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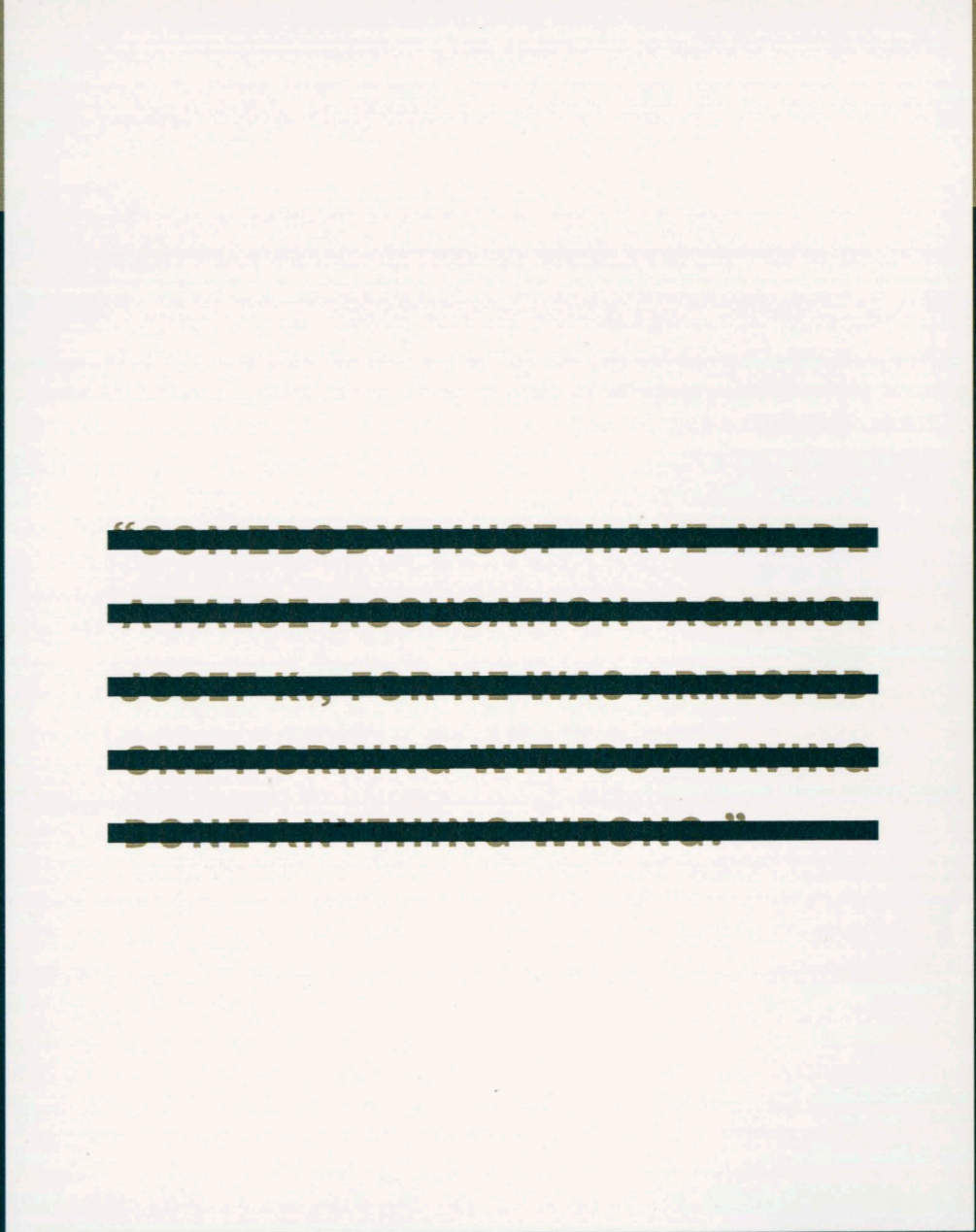
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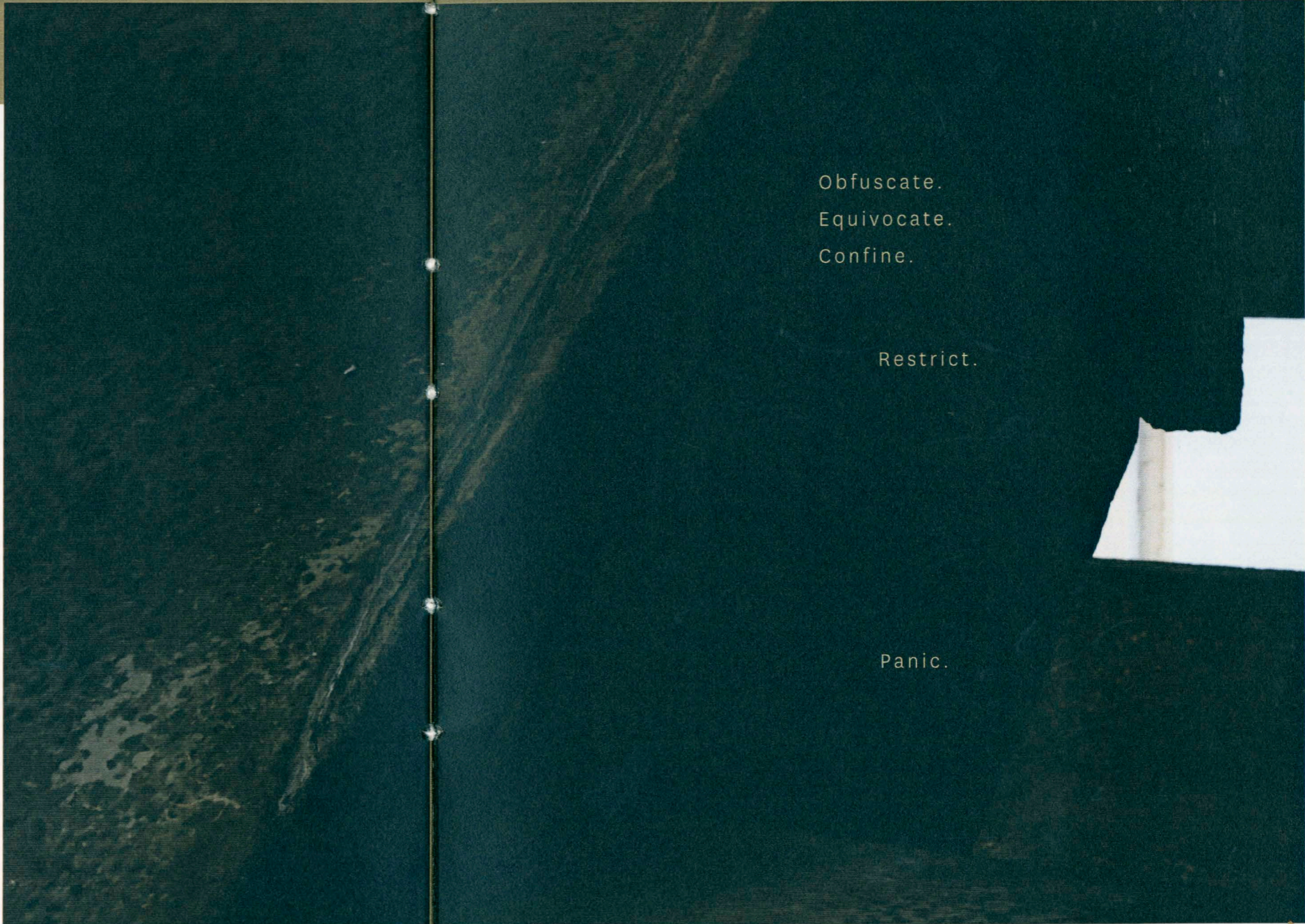
**“SOMEBODY MUST HAVE MADE
A FALSE ACCUSATION AGAINST
JOSEF K., FOR HE WAS ARRESTED
ONE MORNING WITHOUT HAVING
DONE ANYTHING WRONG.”**

A respectable young banker, Josef K. is arrested on his 30th birthday and never finds out why. After his arrest, K. still goes to work, is visited by his uncle and even carries on abortive romances with various women. Yet all the while, the noose is tightening...

Kafka powerfully captures the plight of a helpless individual caught up in the toils of a meaningless and implacable system. As in a nightmare, K. finds that rooms change configuration without warning; people behave according to a bizarre logic; K. knows things without knowing why or how. Yet the overall effect is an inescapable and confronting reality.

— John Banville

THE TRIAL IN FIVE WORDS:



Obfuscate.
Equivocate.
Confine.

Restrict.

Panic.

TYPE OF ISOLATION:

- SOCIAL
- ~~PHYSICAL~~
- ~~PSYCHOLOGICAL~~

The Trial documents man's alienation in the face of a vast and impenetrable bureaucracy. The Court is made up of many levels, most of them being tangible, corrupt and confronting. The highest level, however, remains elusive.

Although the concept of such a trial wrapped in obscurity might seem ridiculous, Kafka presents the situation in an entirely plausible and even familiar manner. We drift into a world that lies between sleep and awakening, resulting in the anxiety of a nightmare that feels terrifyingly real. Kafka's labyrinthine world of totalitarian politics and faceless authority is not attached to a particular time nor place, which gives *The Trial* an eternal relevance.

Don't be intimidated if you feel confused.

Kafka's stories are meant to elude understanding. They live and breathe in a world of paradox, where detail and thoroughness obscures rather than clarifies. The unrestrained momentum of Kafka's writing creates an impression of claustrophobia and panic. A sense of paranoia permeates the text like a perpetual cold sweat and by the time you reach halfway, you feel completely trapped in the book.

This is why we read.

Related Content:

THE SINGLE INDIVIDUAL

For Kierkegaard, the journey to truth is one that the individual takes alone. Like Josef K, we will always find our version of the truth to be corrupted by the social pressures of crowd.

SØREN KIERKEGAARD

“There is a view of life which holds that where the crowd is, the truth is also, that it is a need in truth itself, that it must have the crowd on its side. There is another view of life; which holds that wherever the crowd is, there is untruth, so that, for a moment to carry the matter out to its farthest conclusion, even if every individual possessed the truth in private, yet if they came together into a crowd (so that “the crowd” received any decisive, voting, noisy, audible importance), untruth would at once be let in.”

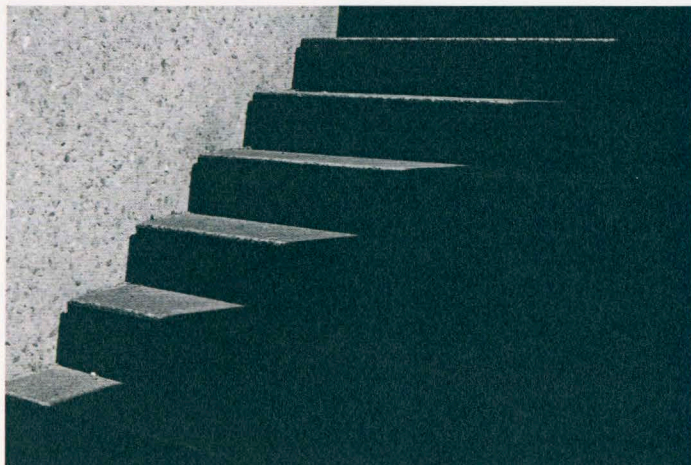
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DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH

The prison is part of a “carceral network” that infiltrates society through a network of power structures. The internalised fear of this modern punishment disciplines the individual to act morally. Although K. is never physically imprisoned, his desperation to resolve the trial and return to anonymity leads to self-destruction.

MICHEL FOUCAULT

FRANZ KAFKA



Franz Kafka was raised in the volatile Austro-Hungarian empire as a German-speaker amongst Czechs, a Jew among Germans and a disbeliever amongst Jews. These forces of alienation were compounded by his overly pragmatic father, his bureaucratic job and the opposite sex. It's easy to see how these isolating emotional, cultural and religious environments have influenced Kafka's writing. Working as a lawyer for an insurance company by day, Kafka dedicated his evenings to writing; the one activity that he believed justified his existence. Kafka only published a few short stories during his lifetime, and instructed his friend Max Brod to destroy his unpublished manuscripts after his death at age 40. Brod ignored his request and went on to publish his most famous works *The Trial* and *The Castle*.

Kafkaesque:



THEMES & MOTIFS

Impaired sight

The court is described as dark, dusty, hazy, dank, stale and stifling. This sickening atmosphere affects K.'s judgement and symbolises the impenetrable wall between humanity and the truth.

Claustrophobia

A sense of panic seeps into the text through descriptions of confined and enclosed spaces. At times its as suffocating to read as the airless rooms of the court.

Conformity

The court represents a society that insists on conformity at all costs where the individual is guilty for simply being an individual, thus rendering the defence system futile. The court gains control by subjecting the individual to a demeaning and perplexing trial resulting in feelings of inferiority, insecurity and paranoia.

Kaf

CHARACTERS

K.

Victim of the faceless bureaucracy

Everyone else

Agents of the faceless bureaucracy

FOUR WAYS TO READ *THE TRIAL*

1. Autobiographical
1. Existentialist
1. Nihilist
1. Absurdist

The sense of impossibility, futility and menacing complexity coupled with a yearning desire and immense hope.

An excerpt from:

The First Examination

K. had the impression he was walking into a great assembly. A crowd of the most varied people came in – packed a medium-sized room with a gallery running round just under the ceiling, this too filled with people who could stand only in a bent posture, their heads and backs pressed against the ceiling. K., for whom the atmosphere was too stuffy, stepped out again and said to the young woman, who must have misunderstood him: 'I asked about a joiner, a certain Lanz.' 'Yes,' said the woman, 'please go in.' K. would probably not have done as she said, had the woman not gone up to him, put her hand on the door-handle, and said: 'After you, I must shut this door. Nobody else may go in.' 'Very sensible,' said K., 'but it's already too full. But then went in all the same.

Between the two men talking right by the door – one was making a gesture with both hands outstretched as if paying out money, the other looked him keenly in the eye – a hand

A TASTE

reached out for K. It was a small boy with red cheeks. 'Come on, come on,' he said. K. let himself be led off by him. It became apparent that through the seething mass there was a narrow space, possibly a dividing line between two factions; this supposition was supported by the fact that in the nearest rows to right and left K. saw hardly a single face turned towards him but only the backs of people directing their words and gestures to people in their own faction. Most were dressed in black, long and ancient Sunday-best coats which hung on them loosely. These clothes baffled K.; but for them he would have taken this for a local political meeting.

At the far end of the hall, to which K. was taken, stood a very low and equally overcrowded platform. A small table was set across it, and behind this, near the edge of the platform, sat a short, stout, wheezing man, talking and laughing uproariously with another standing behind him who had one elbow propped on the back of the chair and had crossed his legs. Now and then he threw an arm into the air as if caricaturing somebody. The boy who had brought K. had difficulty making himself heard. He had already gone up on tiptoe twice in an effort to pass on his message, without being noticed by the man above. Only when one of the people on the platform drew his attention to the boy did the man turn towards him and lean down to listen to his softly spoken report. Then he had pulled out his watch and looked quickly at K.: 'You should have been here an hour and five minutes ago,' he said. K. was about to answer but had no time, for hardly had the man spoken than there was a general hum of disapproval from the right side of the hall. 'You should have been here an hour and five minutes ago,' the man now repeated in a raised voice, and now he also looked down quickly

in to the hall. At once the hum of disapproval grew stronger and, as the man said nothing more, it died down only slowly. It was much quieter in the hall now than when K. had come in. Only the people in the gallery were still talking. As far as could be seen in the semi-darkness up there, through the haze and dust, these seemed to be worse dressed than the people below. Some had brought cushions to put between their heads and the ceiling so as not to rub themselves sore.

K. had made up his mind to observe rather than speak, so he put forward no defence of his alleged late arrival, and merely said: 'Even if I've come late, I'm here now.' A burst of applause followed, this too from the right half of the hall. 'These people are easy to win over,' thought K., who was disturbed only by the silence in the left half of the hall, which was directly behind him and from which only a few isolated handclaps were heard. He wondered what he could say to win them all over at the same time or, if that were not possible, to win the others over for the time being at least.

'Yes,' said the man, 'but I'm no longer obliged to examine you' – again the buzz, but his time its import was not clear, for the man continued, with a dismissive wave of his hand to the people – 'but today I'll make an exception and do it all the same. But such lateness must not happen again. And now step forward!' Someone jumped down from the platform to make room for K., who went up. He stood pressed against the table, the crush behind him was so great that he had to lean back against it if he was not to push the examining magistrate's table and even the man himself off the platform.

The examining magistrate paid no attention to this but sat comfortably enough in his chair and, after a final word to the

man behind him, picked up a small notebook, the only object on his table. It was like a school exercise-book, old, misshapen through much use. 'Right,' said the examining magistrate, who was leafing through the book and now turned to K. with the air of making an assessment: 'You are an interior decorator?' 'No,' said K., 'I am senior administrator in a large bank.' This answer provoked such a hearty laugh from the right faction down below that K. had to laugh too. The people put their hands on their knees and shook as if they were having severe attacks of coughing. Even a few in the gallery laughed. The examining magistrate, who had become very angry and probably had no power over the people down below, tried to compensate for this by attacking the gallery, he jumped to his feet and threatened the people in the gallery, and his normally unobtrusive eyebrows swelled out until they were bushy, black, and huge over his eyes.

The left half of the hall was, however, still silent, the people there stood in rows with their faces turned towards the platform and listened to the words being exchanged up there as quietly as they listened to the noise of the other faction; they even tolerated contacts here and there between individual members from their ranks and members of the other faction. The people of the left faction, who incidentally were less numerous, might have been fundamentally just as unimportant as those of the right faction, but their calmness made them seem more important. When K. now began to speak, he was convinced he was saying what they were thinking.

'Your question, sir, as to whether I am an interior decorator – or rather, you didn't ask, you told me so outright – typifies the whole nature of these proceedings instituted against me.

You may object that these are not proceedings at all. You are absolutely right, for they are only proceedings if I recognize them now, for the moment anyway, out of pity so to speak. You have to regard them with pity if you're going to pay any attention to them at all. I'm not saying the proceedings are slapdash, but this is the expression I'd like to offer you for your private consideration."

K. broke off and looked down into the body of the hall. What he had said was cutting, more cutting than he had intended, but it was true. It should have been greeted with some applause, but everyone was quiet, evidently waiting with keen anticipation for what was to come; perhaps in this silence there was brewing an outburst which would bring everything to an end. It was disturbing that the door at the end of the hall opened just at this moment to admit the young washerwoman who had probably finished her work and who, in spite of her precautions, attracted several glances. Only the examining magistrate gave K. unqualified pleasure, for his words seemed to have made an immediate impact on him. Until now he had listened on his feet, for K.'s speech had taken him by surprise when he had risen to threaten the gallery. Now, while there was a pause, he resumed his seat slowly, as if he did not want this to be noticed. Probably in order to compose his features he picked up the notebook again.

'That doesn't help,' K. continued. 'Your little book, sir, confirms what I say.' Pleased at hearing only his own calm words in that strange assembly, K. even ventured to snatch the notebook without ceremony from the examining magistrate and hold it aloft in his fingertips as if to show his revulsion, dangling it by one of the middle pages so that the closely written

pages, stained and yellow-edged, were hanging down on either side. 'These are the examining magistrate's records,' he said, and he let the book fall on the table. 'Please carry on reading it, sir; this account book doesn't worry me a bit, even though it's inaccessible to me since I can only touch it with two fingertips.' It could only be a sign of deep humiliation, or at least that is how it had to be construed, that the examining magistrate picked up the book where it had fallen on the table, tried to put it into some kind of order, and once more set about reading it.

The eyes of the people in the front row were fixed so eagerly on K. that he looked down at them for a little while. Without exception they were elderly men; some had white beards. Were these perhaps the crucial ones who could influence the whole assembly, whose members had not been stirred even by the humiliation of the examining magistrate out of the inertia into which they had sunk since K. had spoken?

'What has happened to me,' K. went on, more quietly than before, constantly scanning the faces in the front row; this gave his words an appearance of distraction. 'What has happened to me represents of course only one individual case, and as such it's not very important since I don't take it too seriously, but it's typical of the proceedings instituted against many people. I speak here for those, not for myself.'

He had raised his voice without being aware of it. Somewhere a man clapped with hands held high and shouted: 'Bravo! Why not? Bravo! And bravo again!' Some of the ones in the front row ran their hands through their beards, but none turned around in response to this shout. K did not attach importance to it either, but was encouraged by it all the same; he no longer thought it necessary that all should applaud, it

was enough if most of them began to think about the business and if only an occasional one were won over by persuasion.

'I'm not out for success as an orator,' said K., following up this reflection, 'and I don't suppose it's attainable for me either. The examining magistrate is probably a much better speaker; it's part of his job, after all. All I want is public discussion of a public outrage. Listen: I was arrested ten days ago. I can laugh about the fact of the arrest itself, but that's not the point. I was pounced on in bed in the early morning; perhaps – and after what the examining magistrate has said, this possibility can't be excluded – perhaps the order has been given to arrest some interior decorator who is just as innocent as I, but they came for me. The room next to mine was taken over by two ill-mannered warders. If I'd been a dangerous bandit they could have taken greater precautions. These warders were degenerate scum too; they talked my head off, they fished for bribes, they tried to take my clothes and underwear from me by false pretences, they asked me for money, supposedly to supply me with breakfast after they had shamelessly gobbled up my own breakfast before my very eyes. That wasn't enough. I was taken to a third room to face the supervisor. It was the room of a lady for whom I have much respect, and I had to look on as this room was to some extent, because of me and yet no fault of mine, polluted by the presence of these warders and the supervisor. It wasn't easy to remain calm. But I managed it and, quite calmly, I asked the supervisor – if he were here he'd have to confirm this – why I had been arrested. And what was the answer of this supervisor whom I still see before me, sitting in the chair of the lady I've mentioned, a picture of mindless arrogance? Gentlemen, in effect he gave me no answer; perhaps he really knew nothing,

he had arrested me and that satisfied him. He had in fact done something else and introduced into that lady's room three minor employees of my bank who spent their time handling and disarranging photographs, the property of the lady. The presence of these employees had another purpose too; they, like my landlady and her maidservant, were to spread news of my arrest, damage my public reputation and in particular undermine my position at the bank. Now nothing of all this has been achieved in the slightest degree; even my landlady, a quite simple person – I'd like to mention her name here with due honour: she is called Frau Grubach – even Frau Grubach was intelligent enough to see that such an arrest has no greater meaning than an attack in the street by undisciplined young thugs. I repeat – I have suffered only a bit of trouble and passing annoyance from the whole thing, but it couldn't it have had worse consequences?

As K. broke off here and glanced at the silent examining magistrate he thought he saw him looking at some one in the crowd as if giving a signal. K. smiled and said: 'Here next to me the examining magistrate is just giving one of you a secret signal. So there are people among you who take their orders from up here. I don't know if the signal is supposed to produce hissing or applause and, by giving the game away before I have to, I deliberately renounce any possibility of finding out what the signal means. It's a matter of complete indifference to me, and I publicly authorize the examining magistrate to issue his orders to his paid assistants down there openly by word of mouth instead of through secret signals, by saying "Hiss now!" or, the next time, "Applaud now!"

The examining magistrate shifted about in his chair with

embarrassment or impatience. The man behind, with whom he had been in conversation earlier, bent down to him again, either to encourage him or to give some particular advice. Down below, people were conversing quietly but in a lively way. The two factions, who had previously seemed to have such differing opinions, were now mingling with each other; some people pointed with their fingers at K., others at the examining magistrate. The misty haze in the room was extremely tiresome; it even prevented him getting a clear view of those standing at a distance. It must have been a particular nuisance for the people in the gallery. They had to direct questions in a low voice to the participants in the assembly to discover what was going on, all the time shooting nervous side-glances at the examining magistrate. The answers were given just as quietly behind the shield of a raised hand.

'I've almost finished,' said K. and, since there was no bell, he struck the table with his fist and this startled the examining magistrate and his advisers out of their huddle for a moment. 'I can distance myself from the whole business, so I'm able to judge it calmly; and you, if you have any interest in this supposed court, will learn something to your advantage if you listen to me. I'll ask you to postpone until later any discussion among yourselves of what I have to say, because I haven't much time and I'll be going away soon.

There was immediate silence, so completely did K. dominate the assembly. They did not all shout at once, as they had at the beginning, there was not even any more applause, but people seemed already won over, or well on the way to it.

'There is no doubt,' said K. very quietly, for he was pleased by the closely attentive attitude of the whole assembly; from

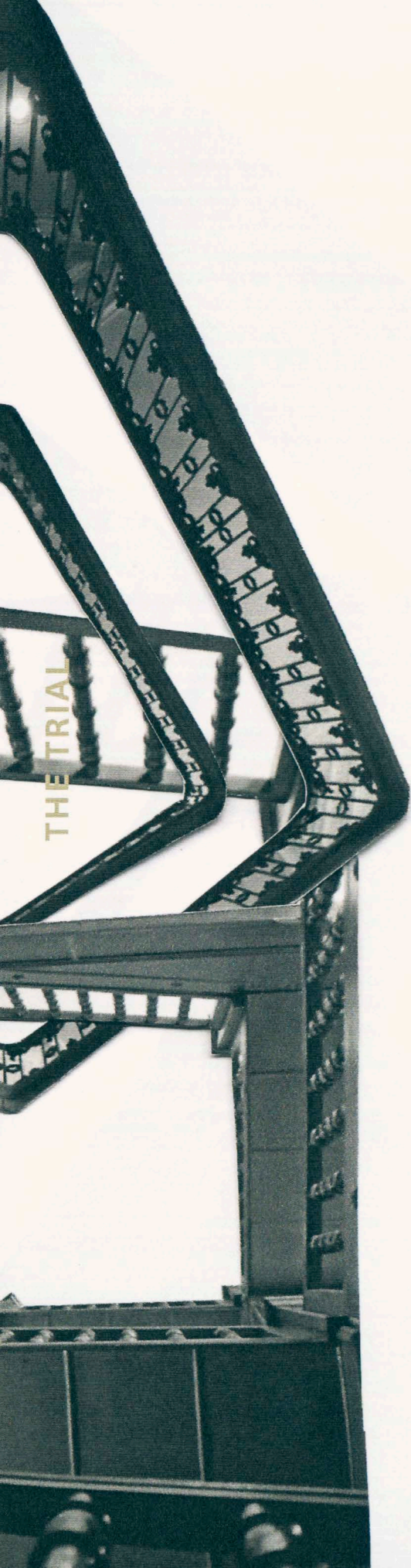
this silence rose a buzz which was more exciting than the wildest applause. 'There is no doubt that behind all the utterances of this court, and therefore behind my arrest and today's examination, there stands a great organization. An organization which not only employs corrupt warders and fatuous supervisors and examining magistrates, of whom the best that can be said is that they are humble officials, but also supports a judiciary of the highest rank with its inevitable vast retinue of servants, secretaries, police officers, and other assistants, perhaps even executioners – I don't shrink from the word. And the purpose of this great organization, gentlemen? To arrest innocent persons and start proceedings against them which are pointless and mostly, as in my case, inconclusive. When the whole organization is as pointless as this, how can gross corruption among officials be avoided? That's impossible, not even the highest judge could manage that. That's why warders try to steal the very clothes arrested persons are wearing, that's why supervisors break into other people's houses, that's why innocent men, instead of getting a hearing, are humiliated in front of large gatherings. The warders told me about depots where the property of arrested persons is held. I would like to see these depots where the hard-earned assets of those arrested are allowed to rot, when they are not stolen by thieving depot officials.'

K. was interrupted by a shriek from the end of the hall. He shielded his eyes to see what it was, for the gloomy daylight made the haze dazzling white. It involved the washerwoman, recognized by K. as a likely source of disturbance as soon as she came in. Whether she was to blame now was not clear. K. could see only that a man had drawn her into a corner by the

door and was pressing her against his body. But it was not she who was shrieking but the man; he had opened his mouth wide and was looking up at the ceiling. A small circle had formed around the pair, and the nearby people in the gallery seemed pleased that the gravity K. had introduced into the meeting had been interrupted in this way. K.'s first impulse was to run to the spot, and he thought everybody would want to have order restored and at least have the couple thrown out of the hall, but the front rows stayed put, nobody moved and nobody would let K. through. On the contrary, he was obstructed; old men held up their arms, and somebody's hand – he did not have time to turn around – seized him from behind by the collar. K. was not actually thinking of the couple now; he felt as if his freedom were being restricted, as if he were really being arrested, and he sprang recklessly down from the platform. Now he stood face to face with the crowd. Had he misjudged these people? Had he overestimated the effect of his speech? Had they hidden their true feelings while he was speaking and had they had enough of this dissimulation now that he had presented his conclusions? What faces these were around him! Small dark eyes flashed from side to side, cheeks sagged as they do in alcoholics; their long beards were stiff and sparse, and when they ran their hands through them they seemed to be growing claws, not combing beards. But under the beards – and this was K.'s real discovery – badges of various sizes and colours glittered on coat collars. Everybody had these badges, as far as one could see. All were connected, these apparent factions to right and left, and when he suddenly turned he saw the same badges on the collar of the examining magistrate, who was looking down calmly with his hands in his lap. 'Ah!', cried K., and he threw

his arms up in the air - this sudden realization demanded space - 'You are all officials of course, I see now; you are the corrupt gang I was talking about, you've all squeezed in here as listeners and snoopers, you've pretended to form factions and one of these applauded just to test me; you were out to learn how to lead innocent people astray. Well, you haven't spent our time here in vain, I hope. Either you have been entertained at the idea that anyone could expect you to defend innocence or - get away or I'll hit you,' cried K. to a trembling old man who had come very close to him, 'or you've really learned something. And with that I wish you joy in your trade.' He quickly took his hat, which was lying near the edge of the table, and pushed his way to the exit amid general silence, at any rate the silence of utter surprise. But the examining magistrate seemed to have been even quicker than K., for he was waiting for him at the door. 'One moment,' he said. K. stopped but did not look at the examining magistrate. He looked at the door, whose handle he already held. 'I only wanted to draw your attention to the fact' said the examining magistrate 'that today, although you may not be conscious of it yet, you have deprived yourself of the advantage which a hearing invariably confers on a person under arrest.' K. laughed into the door. 'You blackguards!' he shouted. 'I make you a present of all your hearings.' He opened the door and hurried down the stairs. Behind him rose the hum of an assembly which had come to life again and was probably about to discuss the events in the manner of a student's seminar.





THE TRIAL

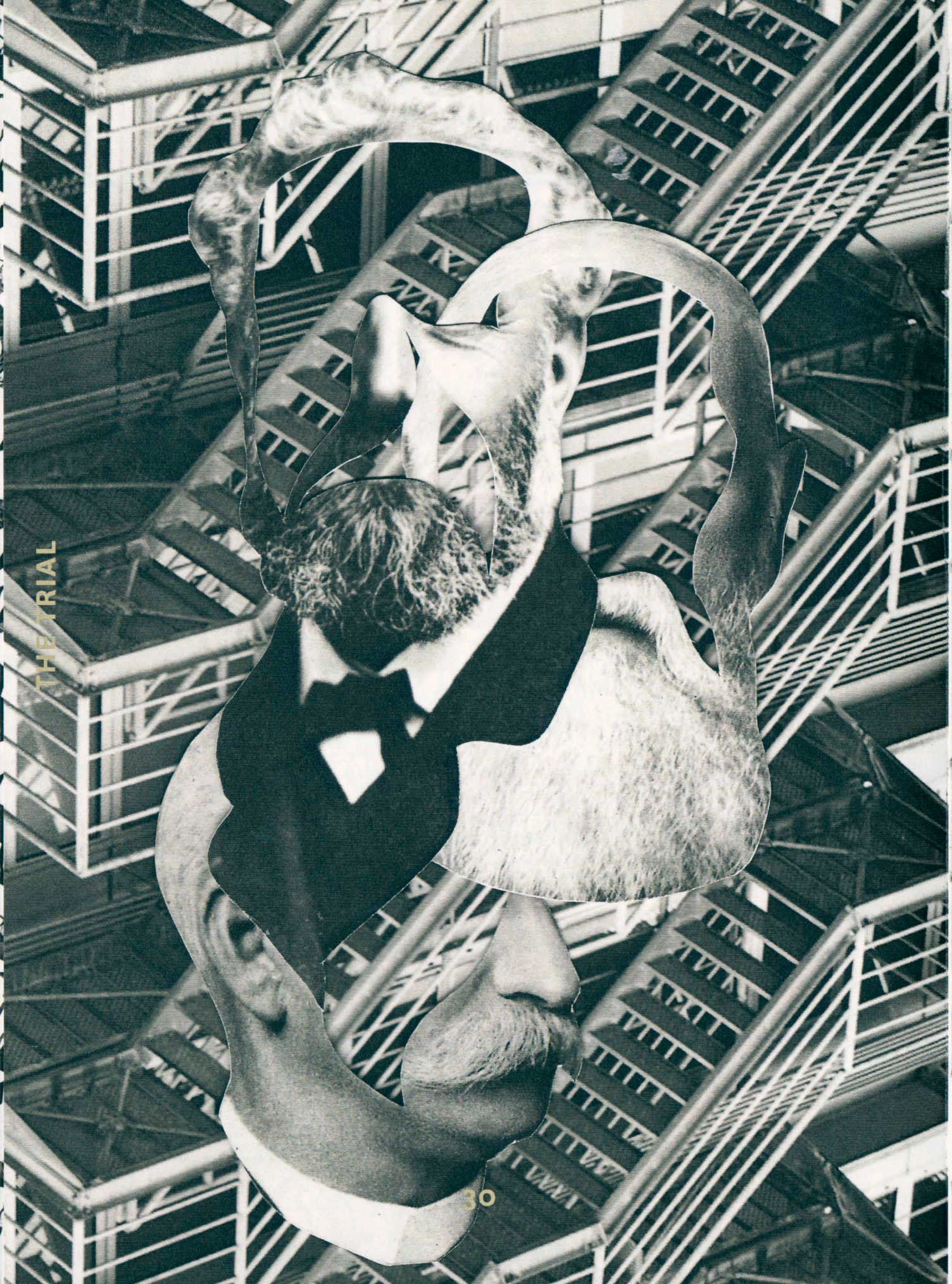


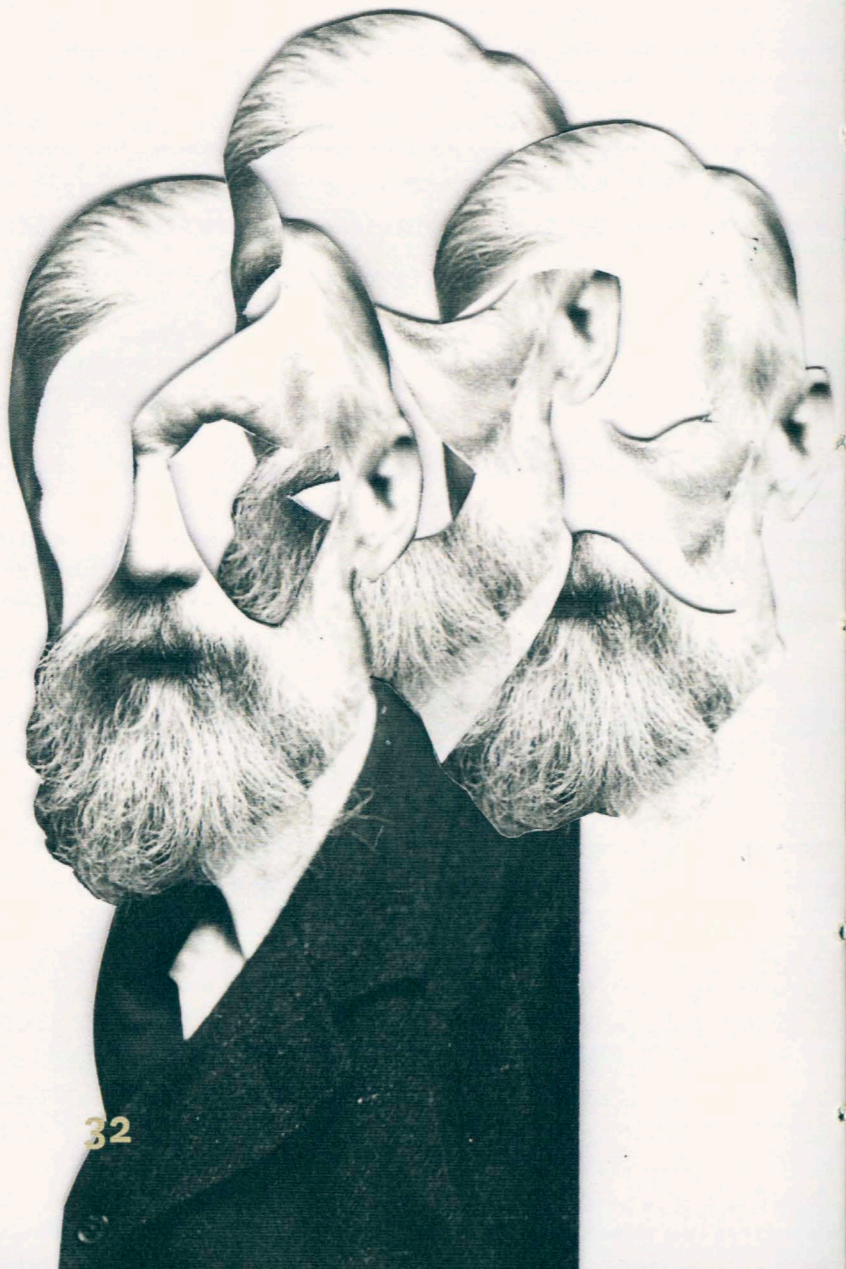
A VISION

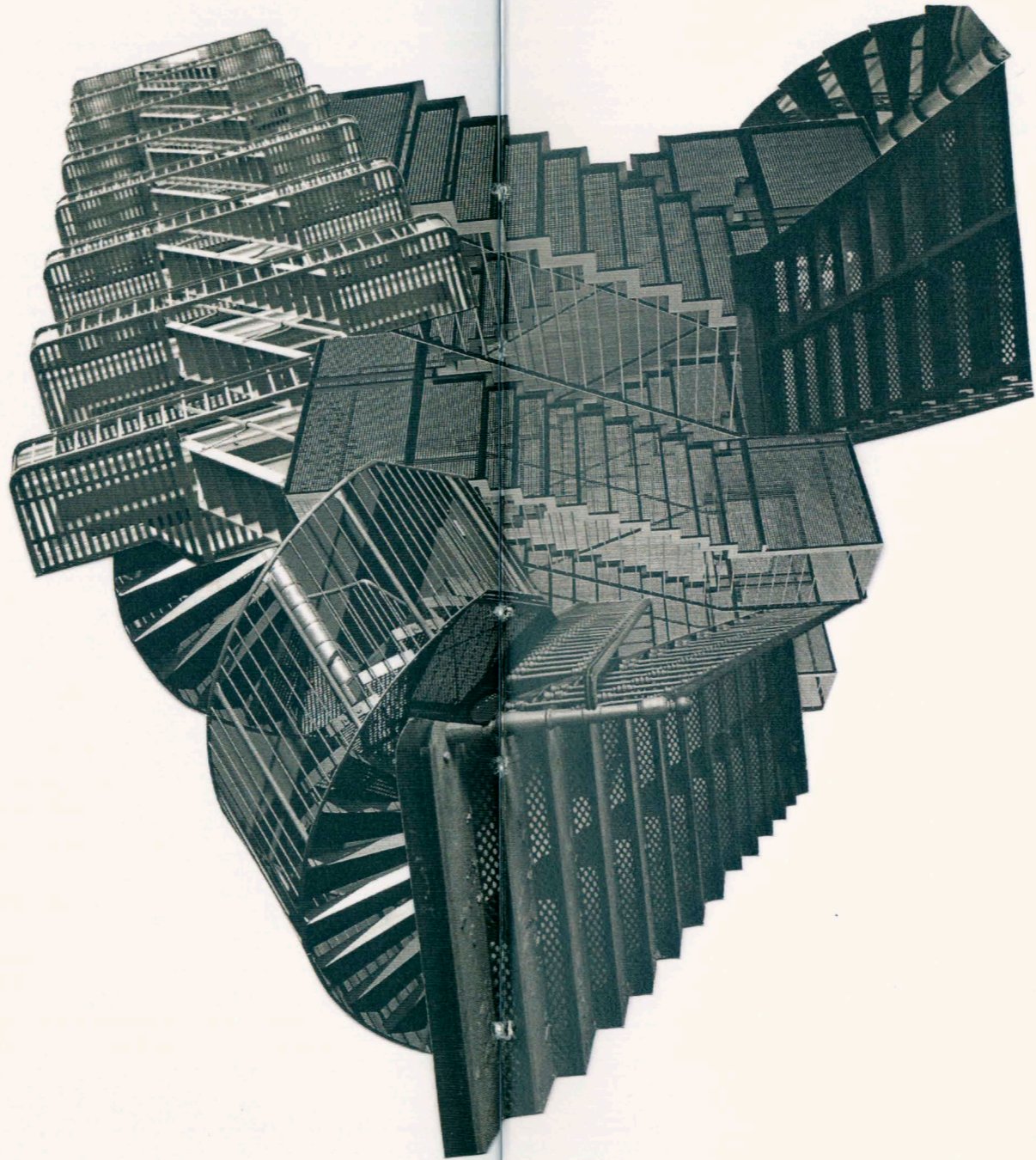


THE TRIAL

A VISION









Designed to be read,
and read by many.