel revolution' in
the London Independent, 16.2.92)

13 Statistics, as usual, vary. Patrick Wright suggests that there are 100,000
homeless people in New York in 1992 while in 1988, the New York Times
(15.5.88) gave a figure as low as 28,000. The figures cited here are taken from Lurie (1991); Kozol (1988) and S. Sassen-Koob (1988).

14 The brutal truth, however, is that as a community we are not good enough, and the care we offer is not good enough. (‘Stranded in a careless community’, The Independent, 16.2.92). The MIND organization estimate that some 15,000 mentally ill people in Britain are homeless. Apart from the scale of the problem, one difference between the two cities is the large number of homeless teenagers, refugees from family friction and unemployment in the north, who arrive in central London and get absorbed into the ‘abject economy’ (begging, sometimes pornography and prostitution).

15 The WECAN Redemption Center was founded by Guy Polhemus in 1986 as a non-profit organization to provide a central bottle and can depository (located in a converted midtown garage near the Hudson river) for the homeless. It now employs 40 full-time staff and during the peak summer season 100 mostly homeless men to sort and bag up to 200,000 cans and bottles a day. The depository makes bottle and can redemption a viable source of income for the homeless who would otherwise waste time lining up outside stores reluctant to take more than a few containers. According to the Globe and Mail, redeemers earn an average of $35 a day, typically for about four hours spent collecting 700 cans. WECAN pay redeemers 5 cents for each container and sell them back to the manufacturers for 6½ cents. The Center’s income is supplemented by corporate and personal donations. A secondary market has also opened up among the homeless as independent refund operators, called ‘two fors’, travel round the city offering homeless people 5 cents for every two containers during the hours when the Center is closed. See the Canadian Globe and Mail, 25.10.91.

16 The realization that women using the vehicle as ‘temporary emergency shelter’ would be exposed to risk became apparent in the course of Krzysztof’s consultations with female evicts.

17 For the arguments about the ‘production’ of space, see for instance, Lefebvre (1991a, 1991b); Castells (1991); Gottdiener (1985); Deutsche (1988); Harvey (1989). ‘Flexible accumulation’ is a term coined by the Marxist geographer, David Harvey. Harvey argues that commercial, technological and organizational innovations have conspired to increase the flexibility and mobility of finance and industrial capital today to such an extent that it signals the emergence of a new regime of capital accumulation. This regime affects the structure and international division of labour markets and leads to an expansion of the informal economy and service sectors and a corresponding decline in developed economies of manufacturing industries dominated by organized labour. Flexible accumulation is equated with the simultaneous deregulation and increased monopolization of markets, the growth of sub-contracting and professional consultancy, accelerated product turn-over and product differentiation, ‘just-in-time’ distribution systems; the ‘instantaneous international coordination of financial flows’ with global on-line banking and computerized stock-market transactions and a general ‘space-time compression’ whereby ‘the time horizons of both private and public decision-making have shrunk, while satellite communication and declining transport costs have made it increasingly possible to spread those decisions immediately over an even wider and more variegated area.’ (Harvey, 1989). The representation and experience of place is also affected as the workforce is subjected to employer demands for increased worker flexibility and a willingness to ‘relocate or go under’ and as cities and regions as well as nations compete to attract investment in a process which leads
to the packaging of place as commodity (cf. debates on 'fake' v. 'authentic'
heritage, etc.). The term ‘flexible accumulation’ signals a commitment to a
classical Marxist theory of development and is intended partly as a Marxist
corrective to postmodernist, postindustrialist and post-Fordist accounts of
Also Lash and Urry (1987); Hall and Jacques (1990).

18 See, for example, October 38, Fall 1986, especially K. Wodiczko and R.
Deutsche; and R. Deutsche, October 47, Winter 1988.

19 This section is extracted from Hebdige, 1988a.

20 Garrison Keillor, Lake Wobegon Days, (Faber & Faber, 1985). But see also ‘The
autograph’ in Keillor (1990), a nicely judged account of a meeting in Manhattan
between Keillor and a homeless man who tries to sell the narrator one of his own
books, and then insists on an autograph.

21 See for instance, Tagg (1981); Hebdige (1988b); Jeffrey (1981); Mayhew
(1861); Pinchbeck and Hewitt (1981); Dyos and Wolff (1980); Keating (1976).


23 See, for example, Chatwin (1987); Sennett (1977, 1990).


26 Davis (1990). Davis cites other, equally ingenious dystopian initiatives: the
downgrading of Elysian Park from tourist attraction to police shooting range; the
introduction of automatic 24-hour pre-programmed water sprinklers stra-
tegically placed to deter homeless catnappers in the remaining public parks; the
construction of private developments, secluded to the point of invisibility, with
appropriate names like Hidden Hills and Rancho Mirage and an ‘imbrication of
the police function into the built environment’ so naturalized that residential
rooftops have been painted with identifying street numbers to facilitate helicopter
surveillance. Davis further reports a tripling in security service industry sales and
workforce during the eighties and resistance from an exclusive residential estate to
the proposed siting outside its gates of forty-five homes for senior citizens on the
grounds that it ‘will attract guns and dope’. See also Davis (1988); Wilson (1991);
and Mike Byegrave, ‘LA Law: the bust live from Los Angeles’, a report on the
background to the police assault on Rodney King in Lake View Terrace on 3
policy based on a small, heavily militarized Robocop-style force became
apparent, however, in the upheaval following the King verdict in April 1992.

27 Jim Woods, Chairman of the Community Redevelopment Agency in Los
Angeles Times, 19.2.87 quoted in Davis (1988).

following statistics:

Home maintenance and d-i-y (do it yourself) is no minor activity. In 1983 one
of the UK’s major national surveys indicated that 51% of all males aged 16
and over had done some d-i-y in the four weeks before the interview took
place. Among women, 24% had also been active in this area. With 68% home
ownership predicted in 1990, . . . the d-i-y and associated gardening markets
offer one of the growth markets for home-centred consumption. There has
been a 9% real growth in spending on d-i-y goods from 1981 to 1986, with
£3,161 million being splashed out on such goods in 1986. Home-based
consumption, home ownership and autonomy in decorative display – these
are intensifying trends in Margaret Thatcher’s Britain.
29 The unprecedented number of house repossessions due to the recession and a stagnant property market prompted the British Government in early 1992 (an election year) to pressurize lending companies to offer ‘mortgage rescue schemes’ for struggling house-owners. In February 1993 it was estimated that 600,000 people in Britain were having difficulties with mortgage arrears (You and Yours, BBC Radio 4, 18.2.92).

30 Williams introduced the term ‘mobile privatisation’ in Television, Technology and Cultural Form (Fontana, 1974) and developed it subsequently (e.g., Williams, 1989b) to refer to the transition from the older, more public, collective forms of social affiliation to an investment in the private sphere, domestic space and the family as focal point. He likens ‘this unprecedented condition’ to being enclosed in a mobile ‘shell’ that provides the primary sense of identity and reality against which the ‘distractions . . . and destructive interventions’ of the larger outside world appear as ‘mere abstractions’ (Williams, 1989b).

31 For an interesting examination of the abiding power of notions of heimat (literally ‘homeland’) in contemporary Europe, especially with reference to the construction of post-war German identity see Morley and Robins (1990). The projection of a common homeland cuts both ways of course and has as much to do with excluding outsiders as ‘redeeming’ lost or threatened imaginary communities.

32 Quoted in Joan Kron (1983). Kron also quotes Gaston Bachelard (‘Home is our corner of the world . . . our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word’) and ‘architectural phenomenologist’, Kimberly Dovey (‘Home is an ordering principle in space . . . a place that is loved or a place of loving . . . a place where one has some degree of control . . . an option to modify’). But see also Putnam and Newton (1990) especially contributions by T. Putman, M. Bulos, R. Madigan and M. Munro, D. Miller, V. M. Swales, R. Silverstone and D. Morley.

33 Hall’s work on articulation is related politically and philosophically to the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, e.g. C. Mouffe, ‘Radical democracy: modern or postmodern’ in Ross (1988); Laclau and Mouffe (1985); Laclau (1990). Each of them uses the term differently but taken together their work represents an attempt to pursue the ‘discursive turn’ which marks contemporary social and political thought while thinking through the implications for established (Marxist) models of political agency and political organization of a theory of ‘non-necessary correspondence’ in a world marked by multiple social antagonisms (e.g., ethnic, gender, sexuality, evict/non-evict, etc.) where Lefebvre’s ‘proletariat-bourgeoisie’ relation (Lefebvre, 1991a) is no longer guaranteed paramount importance. The acknowledgement of fragmentation, incompleteness and plurality associated with work that takes ‘articulation’ as its central metaphor also involves—at last!—a recognition of ‘the dignity of the specific’ (Laclau, 1990).

34 Two more of Wodiczko’s first Vehicles series. The Orator’s Vehicle is a lectern on wheels and the speed of the vehicle which moves in one direction only and is propelled by an electric motor is determined by the strength of the orator’s voice. There are two versions of the Coffee Shop machine though the chassis in both cases consists of a table and two seats mounted on wheels. In the first, the voices of the conversants activate the engine of the vehicle which is kept in (unilinear) motion by the liveliness of the conversation. In the second, the animation of the speakers’ movements causes a swinging motion which is transmitted through a system of gears to rotate the wheels which
move the vehicle in a straight line in one direction only. (See Wodiczko, 1982; Coutts-Smith, 1979.)

35 Kristeva (1988). I am grateful to Catherine Gaitte for translating this passage for me.

36 The details of the Poliscar project included here paraphrase two unpublished Restless Production documents (Wodiczko, 1991a and 1991b) produced by the artist in New York during August and September 1991. One of them was handed out to visitors to the Poliscar exhibition (7 September-5 October 1991) mounted at the Joss Baer gallery.

37 Mulgan (1989); See also Morley (1991). Paul Willis defines 'proto-communities' as 'new, emergent or potential communication communities' and distinguishes 'proto' from 'organic' communication:

Organic communication, where communities communicate within themselves and then outwards, sending messages about their conflicts, oppressions and material conditions of existence, is breaking down. . . . [Proto-communities] are flatter and much more resistant to top-down communications of all kinds. They have different origins and different stakes in communication. They start and form not from intentioned purposes, political or other, but from contingency, . . . from shared desires, from decentered overlaps, from accidents. They form from and out of the unplanned and unorganized precipitations and spontaneous patterns of shared symbolic work and creativity (Willis, 1990).

Wodiczko's Poliscar is oxymoronic insofar as it 'engineers' a proto-community.

38 This is not from a Participant Observation study of homeless alcoholics but from Colin MacCabe's introduction to John Healy's (1988) extraordinary autobiography The Grass Arena. MacCabe's comments are disarming in their sincerity (and his remarks about the role of first-person narration are pertinent to the discussion of 'I-witnessing' in the present article). Predictably, MacCabe's legitimation of the book by Healey, a recovered lower working-class alcoholic (MacCabe places it in the masterpiece tradition of European high modernism), proved as offensive and ultimately as unacceptable to the liberal and/or genteel tastes of ruling English literati in the nineties as Healey's writing itself (which included, in addition to the book, letters threatening violence to the chairman of Faber & Faber).

39 J. Clifford in Clifford and Marcus (1986):

Every description or interpretation that conceives itself as 'bringing a culture into writing', moving from oral-discursive experience (the 'native's', the fieldworker's) to a written version of that experience (the ethnographic text) is enacting the structure of 'salvage'. To the extent that the ethnographic process is seen as incription (rather than, for example, as transcription or dialog) the representation will continue to enact a potent, and questionable, allegorical structure.

When judged in these terms, the present article is, no doubt, a failed attempt to move 'beyond the salvage paradigm'.

40 I have invoked and explored the idea of 'witness' in relation to otherness and truth (though - perhaps not surprisingly - I have never tried to theorize it) in a number of articles in the past few years (e.g., 'Guilt trips - coming up against the wall' in Art and Text No. 31, Summer 1990; 'Transmissions', a catalog essay for
the Rooseum (Malmö, Sweden, 1991); Down the Line: An Identity Production (Winnipeg Art Gallery, forthcoming).

41 For important analyses of the category of the 'proper' see, for instance, Mary Douglas and Luce Irigaray. Eric Michaels conducts an intermittent assault on the discourse of the 'tidy' in his AIDS diary. For instance:

'Tidiness is a process which, while avowedly in the service of cleanliness and health, in fact is only interested in obscuring all traces of history, of process, of past users, of the conditions of manufacture (the high high-gloss). Tidiness inhabits and defines a 'moment', but one outside time, ahistorical, perhaps the ancestral dreamtime home of all 'Lifestyles'. It is a perfect bourgeois metaphor. The tidy moment does not recognise process, and so resists deterioration, disease, aging, putrefaction. On this basis, it justifies its association with health and cleanliness and is considered an appropriate discourse to inflict on the diseased, the aging, the putrefying (Michaels, 1990).

42 See J. Kristeva (1988). The sense of grace or Zen jijimuge ('the unimpeded interdiffusion of all particulars' (D. T. Suzuki)) implied here may seem, on the face of it, diametrically opposed to the sense of revulsion Kristeva sarcastically associates with patriarchal horror at the prospect of merger with the mother's body. However, the sensation of ego-loss which occurs in I-witnessing can be no less visceral. Padma Perera relates one such moment, experienced as a child standing on the threshold of a gopuram, a gigantic twelfth-century stone shrine:

When the priest started to chant, his voice rose and echoed and melted away: into that shadow, into that stone. And when he stopped, the silence was as sculptured as the stone. It was as if all boundaries had disappeared: between solid and void, between light and dark, between sound and stillness - between you and what you saw . . . . Describing her similar experience while watching the sunset one evening, and merging imperceptibly into it, my mother wrote to me: 'Somewhere along the way, my seeing eye was no longer an individual point but a part, as it were, of the whole circumference' (Perera, 1986).

43 For an attempt at magically realist ethnography see, for instance, Hebdige (1987).

44 'You have learned something. That always feels at first as if you have lost something' (George Bernard Shaw).


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Reviews

TIM DWYER

THE VALUE OF REALPOLITIK IN 'BLANDSVILLE'

- Stuart Cunningham, Framing Culture: Criticism and Policy in Australia (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 204pp, $19.95 Paperback.

The starting point of Framing Culture is a view that cultural studies ought to be outwardly concerned with its future. Within this argument it is presumed that cultural studies need not risk marginality and exclusion because it can offer strategic discourse beyond cultural critique and into the seemingly bland world of policy making. There is a gulf between these two worlds which is capable of being bridged. Cunningham asks the question: Why leave important issues of
cultural policy to the econocrats, financial hardheads or can-do communi
cations engineers? The structured corollary is that an open orientation to
other 'blander' knowledges will facilitate cultural studies’ ongoing input to
public policy. In fact, Cunningham's book is valuable on two main counts.
Firstly, he has suggested ways in which the dual terrains of criticism and
policy might be merged, yet he is able to retain both within a responsive
cultural studies framework. And secondly, actively pursuing this approach
has enabled him to expand on the traditional cultural studies agenda of
power and contestation in policy-making contexts. Framing Culture has generated widespread response and controversy in
Australia. Reviews have ranged from elaborate enthusiasm to the trenchan
daily the Australian Financial Review felt that the incumbent Federal
Communications Minister would be well advised to dip into Framing
Culture’s arguments. In Synnott's view they constitute a primer to the
broader social and cultural implications of technocratic planning for major
communications infrastructures like Pay TV. Meaghan Morris (1992)
thought the book is an exercise in 'theoretical pragmatism', but none the less
'makes useful suggestions about putting policy into our pedagogy'. Hawkins
(1992), King, O'Regan (1992) and Rowse, (1992) in separate reviews,
thought that Cunningham does not do justice to the relationship between
intellectual practice and political change, arguing that his privileging of the
cultural policy analyst above the cultural critic is misconceived. Similarly, it
was the view of a number of reviewers that Cunningham's representation of
the 'discipline' of cultural studies was somewhat selective in not taking into
account, as Hawkins notes, the 'plurality of critical practice, (including)
gender and sexuality studies, post-colonialism, studies of popular culture
and textual studies'. I take the import of the debated issues to be a fair indication of not only the
intensity of response that Framing Culture has provoked, but also as a
measure of the centrality of the issues raised for cultural studies as a
pedagogical terrain. Less critical attention has been shown towards the
important cultural policy questions themselves, which, in fact, occupy the
greater part of the book. The book uses a number of case studies to provide
practical examples: 'A tale of two institutions' looks at the humanities in
Australian tertiary education and its relationship with governmentally framed policy; 'Nations at the crossroads' examines the dynamic between national and international cultural production using the policy debate over television content to illustrate strategies for intervention; 'The unworthy discourse? Advertising and national culture' considers similar issues in relation to the advertising industry; 'The future close at hand pay 'tele vision in Australia' analyses the policies of a new media industry; and 'Shock! Horror! Violence and Television' reviews the dominant paradigms of research into media violence and their effects on policy and suggests ways in which cultural studies may contribute to these debates. Instead, issues such as the legitimate focus of cultural studies and where it should direct its energies have tended to mark out the site of conflict. No less than the future direction of the humanities and cultural studies have been depicted as the stakes in the debate, which no doubt accounts for their intensity. Indeed, King juxtaposes Framing Culture with essays by Morris and Frow in Beyond the Disciplines: The New Humanities, a recently released collection edited by Ken Ruthen (based on a peak conference of the
same title organized by the Australian Academy of the Humanities) which

focuses on similar 'future directions' matters. By setting up his polemic in
terms of a cultural critique/cultural policy opposition, Cunningham has

invited these factional alignments. And, as a generalization, those positioned

more closely to either critique or policy modes (and I am guilty here of

sustaining the 'othering' that the book would like to see les"ened), will tend
to have different responses as regards this project of convergence. For

example, Chris Healy (1992) has suggested that the arguments in Framing
Culture well illustrate Lyotard's in The Postmodern Condition: A Report on

Knowledge, which argues that in a 'postmodern education system the ques
tion is no longer, Is it true? but What use is it?: Is it saleable?: Is it efficient?' However, despite what some reviewers have suggested, a cultural studies

approach does underpin the book. This equips Cunningham to analyse a

number of key policy-making sites in a contemporary capitalist liberal
democracy. And clearly his theoretical assumptions and methods could be

usefully applied to any similar analysis of the construction of policies by
governments. Regulatory policies in education, commercial television,
television content, violence and television and new
communications media

are critically examined: but the criticism is filtered through an acknowledgment of the realpolitik of the policy-making process. Indeed, there is an inversion of the usual critique of policy position: It has been the approach of this book to view cultural studies from the perspective of the policy process, rather than the more usual standpoint of assessing policy from within academic criticism. In turning this traditional relationship on its head, the field of cultural and communications policy has been used more as a benchmark than as an object of critical examination. This stance has not left the policy process immune from criticism, but it has maintained that a greater understanding of the internal dynamics of policy development, and of their marked differences from the protocols of criticism, must precede analysis of and participation in them. (181)

This means being context-sensitive to, among other things, technical information and political and lobbying games. He founds his position on a view which recognizes limits in the ability of critique to further practical interventions in the construction of public policies. Cunningham argues critical discourses are ill-equipped to provide the totalized exegesis which they will frequently claim. Behind this is a far-sighted appreciation that for cultural studies to 'add value', it must adapt its basic strategies towards dealing with cultural policy. In his own words, 'to treat policy adequately from a critical perspective, it is necessary to appreciate the coordinated impact of economics, administrative law, cultural history,
entertainment financing, government and parliamentary procedures, and so on, on the development of public policy'. And furthermore, 'cultural policy research thus requires a wider, rather than narrower, critical understanding than is found in the traditions of cultural criticism developed exclusively within humanities-based disciplines, and a significantly greater sensitivity to the extra-academic contexts within which such research must circulate for it to exercise its potential leavening function.' This kind of broader orientation has also been advocated by Graham Murdock who, concerned with the direction of cultural studies, argued in 1989: We also need to restore cultural studies' commitment to making practical as well as academic interventions. This certainly involves arguing with policy makers and contributing to debates on the funding and organisation of cultural activity, but it also means renewing and developing the dialogue with the subjects of our inquiries, through adult and continuing education, public speeches, journalism, and programme making.... If cultural studies is to contribute in a central way to the debates of the 1990s we will need to fight long and hard to defend and extend the spaces and resources that allow intellectual work and political debate to proceed (1989: 47).

Cunningham's arguments need to be understood within the context of Australia's polity. Unlike northern hemisphere, first-world nations, Austra lia is a second-world nation with what has been characterized as an 'import culture'. There is a history of positive state involvement
in our cultural sphere which tends to be at odds with the role of the state in many first-world nations like the United States. Were it not for this positive intervention of shaping and supporting cultural production, much of this activity would not be otherwise possible in a small and minimally funded market. Cunningham argues that in this situation cultural studies should develop more appropriate accounts of national identity that can support policy development in the face of increasing internationalization. Framing Culture, I would suggest, belongs to a long tradition in the history of the social sciences and humanities where liaisons between critical or generally oppositional and administrative-cum-dominant knowledges have occurred. Naming two that come to mind, there has been the work of Lasswell in the United States in the 1950s who advocated 'a policy orientation' in the social sciences, or more recently, the work of Mattelart et al. (1984) in France in the early 1980s who collaborated with the government on national cultural-policy strategies. Yet there will always be certain unlikely coalitions of discourses in policy processes which resist existing categories deemed to be officially 'appropriate' for particular policy
projects. However, these examples tend to be the exceptions rather than the rule. Far from being oblivious to the implications of walking this tight-rope

Cunningham notes that: Most people trained in cultural studies would see their role as being critical of the dominant political, economic and social order. When cultural theorists do turn to questions of policy, our command metaphors of resistance and opposition predispose us to view the policy making process as inevitably compromised, incomplete and inadequate, peopled with those inexpert and ungrounded in theory and history or those wielding gross forms of political power for short-term ends. These people and processes are then called to the bar of an abstrusely formulated critical idealism. This critical idealism might well regard my voice as one of neo liberal compromise and cooptation. (9)

In general, I consider that these all-too-rare liaisons are to be welcomed when they do emerge. Certainly, the circulation of these ideas in the Australian context is timely. Australia’s media scene is characterized by a lack of critical input to public-policy processes. What kind of strategic interventions does Cunningham actually propose?

In his chapter, 'The unworthy discourse? Advertising and national culture' he makes the point that cultural studies are markedly unsuited to contributing to current policy debates in Australia. Understandably; the prevailing critical position is one which views advertising as pandering to consumerist and patriarchal mentalities. But such a perspective tends implicitly to aid and abet deregulationist trends which regard the national advertising industry as
blatantly protected against foreign content. (The
Australian Broadcasting
Authority administers regulations on maintenance of
'Australian content'.)

After all, why would you bother intervening in defence of
such a damn
shabby enterprise? Cunningham suggests that a more
strategic cultural
studies intervention would be to argue for the positive
contribution that
advertising makes to national culture and identity. In
other words, the
experience and competences of those skilled in analysing
connections
between audiovisual texts and questions of national
identity could be
usefully drawn on to inform policy positions. As well,
persuasive cultural
and industrial arguments can be mounted: empirically a
strong local
advertising industry undergirds local television drama
production. In
context of globalizing culture, the need for a
rapprochement between
cultural theory and media policies will continue to remain
high on the
agenda. There is food for thought in his point that there
is a strange
convergence between cultural studies criticism, inherently
critical of con
structured unities like the nation-state, and doctrines of
'rational' economic
and social restructuring. It seems to me that Cunningham is
in no sense suggesting that the social
critique edge of cultural studies be jettisoned. On the
contrary, he is arguing

that a deeper understanding of how particular public
policies of the cultural
industries are contested needs to utilize a full range of
resources from the
social democratic toolkit. For example, the much vaunted
notion of
'citizenship' adds political value to debates that might
otherwise rely on
libertarian culturalist arguments, and which tend to run
the risk of
uncritically echoing 'internationalist' cultural and
economic rhetorics. From
his self-proclaimed social democratic position he argues
that developments
in cultural studies, like its attention to a notion of
citizenship as part of its
political vocation, represents the kind of strategic
adjustment that is
required for the 1990s. The idea of re-thinking the status
of cultural studies in policy contexts is to
ensure that it can make an ongoing input into spheres
where, in the past, it
has been marginalized. To this end, Framing Culture has
emerged on the
Australian media scene at a time when the debates on pay TV
are reaching a
well-fermented zenith, after more than a decade of policy
pirouettes by
successive administrations. Cunningham argues in the fourth
chapter, on the
still-yet-to-materialize pay TV industry, this virtual rather than the actual media future provides the opportunity to 'test and refine perspectives that should be central to the critical enterprise. Principal amongst these is the relation of cultural to economic and technological precepts . . . in the formulation of policy'. The point of this kind of exercise is to re-balance debates which nowadays are increasingly dominated by information technologists, engineers and economists.' His arguments on the discourses of 'informatisation' and the implications of these for conceiving audiences in policies provide a much needed counterbalance to prevailing deregulatory ideologies which frame audiences as consumers. In that regard he makes the important observation that these ideologies fit snugly into de rigueur rhetorics of consumer sovereignty discourses which circulate widely, along with the dubious 'choice' offered by new communications media products. In a sense Cunningham's advocacy of a renewed set of political strategies for cultural studies needs to mobilize concepts like 'citizenship'. In the context of changing communications and information technologies, it enables an expanded cultural studies mandate to be equated with the
advocacy of cultural or information rights. The promotion of equitable
access to communications and information in a period of increasingly
commoditized and privatized media is, to borrow from the lexicon of
'machine' political advisers, a 'spin' that makes for a pleasant surprise.


