THE NORTH END

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN PASKIEVICH

INTRODUCTION BY STEPHEN OSBORNE

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For Marilyn and Andrew

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"The past is not dead. In fact, it's not even past."

- William Faulkner

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INVISIBLE CITY

John Paskievich and the North End of Winnipeg

John Paskievich has been photographing the North End of Winnipeg over a period of more than thirty years, and the body of work that he has built up in that time is a revelation of the particularity of people and place. His genius is to have created or perhaps discovered a singular photography: as Fred Herzog can be said to have created a Vancouver photography and Michel Lambeth a Toronto photography, so has John Paskievich created a Winnipeg photography.

Cities and the people who live in them are the classic subjects of photography. One of Daguerre's earliest photographs is a view of a busy Paris street in 1838, but the people and the vehicles streaming by are moving too quickly to leave an impression on his very slow emulsion: only the unmoving lower leg of a man having his shoe shined remains to be seen in an apparently empty street. As materials and equipment were refined in the following decades, the images of passersby began to register more and more frequently in photographs, and by the middle of the twentieth century, modern photography had become steeped in the instantaneous. City streets even at night were viable settings for encounters between passersby and the camera, and in the work of Brassai and Cartier-Bresson (who conceived of the "decisive moment") in Paris and Lisette Model on the Riviera, an urban photography emerged that consisted largely of encounters and confrontation between photographers and an anonymous citizenry. An exception was Eugene Atget, who prowled the streets of old Paris for decades with an antique field camera, intent on his mission of recording (on slow emulsion) a city and a way of living that were disappearing rather than passing by. Atget's enormous body of work, which includes no image of the Eiffel Tower, the most prominent landmark in Paris, was "discovered" in 1925 by Berenice Abbott

(herself an inventor of an urban photography of New York City that might be compared to jazz), who wrote of the "shock of realism unadorned" that she experienced upon first seeing Atget's work.

In North America the quintessential photography of street, road, café, and jukebox emerged in the work of Robert Frank, the Swiss photographer whose compelling collection, *The Americans*, which appeared in 1958 with an introduction by Jack Kerouac, defined the photographer as a wanderer passing through town, a traveller on the move—a motif that we see extended in the streets of New York City and Los Angeles in the sixties in the work of Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand, whose work further expressed the alienation of the photographer from his subject (i.e., the women and the men in the street).

In 1972, when he was twenty-five years old, John Paskievich went home to Winnipeg, Manitoba, to visit his family in the

North End, where he had grown up and gone to school. He had been away for five years, and had lived in Montreal and travelled through Europe and the Middle East, and he had gone to Ryerson Polytechnic in Toronto, where he studied photography and film. When he returned to his old neighbourhood, he realized that here was a city almost never seen in photographs. The North End of Winnipeg occupies about twelve square kilometres centred on Main Street north of the vast CPR railyard. It is a place of low ramshackle buildings, discount warehouses, corner stores, rows of tiny houses, uncrowded sidewalks: there was no "look" to the North End in the sense that many European and North American cities can be said to have a look, a way of presenting themselves in the syntax of urbanity. "Official" Winnipeg (the city whose slogan had once been "Bull's eye of the Dominion"), the visible city on the other side of the railyards separating it from the North End, even today retains the imposing look of Empire, from the temple banks at downtown intersections to the war memorials and the legislative building spread out over vast lawns like something left over from the British Raj (a plaque in the legislature memorializes the United Empire Loyalists, who "adhered to the unity of Empire in the Canadian wilderness"). Signs of Empire (save for a lonely monument to the troops that defeated Riel in 1885)

are unobtrusive in the North End, where prominent buildings are the Ukrainian Labour Temple, one of the centres of the General Strike of 1919, and the Orthodox Holy Trinity Cathedral, whose domes can be seen rising up over the strip mall on Main Street. Little else save the yards of the CPR stands forth to the eye of the visitor or the passerby.

When John Paskievich first turned his camera toward the North End–a place that was already familiar to him, and therefore hidden to some extent by habit and familiarity–he knew the work of Cartier-Bresson and Frank, Friedlander and Winogrand, but he had also been affected by the work of Michel Lambeth, whose photographs of the east end of Toronto suggested an urban photography grounded in intimacy with childhood places. John Paskievich was a traveller (and an outsider by birth and family history) returned home, and, as he set out to renew his acquaintance with places and people known to him, he had to be able to see without the hindrance of habit, without the familiarity that renders most of us unable to perceive the world, the cities in which we live and the people around us.

The North End was the working-class enclave first of immigrant and farming families moving into the city, and refugees displaced by two world wars (John Paskievich's Ukrainian parents survived both Soviet communism and the Nazi labour camps, and he was born in a Displaced Persons Camp in Austria in 1947), and, as the original populations moved into more prosperous neighbourhoods, the new poorer classes of the later twentieth century moved in, seeking homes and refuge. By the time John Paskievich began roaming the neighbourhoods that he had known as a child, moving through streets and alleyways, along the narrow lots and ramshackle wooden frontages already falling into disuse, the largest group of "new immigrants" were First Nations people moving into the city from the Canadian hinterland. Today the North End has the biggest urban population of First Nations people in Canada.

The North End sprang into life in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century, as the population of Winnipeg (until now largely Anglo-Celtic in origin) surged from 40,000 to 150,000, largely Slavic and Jewish families from eastern Europe, who took up labouring jobs on the railway, in lumber camps, on farms, and in the textile factories and sweatshops. Many of the women were employed as day servants or as day workers picking vegetables for the market gardens, or as piece workers for the textile manufacturers. Property developers laid down a grid of narrow streets lined with rows of cheaply built houses on twenty-five-foot lots. By 1906, nearly half the population of Winnipeg was squeezed into the North End, which occupied less than a third of the area of the city. Inadequate water and sewage connections resulted for decades in periodic epidemics of fever and infection (at one time infant mortality was 25 percent in the North End and 11 percent in the rest of the city). By 1913, English was spoken by only a quarter of the population; the majority spoke Ukrainian, German, Polish, Yiddish, Russian, or any of several other eastern and central European languages. The North End was a culture of cultures long before multiculturalism was a national catchphrase; but "official" Canada perceived the people of the North End to be a homogeneous population, an unassimilated chunk of Winnipeg cut off from the rest of the city and the rest of the country by language, religion, politics, class, ethnicity, and the racket and the physical barrier of thousands of freight cars shunting along 190 kilometres of track in the world's largest urban railyard—a separation of neighbourhoods and cultures that remains today deeply etched into the psyche of the city.

For most of us, the first glimpse of a place is the only one that gives us the sense of the new, the particular: within moments, days, weeks, the world sinks away into the familiar and we see it no more. John Paskievich, on the other hand, was prepared to see and to see again, even as the North End that he had known was disappearing before his eyes and often falling into decrepitude. Only one of the movie houses along Main Street was still operating in 1975, as a second-run house obscured behind a plywood hoarding. When Paskievich approached it with his camera, a man in a plaid sports jacket was hunkered down in front of the hoarding, studying the fine

print on a poster advertising *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*. The sidewalk behind the crouching man in the photograph is dusty and littered with scraps of paper; the doors to the movie house are closed. There is no one else around. The scene is saturated in stillness, and as we look through the photographs of the North End that Paskievich made over the next three decades, we find this stillness again and again: at times languid, at times approaching the desolate; it is a stillness that

implies always a certain distance that Paskievich maintains as an expression of respect and at times even reverence for his subjects. Here the camera never pries. Along a quiet residential street, a woman in a babushka stoops over the grass by the sidewalk: she might be pulling up a weed. At the curb a few feet away looms a gleaming white muscle car, a Chevrolet Monte Carlo. These images carry the power of allegory, of meaning concealed but pressing forward from within us. Paskievich leads us into the North End not through a series of "decisive moments" as Cartier-Bresson would have it, but rather through a display of tableaux vivants: we are invited to linger and pay attention. Women in the North End are frequently seen in a stooping posture: leaning toward the ground, toward children, toward each other. They enact their lives. We see them in groups more often than singly, whereas men in the North End tend to appear one at a time, even when in groups.

Consider the three men on the steps of a public building, another tableau: three men and three hats. One man paces slowly; the other two gaze into separate distances; separately they take possession of an awkward bit of angular space. Men in the North End keep their distance, and the photographer keeps his distance too. Public space in the North End, in the photography of John Paskievich, is a negotiated space. Three more men wearing hats at a bus stop have disposed themselves artlessly, characteristically, perhaps cautiously, in the space they share with the city around them.

Men in the North End assume a variety of postures: reclining, lounging, squatting, resting, snoozing, reading. They are solitary men waiting for the next thing to happen, and we do not intrude on them: a man with a rabbit, a man with a hot plate,

a man with a slice of bread in his hand. A man with a garden rake waits (we presume) for a break in the traffic. The barber waits for his next customer, as do the tailor and the laundryman. The cobbler pauses in his work to peer at the photographer.

In one of the most haunting images in this book, two men walking backwards ease a toboggan laden with boxes over the curb. They lean delicately against the ropes: they are attentive, patient, watchful; they are observed closely by two passersby, and the photographer, who is careful not to get in the way. Here all is deliberate, unselfconscious: this is a tableau that can be set only in the North End. I look at this photograph and I want to be there then, on that cold day, at that moment, looking on at the enactment of the small miracle of the toboggan and its burden.

Much in the North End is occluded, partially hidden behind improvised fences, faded brooding storefronts, peeling signage. What was once here has not yet given way to the new: the new has yet to arrive even as the past is still falling away. We look down alleyways and across empty plazas.

On the sidewalk a man in striped trousers carries a braided rug bundled over his head and shoulders: he resembles an exotic insect. Like so many of the photographs in this book, it seems to be offered as a gift: the miracle is that the photographer

was there with his camera, prepared for the man to pass by with his odd burden. Another man, in a suit and fedora, strides purposefully between two enormous bananas in windows set into a brick wall. He carries the daily newspaper folded in his jacket pocket. City photography is conventionally confrontational: we experience encounters with strangers in the Los Angeles and the New York of Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander, in whose work we are made aware of the photographer as outsider. In most urban photography, the camera slips through a passing scene, the decisive moment provides the passing glimpse, and the perceiving viewer moves on, to another scene and another, soon perhaps even to leave town in search of more moments.

At the edge of a narrow lot, a family of six gathers in the space between yards: they spill down into the space and up to the fence in a perfect distribution of childish bodies, adult hands and shoulders, and the textures of peeling paint, bare ground, worn clothing, bicycle parts, and the precise living attention of each member of the family in the narrow confine. Here again is the living tableau that leads us to attend to the people who make their lives in the invisible city of the North End.

These photographs constitute a continual return, a renewal of seeing. In that way they are more closely related to the Paris photography of Eugene Atget, which can be seen as an extended meditation on a single subject. Atget's goal over four decades was, in his words, "to possess all of Old Paris." He was engaged in a kind of preservation. John Paskievich fifty years later set out not to "possess" the "old" North End but to find it, and he found traces of it, not in vanishing architectural wonders (there are few of these in the North End) but in the spaces themselves, in the stillness in which the past still lingers, and in the dignity and the singularity of its inhabitants.

Neither do these photographs provoke a sense of nostalgia: we are not moved to romanticize what we see in these images, which more than anything seem to express the real, the real that always contains a vacancy, a certain desolation, even perhaps a resignation approaching but not achieving despair. We are brought to these scenes and feel only that we wish to see them ourselves: they are in a sense so familiar that we feel that we missed them while they were happening. This is the resurgence of "realism unadorned" that Berenice Abbott experienced in the work of Eugene Atget. Paskievich leads us precisely to the surprise of the ordinary, of that which becomes invisible to the people who live it, and which Paskievich the photographer is able to retain, or recover: the fresh view. He sees for the first time: the now remains fresh for him. The art of seeing as expressed in these photographs is a kind of touching, a tactile response to the world; these photographs emerge from a phenomenology of the local: they are an embrace, given rather than (as photographs are usually said to be) taken.

There is much apparently empty space in these photographs: much of the past of the North End is implied in them. And even the "present" North End that we see in these pages has gone into the past (most of these photographs were taken between the mid-1970s until the 1990s). I look into the spaces in these images and I sense the presence of my grandfather, my father's father, whose family moved into the North End in the early 1900s from a farm in Ontario, and whose father took a job with the CPR. My grandfather worked as a lumberjack and then went to war in France. He met my grandmother in the Eaton's mail-order plant. She had moved into the North End from a homestead in Alberta. They too are remembered in these images of the distant spaces of the North End.

Stephen Osborne

Vancouver, 2007

THE NORTH END

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UP TO
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DENTIST
Dr. F. Molna
VACU-MA
Central Vacuum Syste
THE SPORTS
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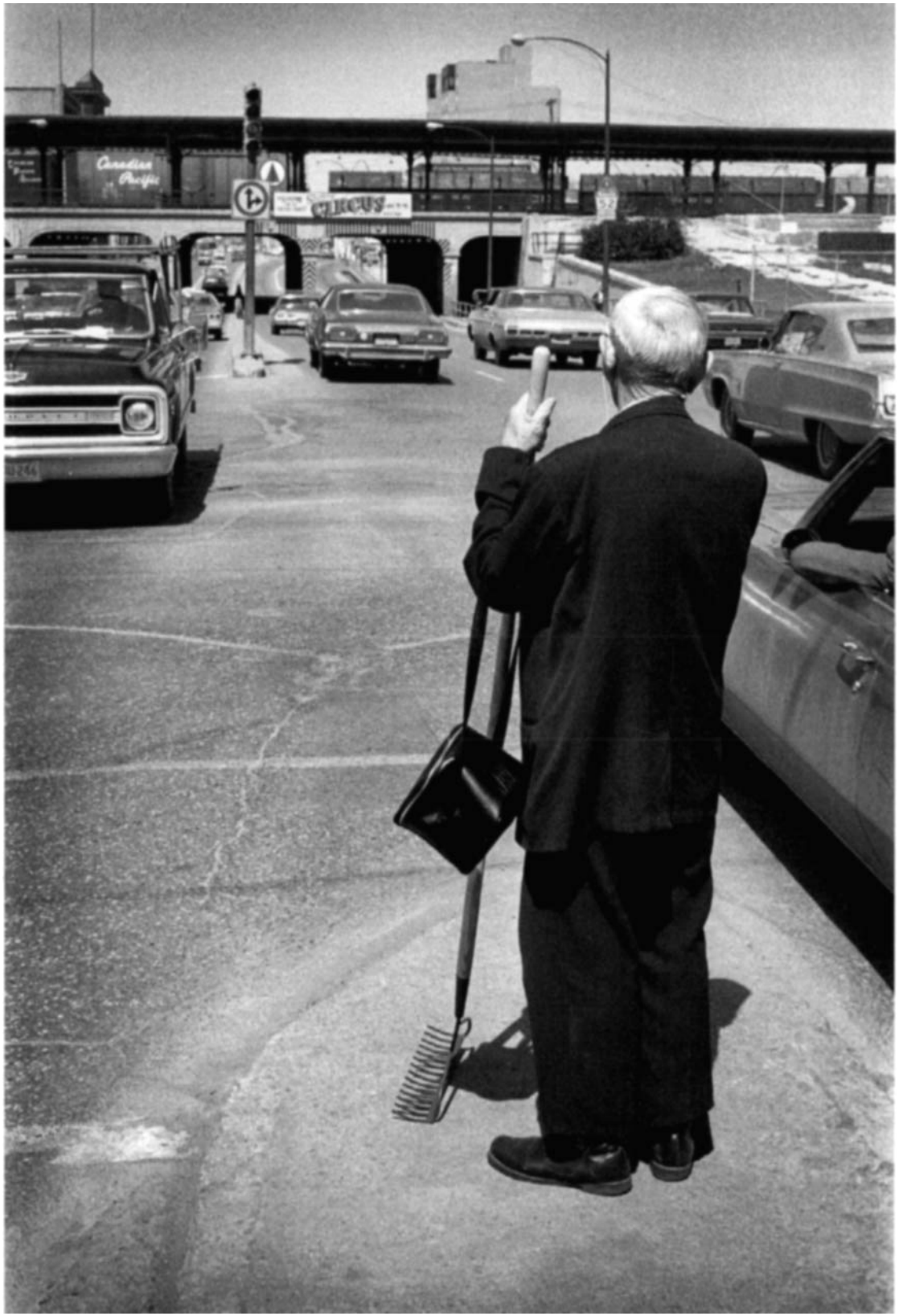
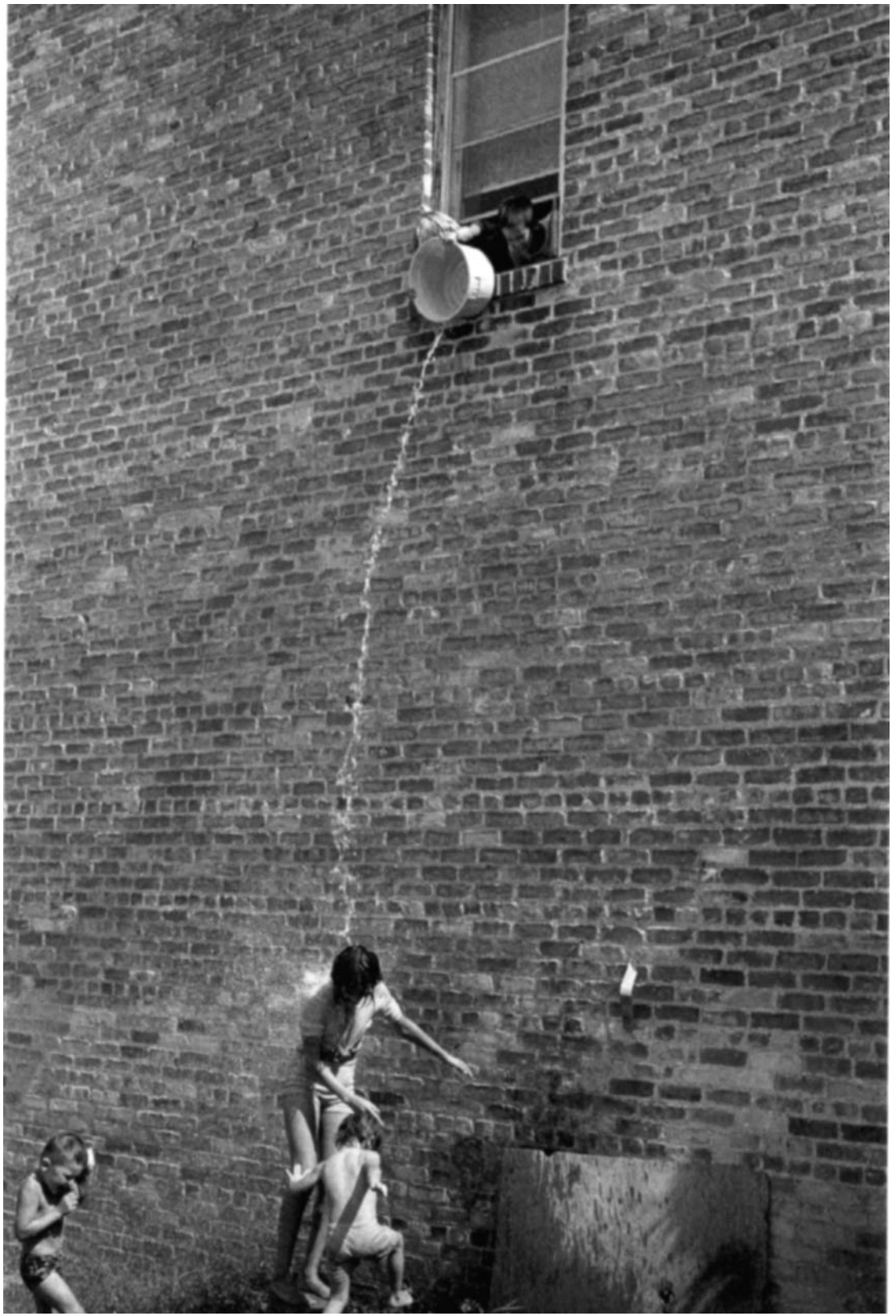
WELCOME TO
THE NORTH END

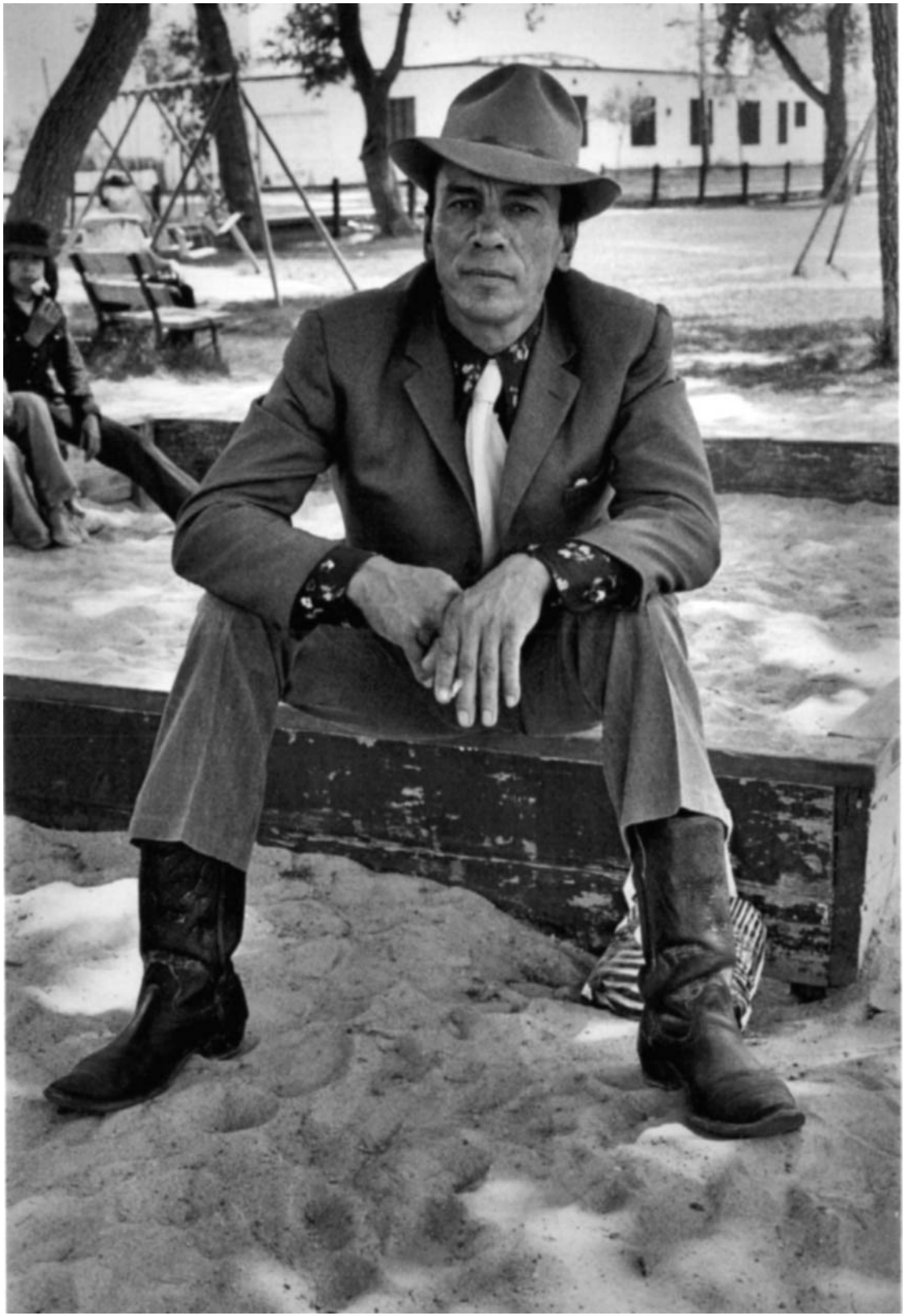

Canadian Pacific
CIRCUS


693
UP


THE BIKE WORKS
MOTOR CYCLE
PARTS & SERVICE
608 PORTAGE AVE.
TAKE IT EASY & TAKE A BUS


ROOMS WITH BATHS
RESTAURANT



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(+3)+(-5) = -2
(+2)-(-8):
(+2) + (+8) = +10
(-4)-(+3)
(-4)+(-3) = -7
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-7


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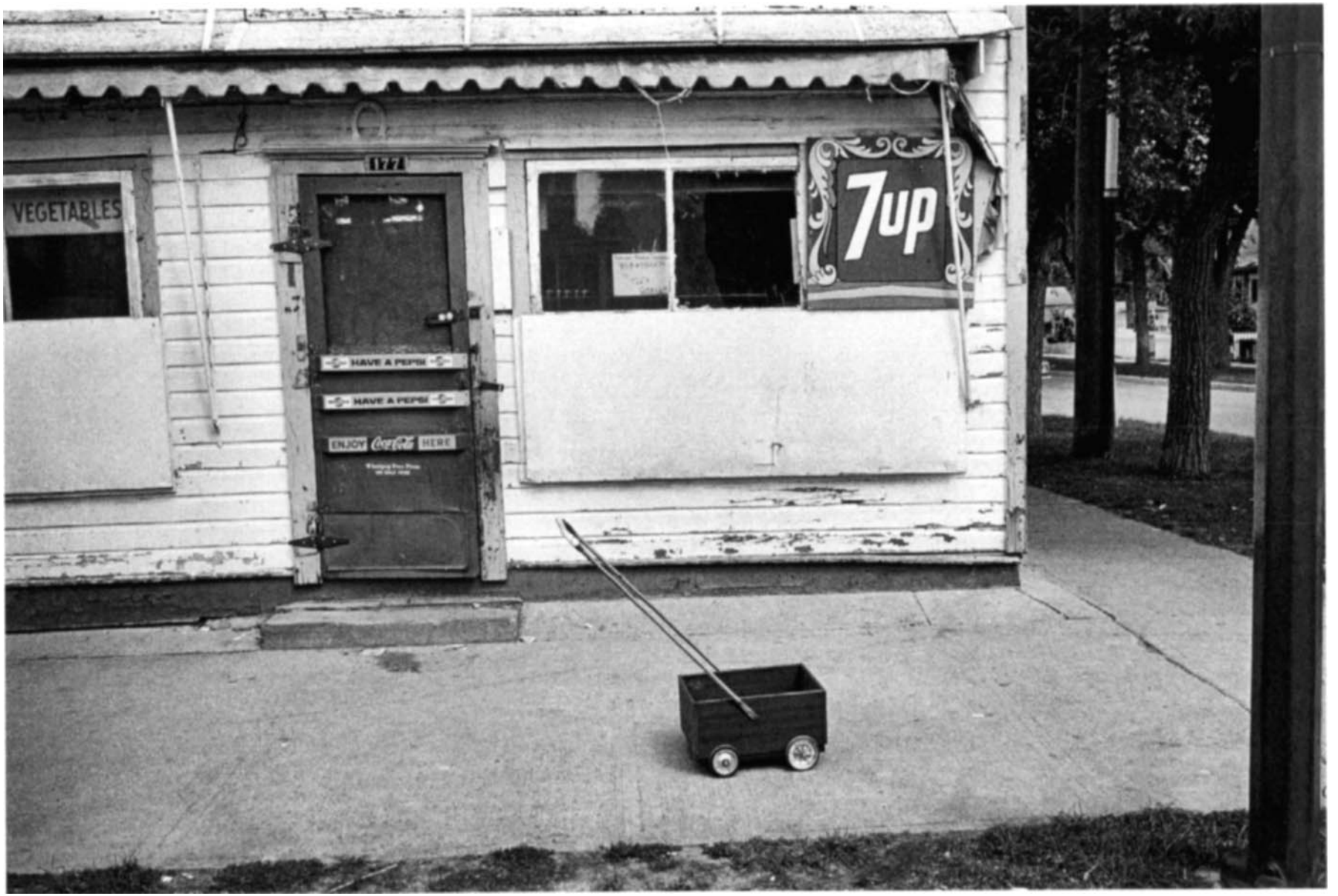
TOOLS · & · LUGGAGE


VEGETABLES
7up
HAVE A PEPSI
HAVE A PEPSI
ENJOY Coca-Cola HERE


A LABEL FROM


It's the real thing. Coke
It's the real thing. Coke.

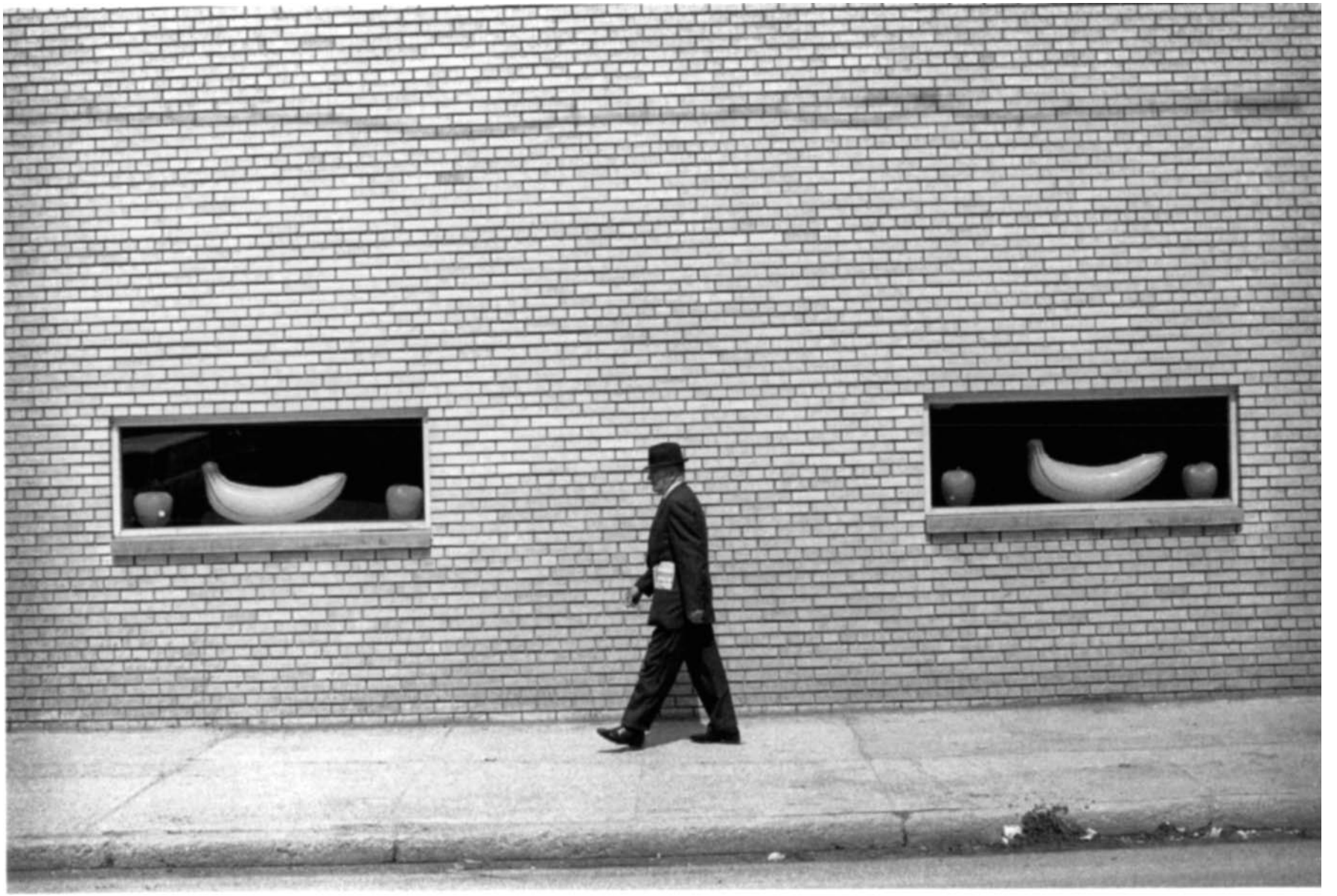

Coca-Cola

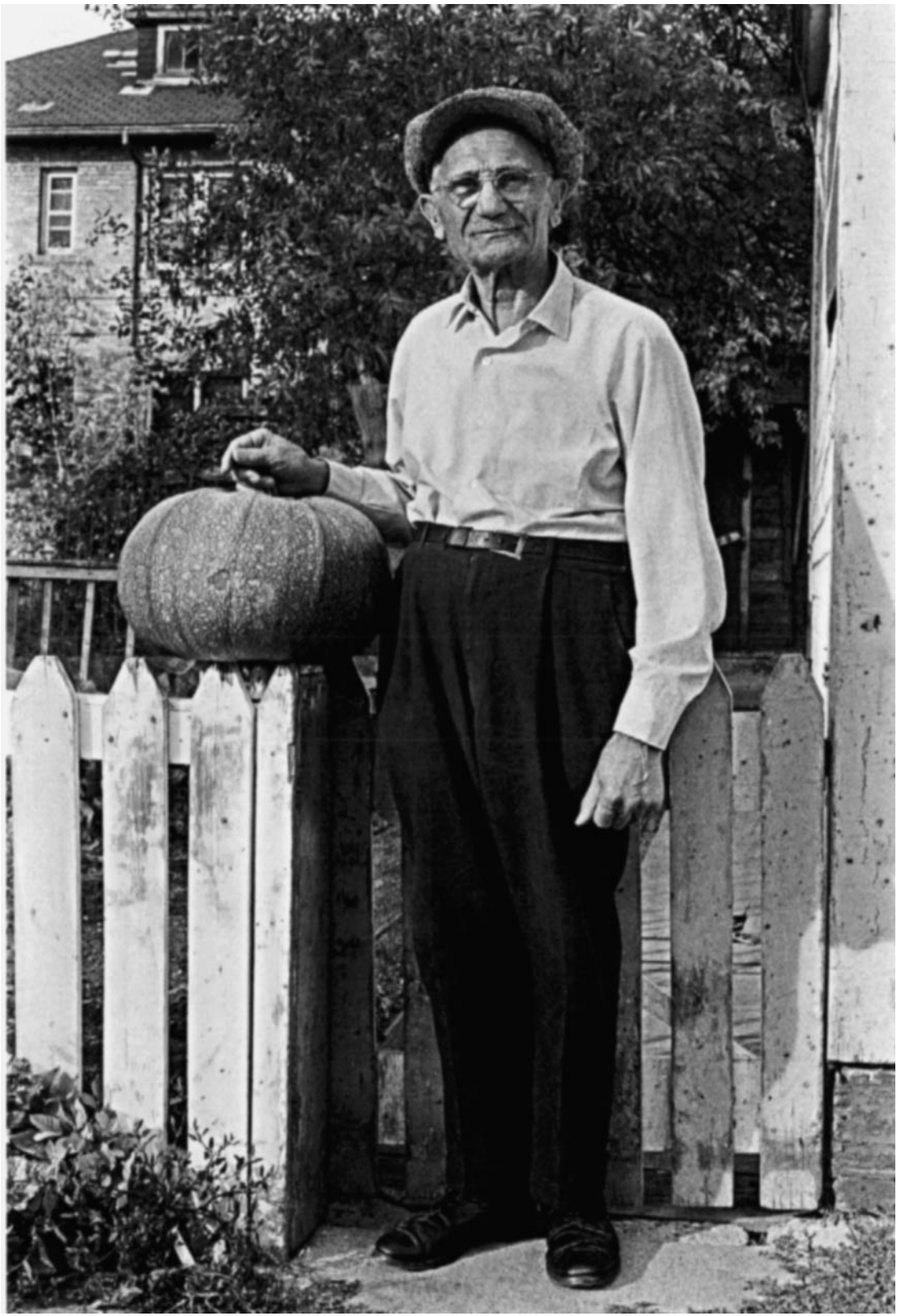

MILK. WE DRINK IT. WE ALWAYS WILL.

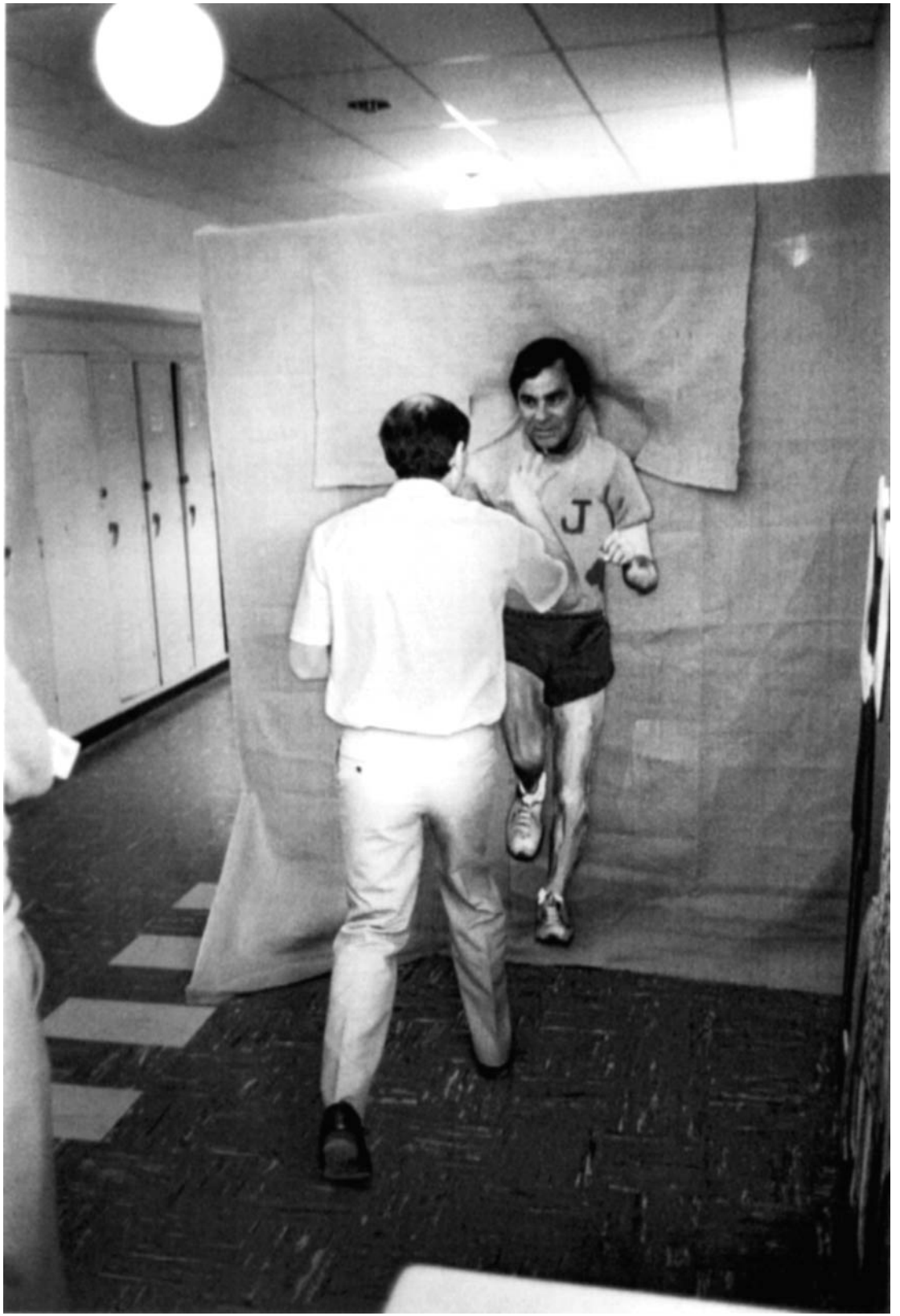

ULTRA


PULL
PULL


SEWER
WATER



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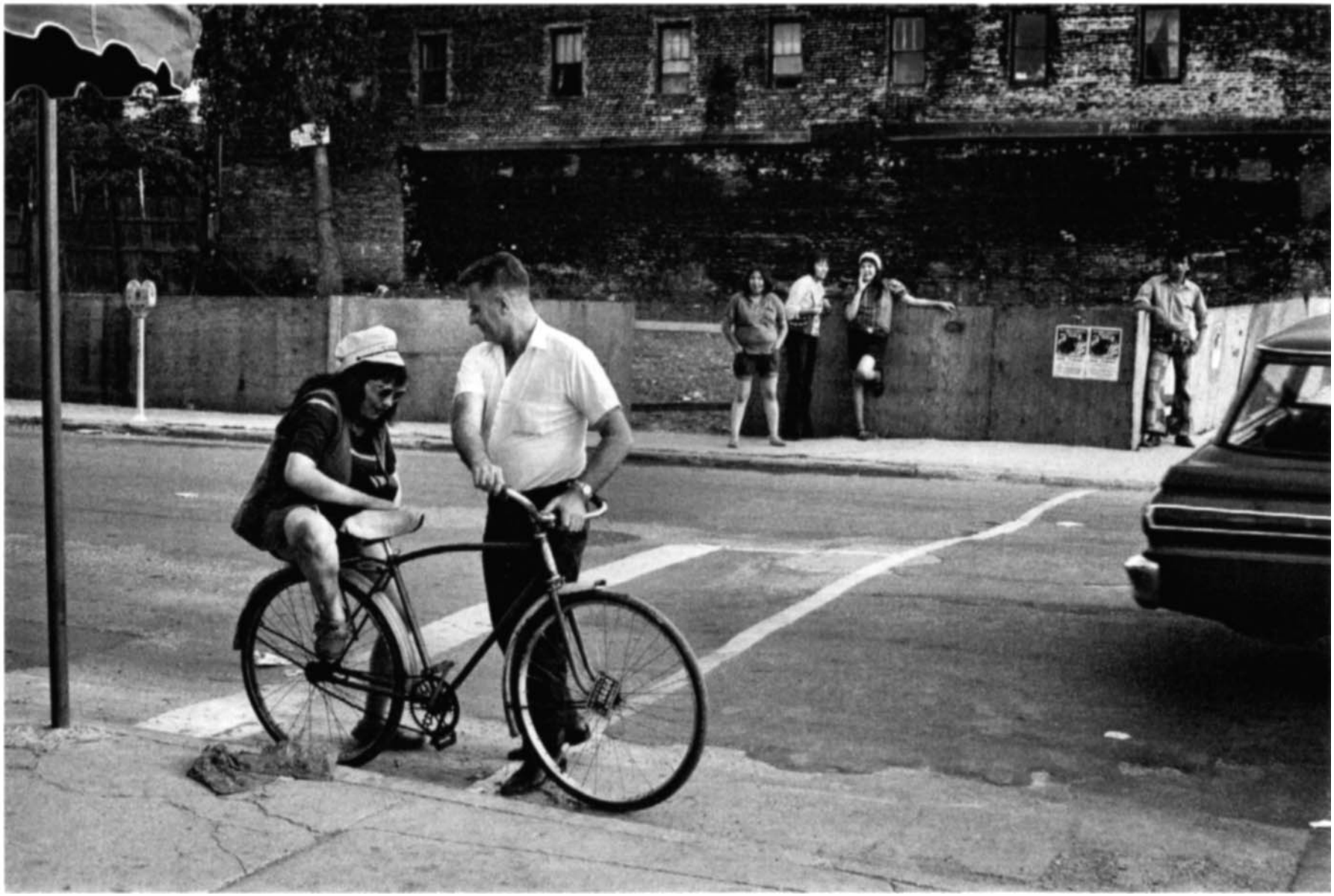
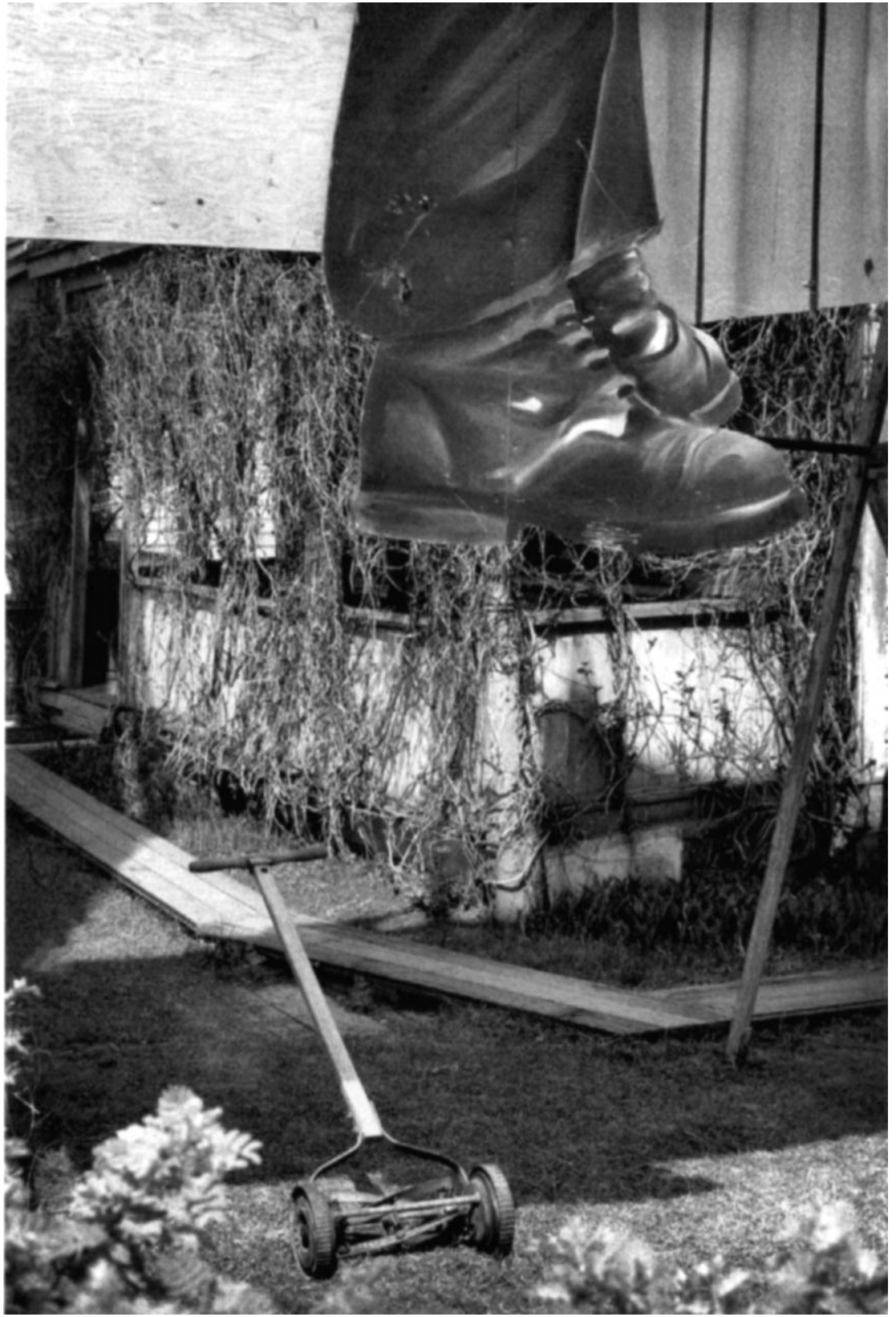



OZIE'S LUNCH
DRINK
Coca-Cola


1937


SALTER
NITOBA
108

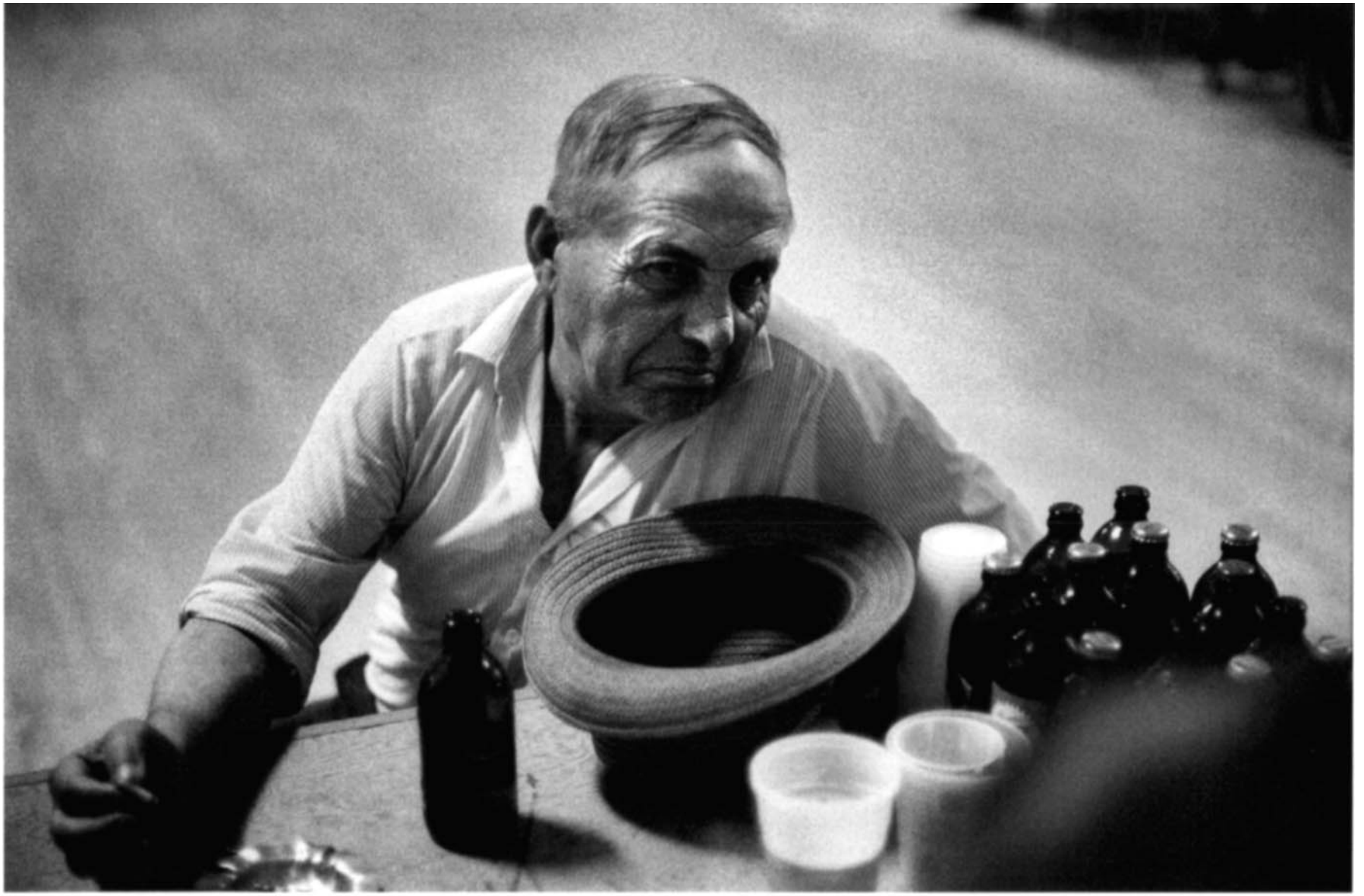

УКР. РОБ. ДІМ
UKRAINIAN LABOR TEMPLE
Mother's
DAY
TEA
SUNDAY
MAY 11
2:00 P.M.

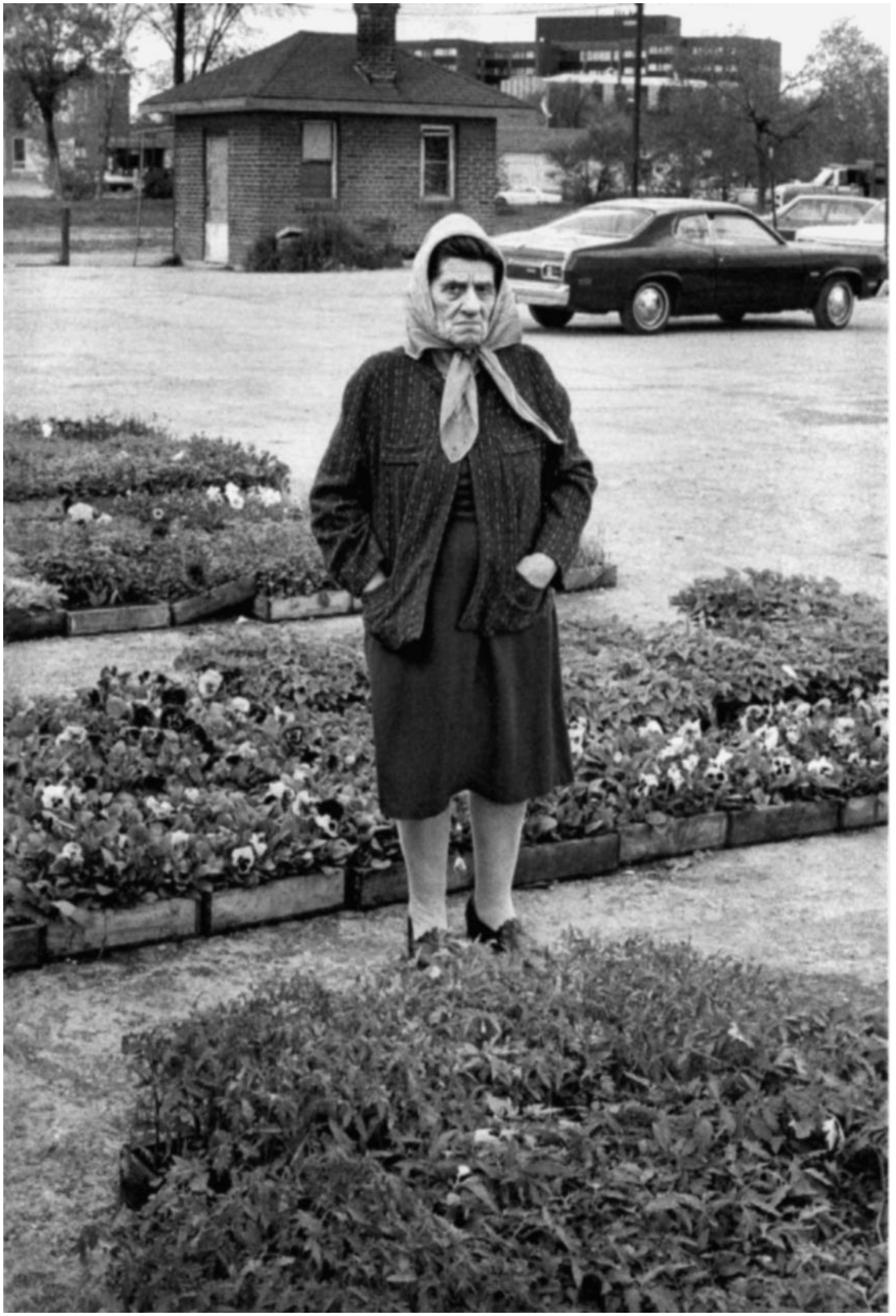


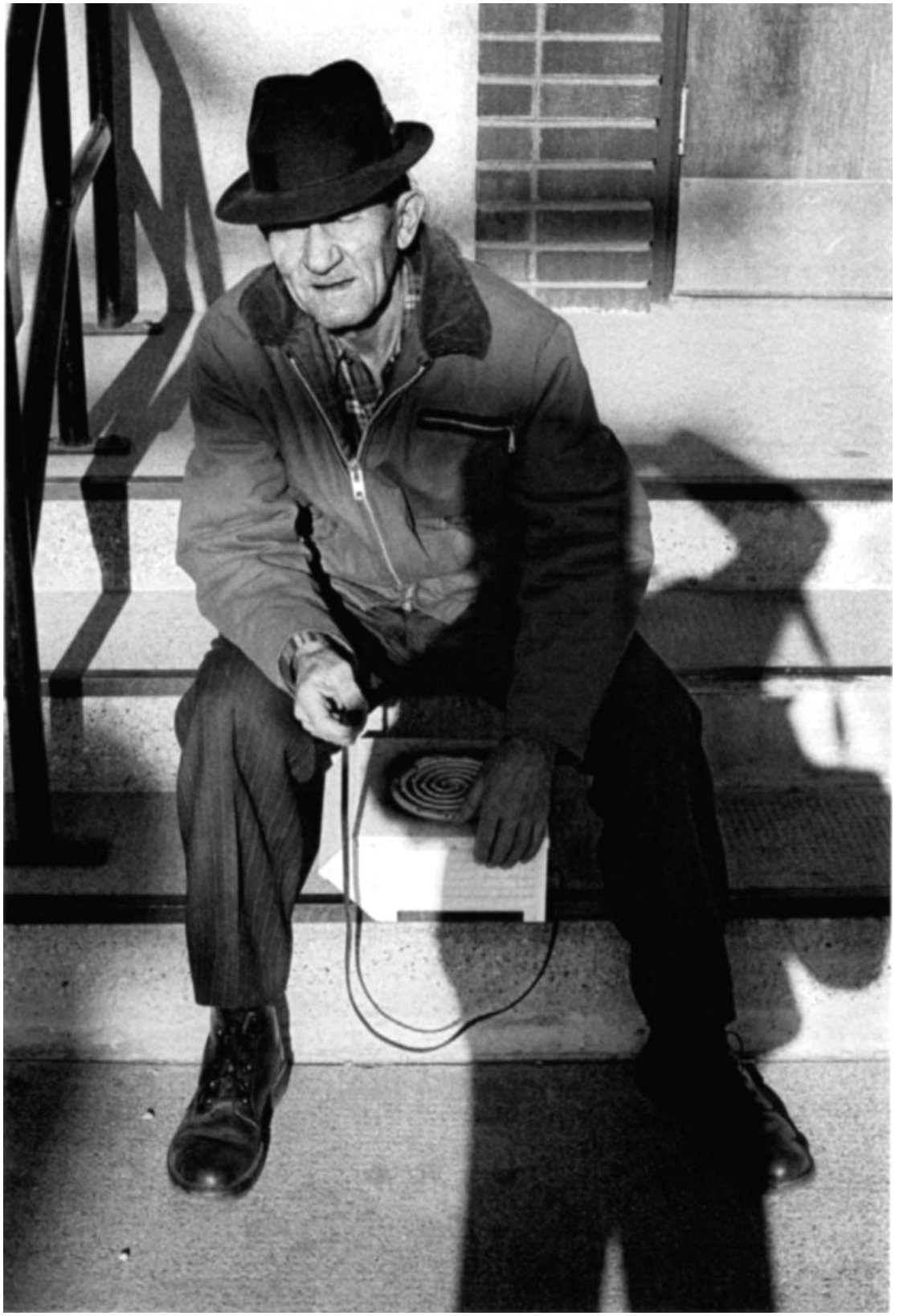

CITY MEAT


WELCOME
TO
OWNTOWN


PAWN SHOP








MODEL NO 3 SPACE SAVER


Coke.


7UP
WARNING
MENU:
JUICES
WAFFLE
HOT CAKES
HOT CAKE WITH BACON
BACON + EGGS
HAM + EGGS
SAUSAGES + EGGS
CHEESE OMELET
DENVER OMELET
ICE CREAM
SUNDAES
PIES
LAYER CAKE
CHEESE CAKE
FOUNTAIN DRINKS
MENU:
CHILI BOWL + CRACKERS
CORNED BEEF SAND
GRILLED CHEESE SAND
BEEF SAND
TURKEY SAND
SARDINE SAND
SALMON SAND
TUNA SAND
DENVER SAND
FRIED EGG SAND
FRENCH FRIES
WITH GRAVY
CASH
2.15
SOUP


PERESHKEY
SPECIAL
3 DOZ (SMALL) POTATO ONION
OR
3 DOZ (SMALL) POTATO CHEDDAR CHEESE
$2.70
SAUERKRAUT PEROGEYS
(CABBAGE)
$1.15 PER DOZEN
PEROGEYS
POTATO + CHEDDAR $1.00
POTATO + ROAST BEEF $1.00
POTATO + COTTAGE $1.05
SAUERKRAUT $1.15
MEAT + RICE $1.15
MEAT $1.20
COTTAGE CHEESE $1.20
PEROGEYS
POTATO + CHEDDAR 1.00
POTATO + ONION 1.00
POTATO + COTTAGE 1.05
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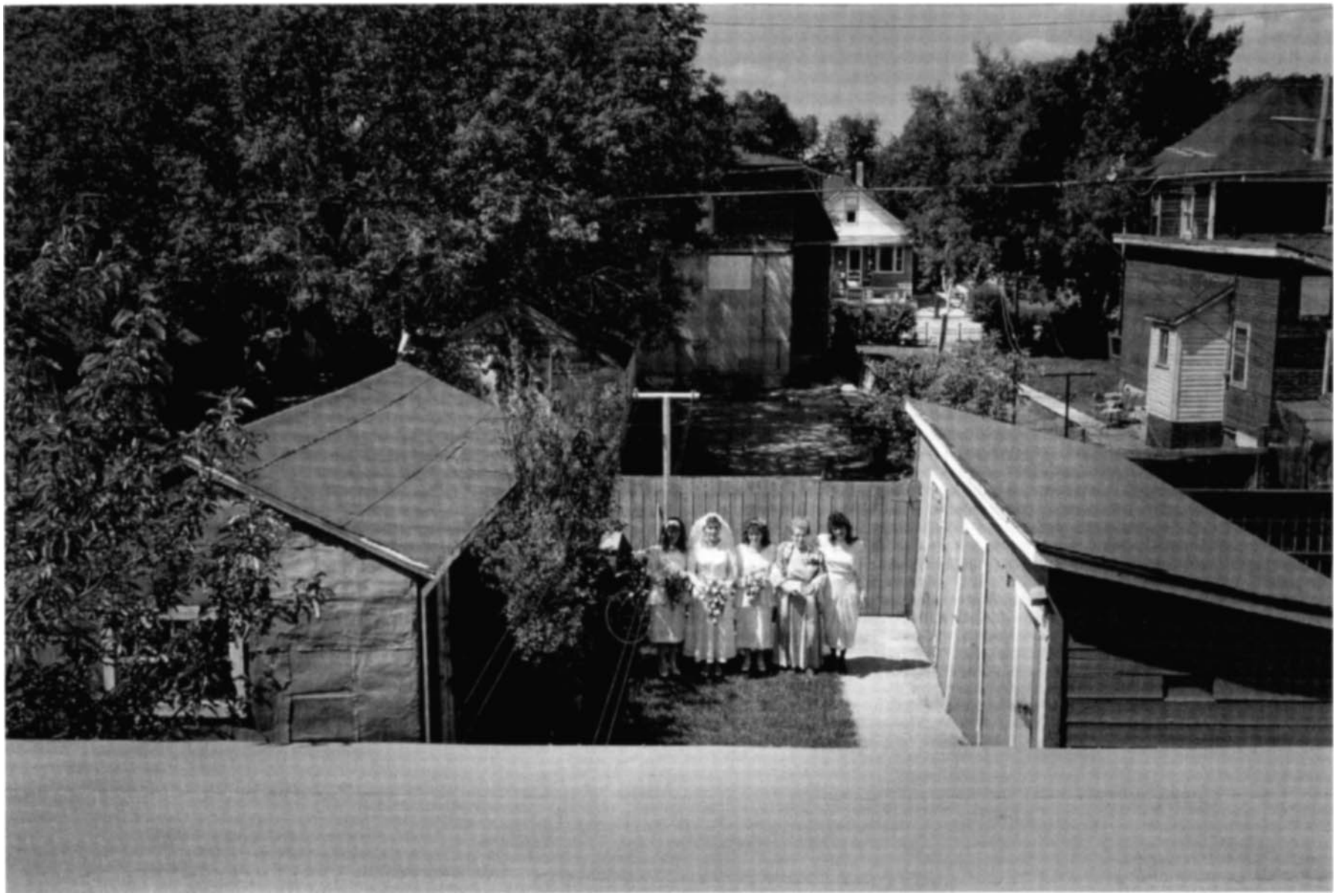
MEAT + RICE 1.15
MEAT — 1.20
COTTAGE CHEESE - 1.20




Ketchen
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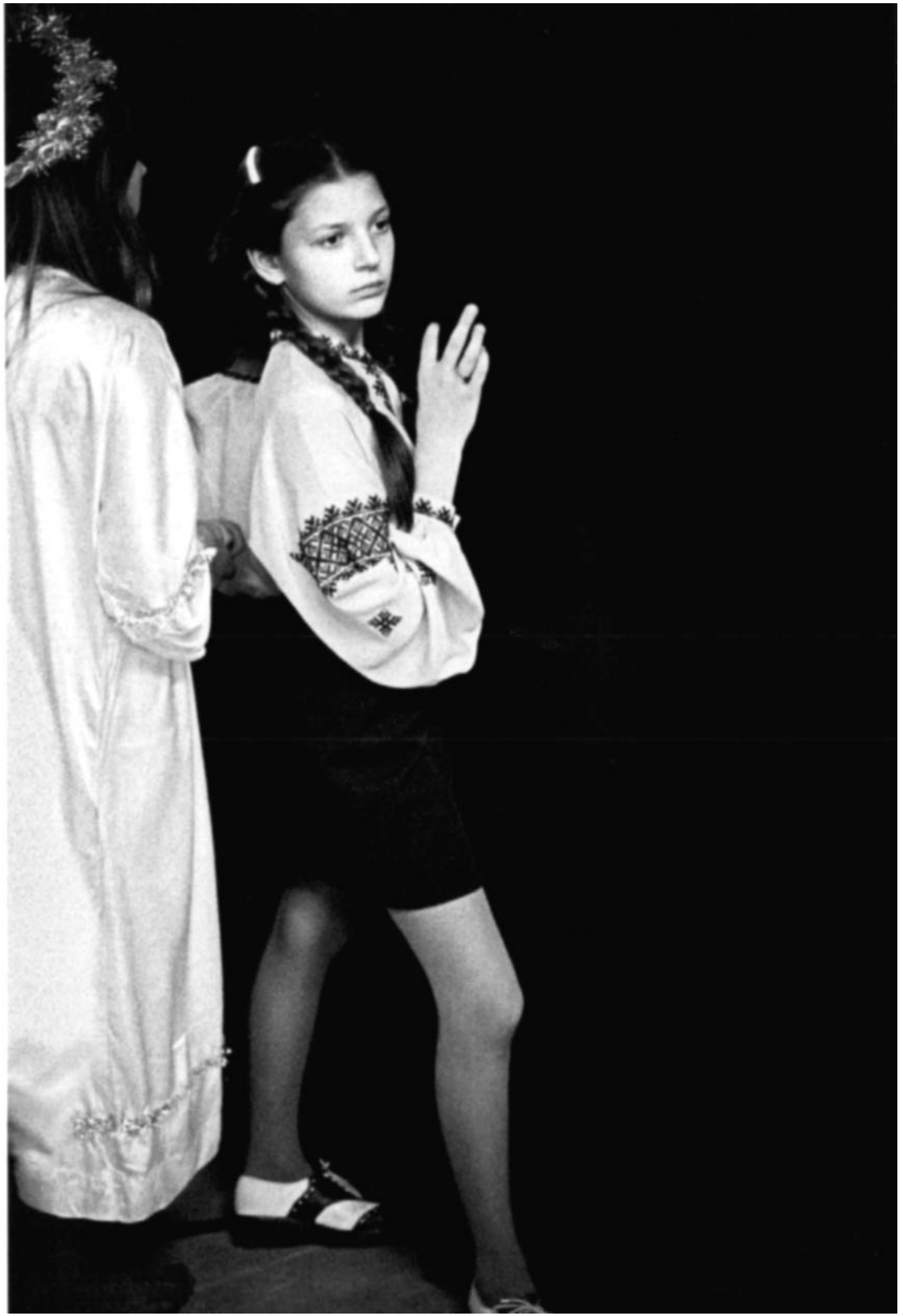
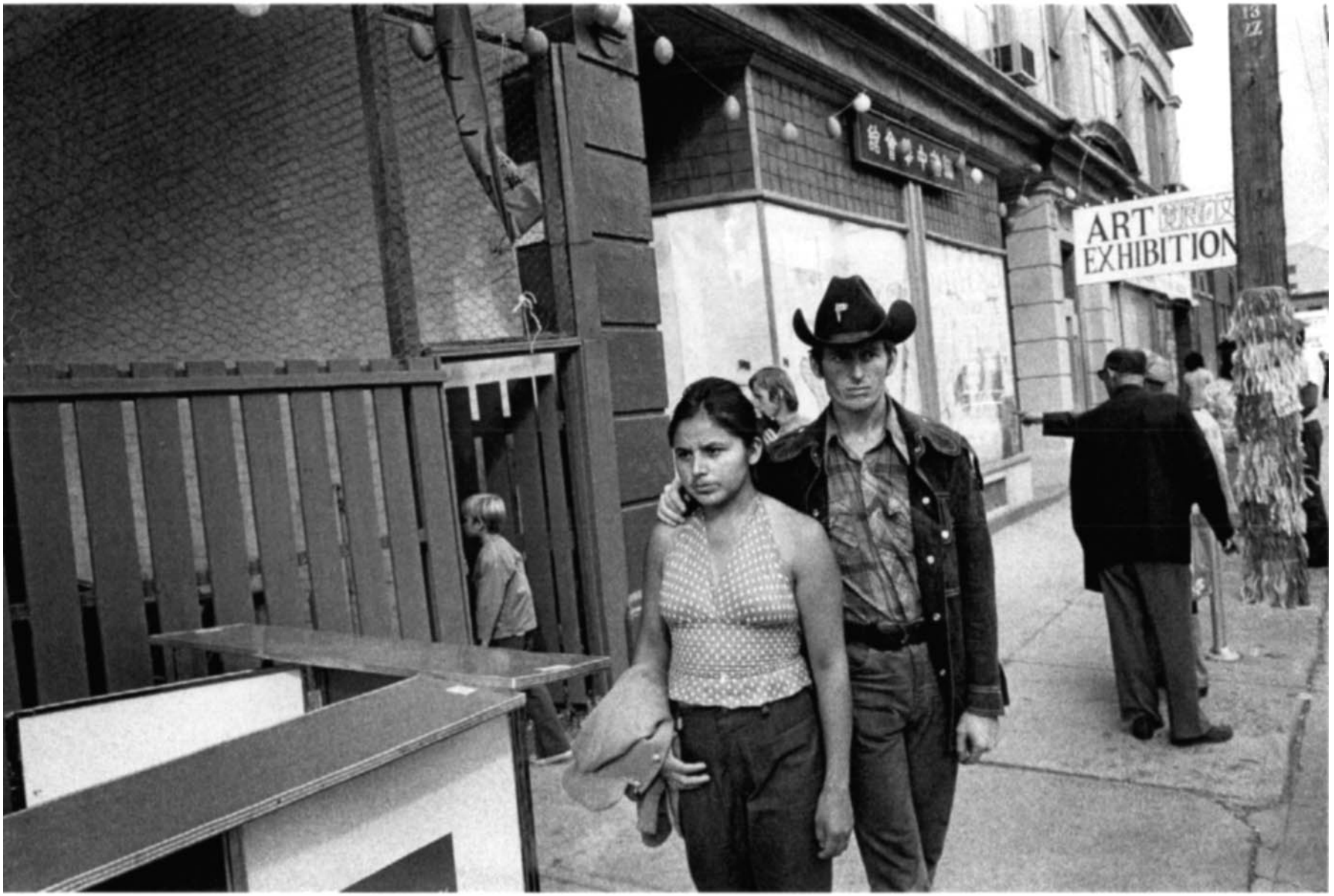
KULA

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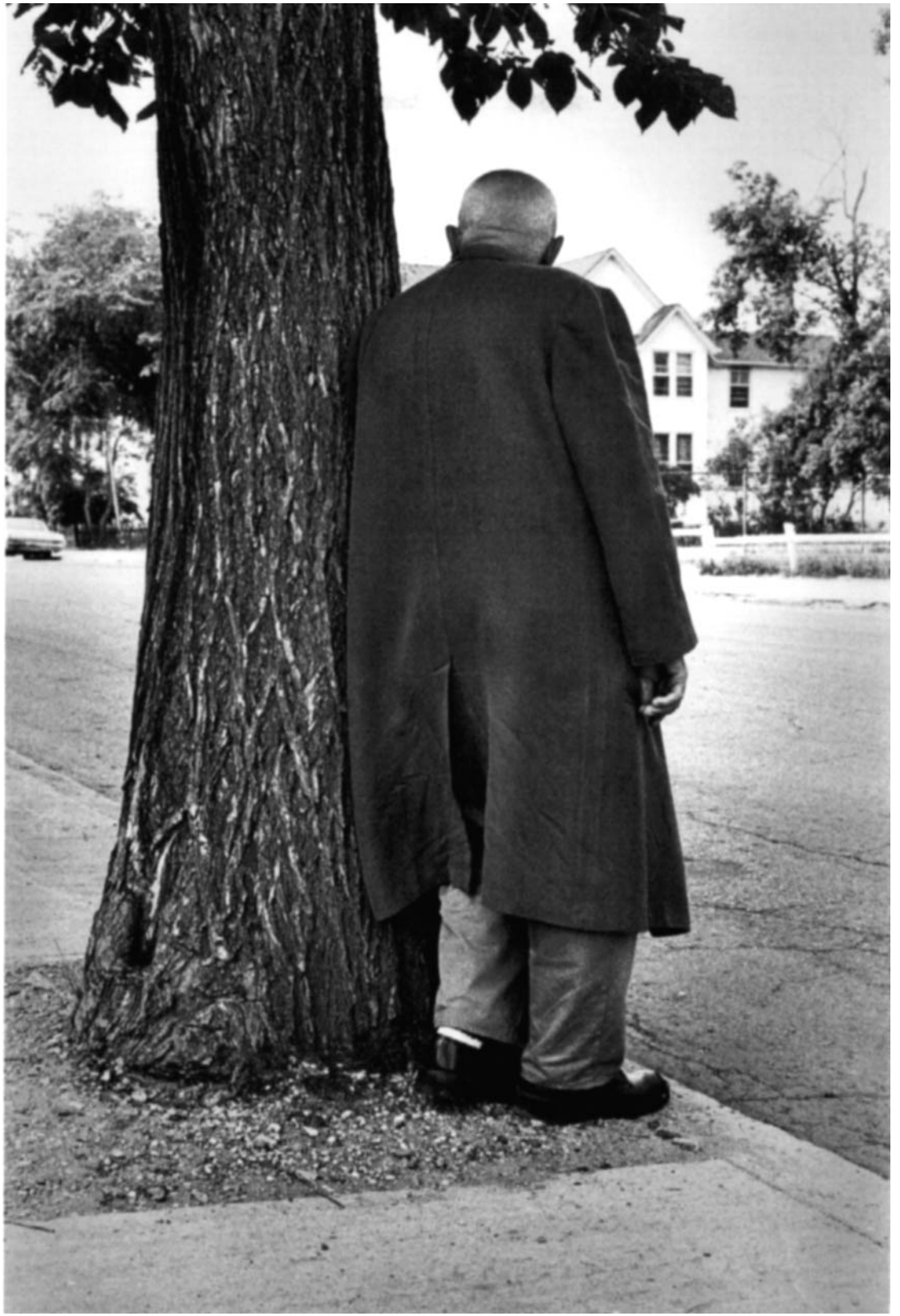


ONE WAY
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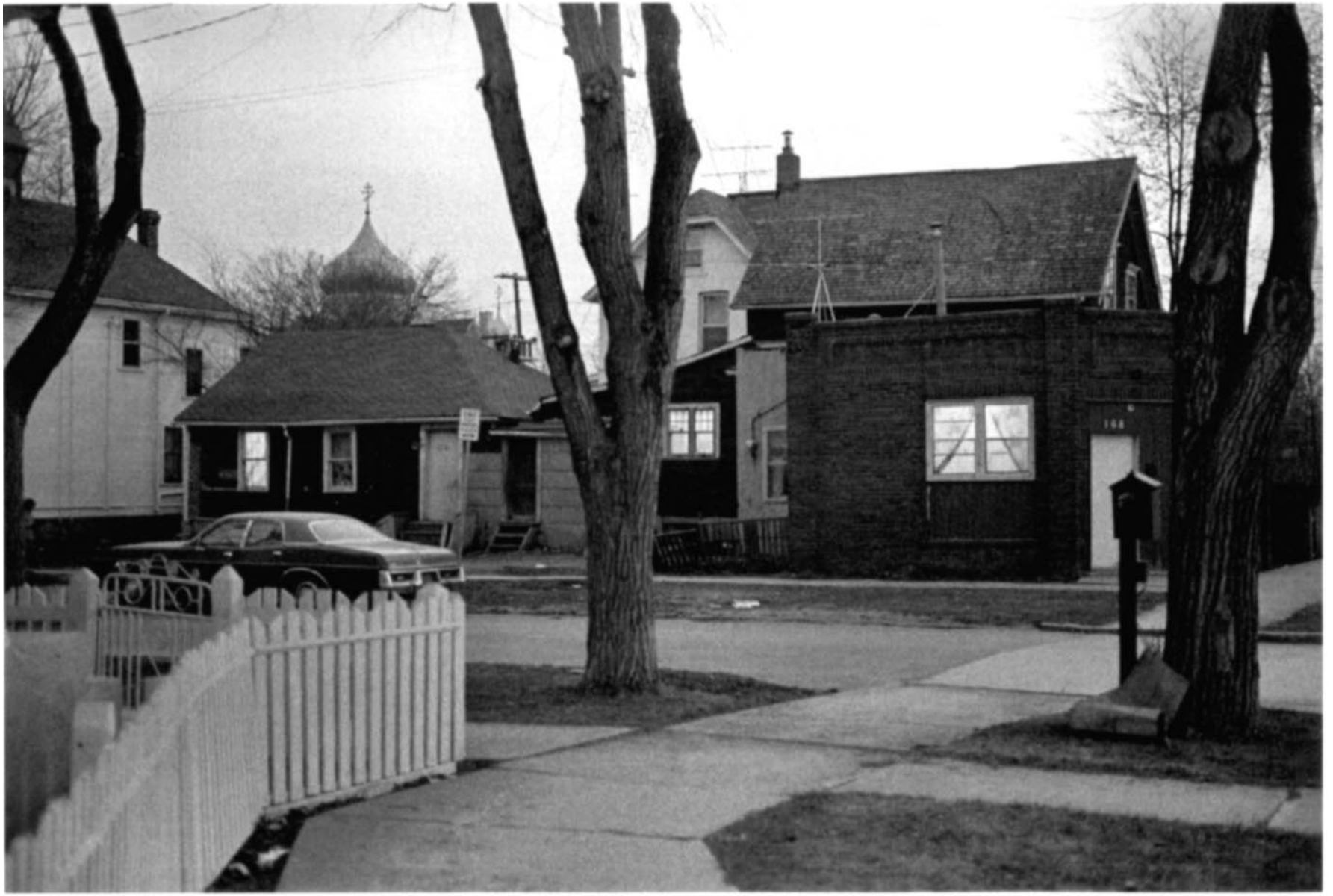
ONE WAY




SMILE
· FOOD STORE ·
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SMILE
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OPEN


MANITOBA
GROCERY
DRINK
Coca-Cola
7up
MANITOBA
GROCERY
DRINK
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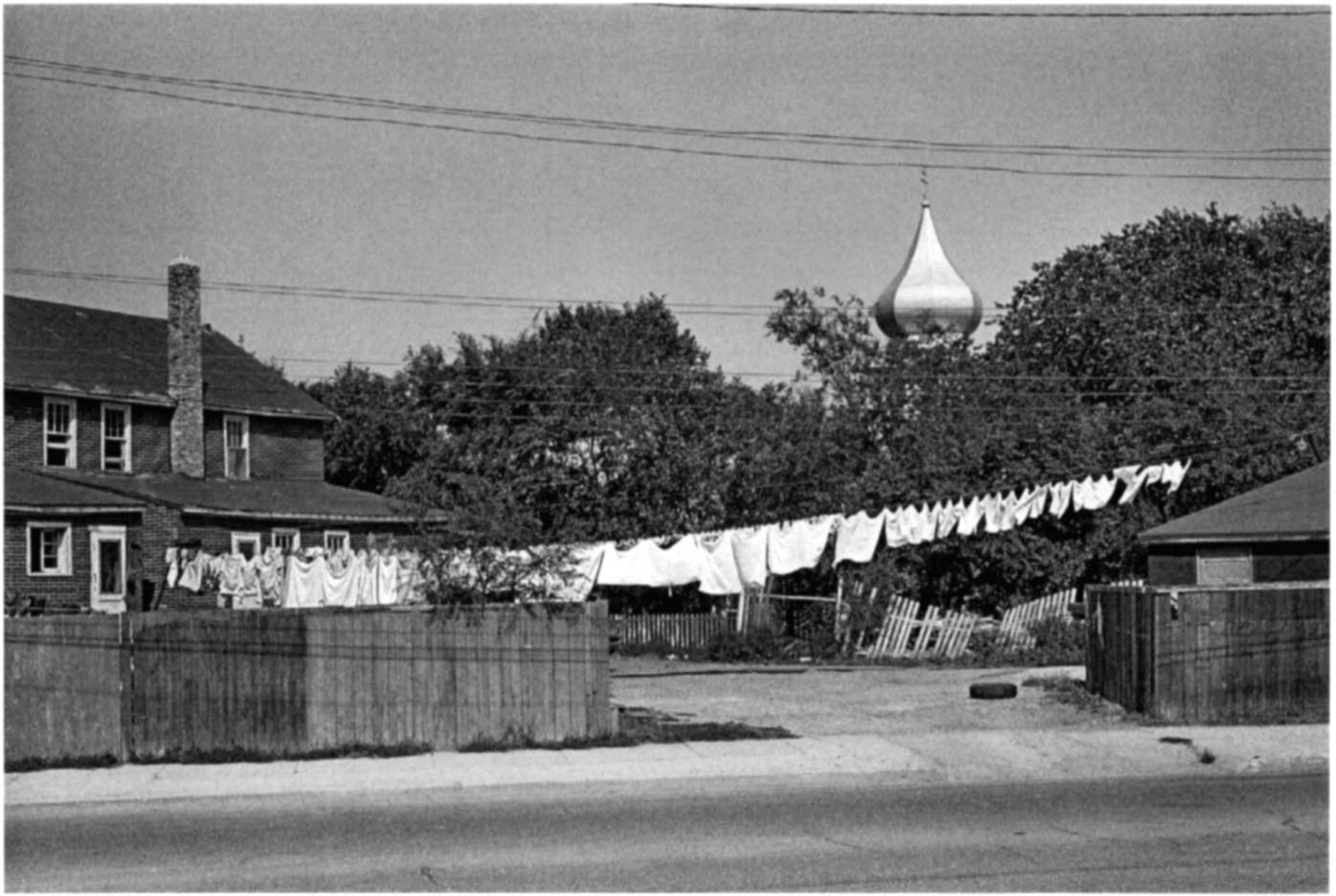


181
SAM
LEE
LAUNDRY
181
EUCLID
SAM LEE
LAUNDRY


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or
Blindstitch Sewing Machine
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Repairs


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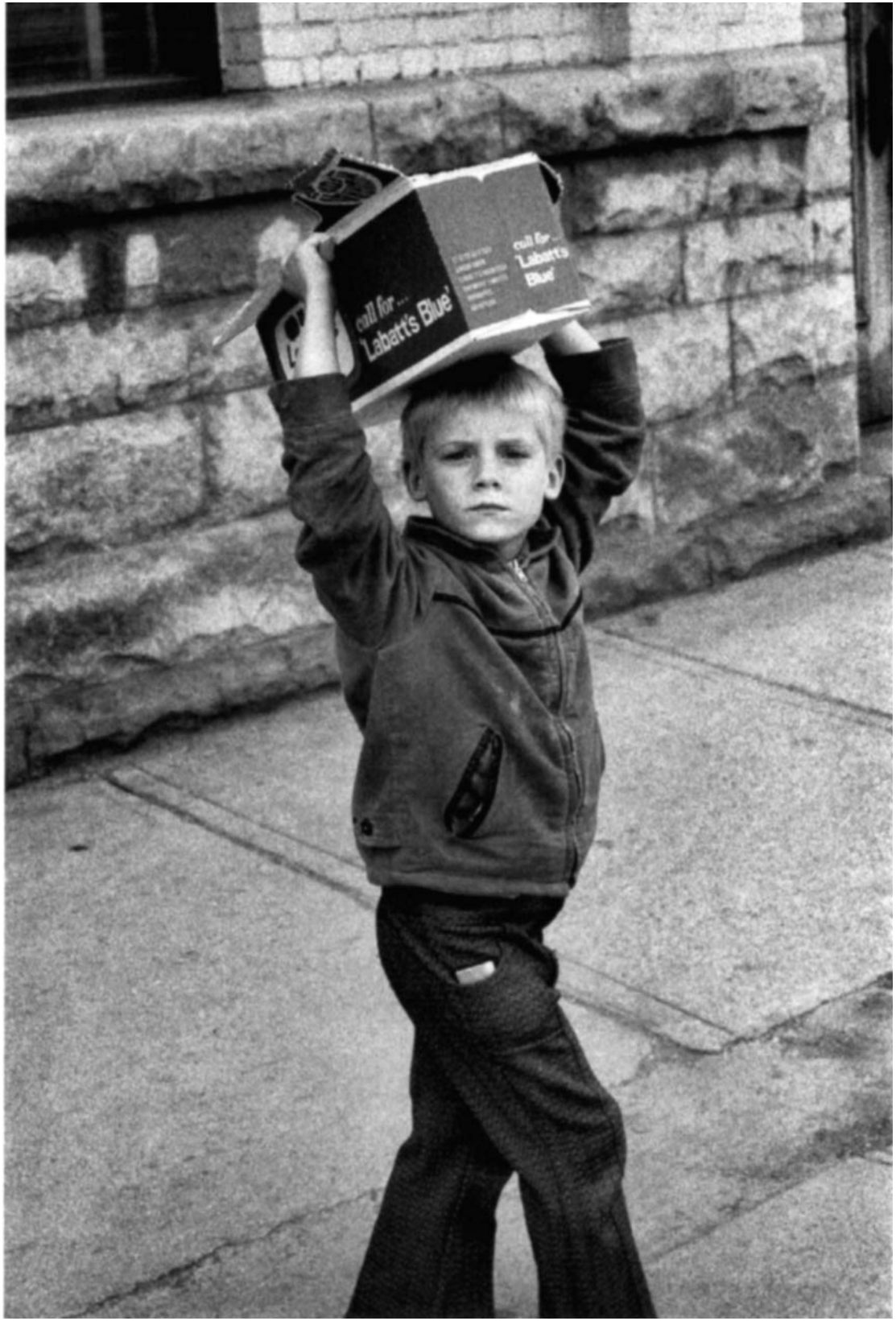
call for...
Labatt's Blue
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Labatt's
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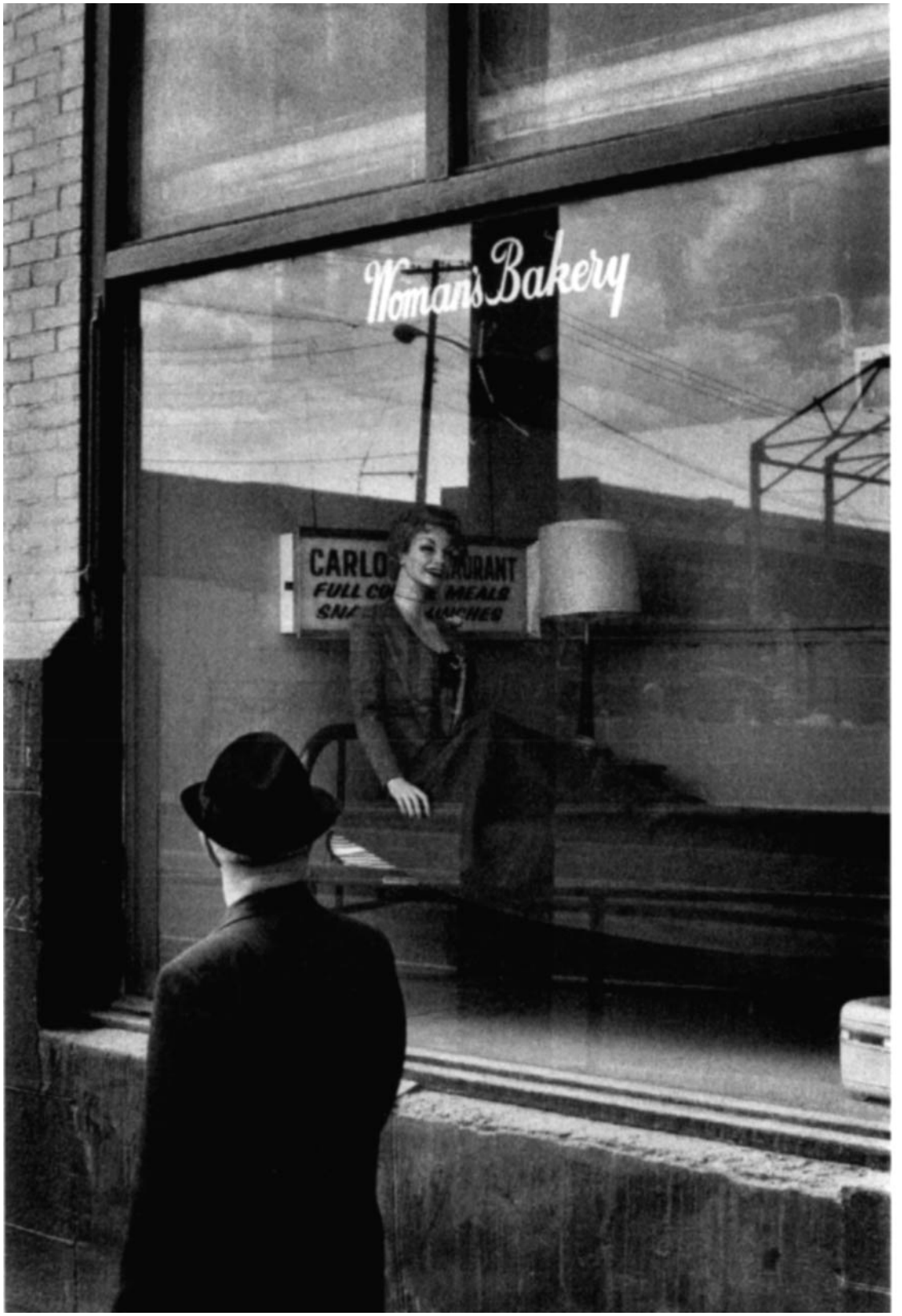
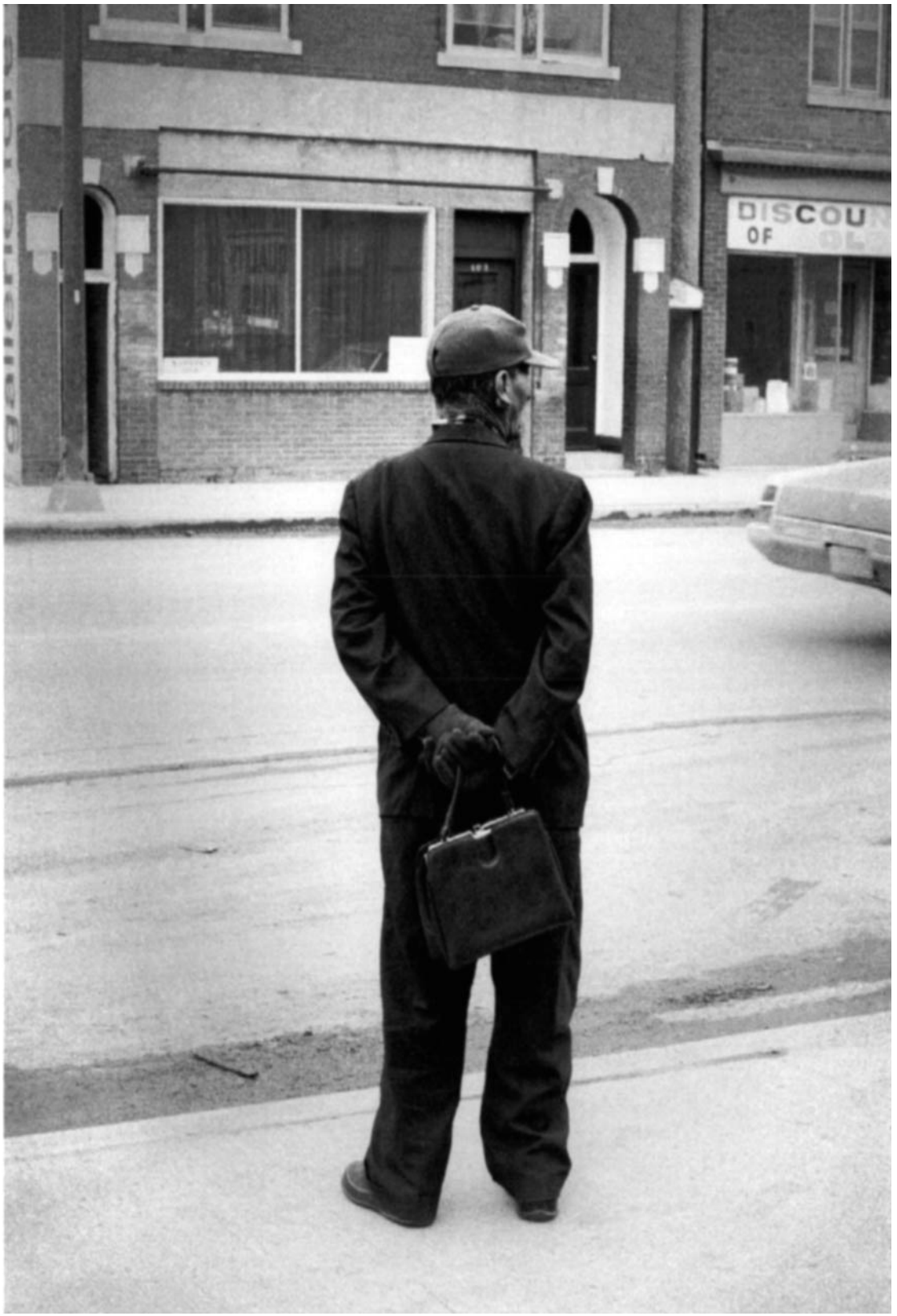

Woman's Bakery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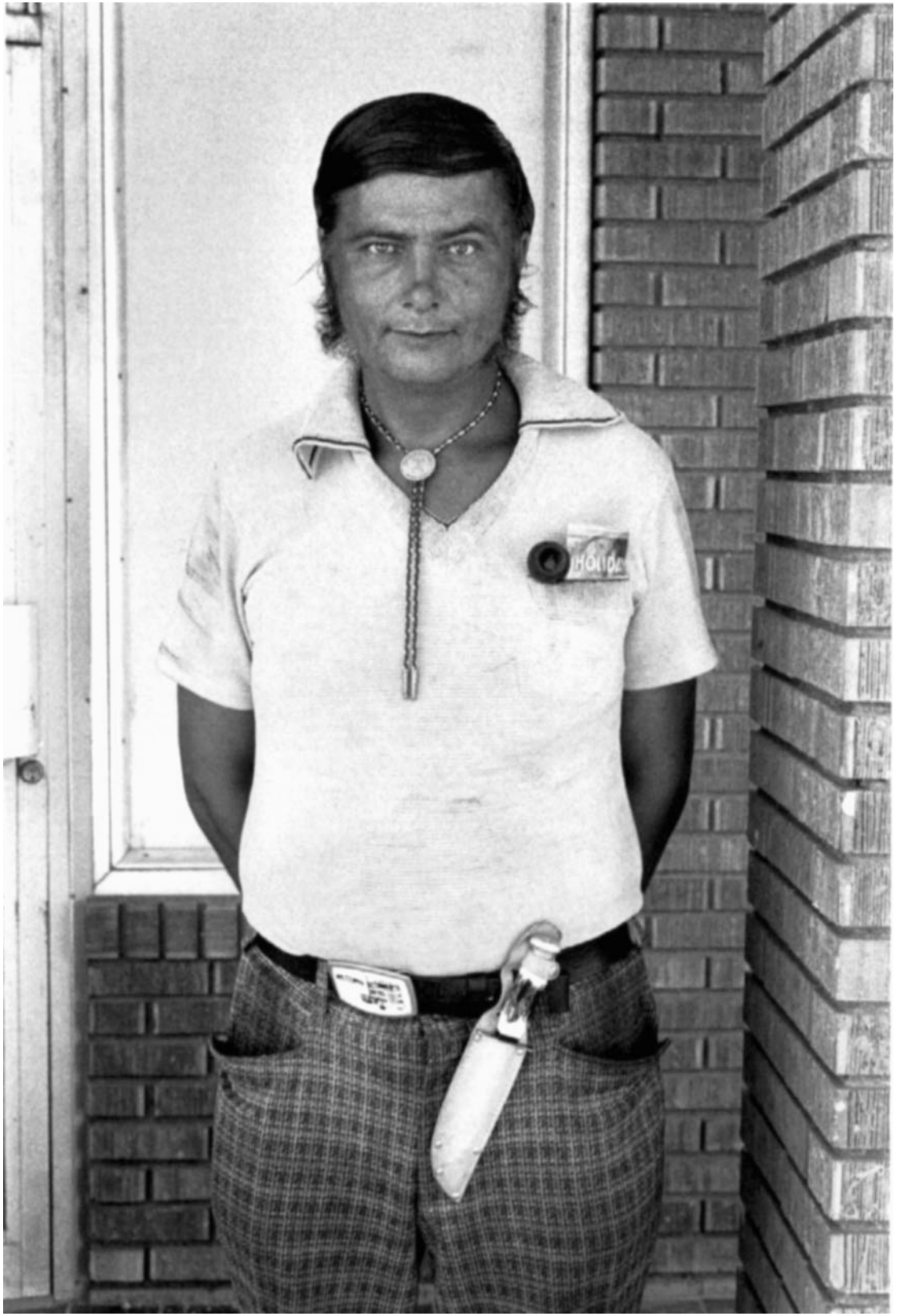
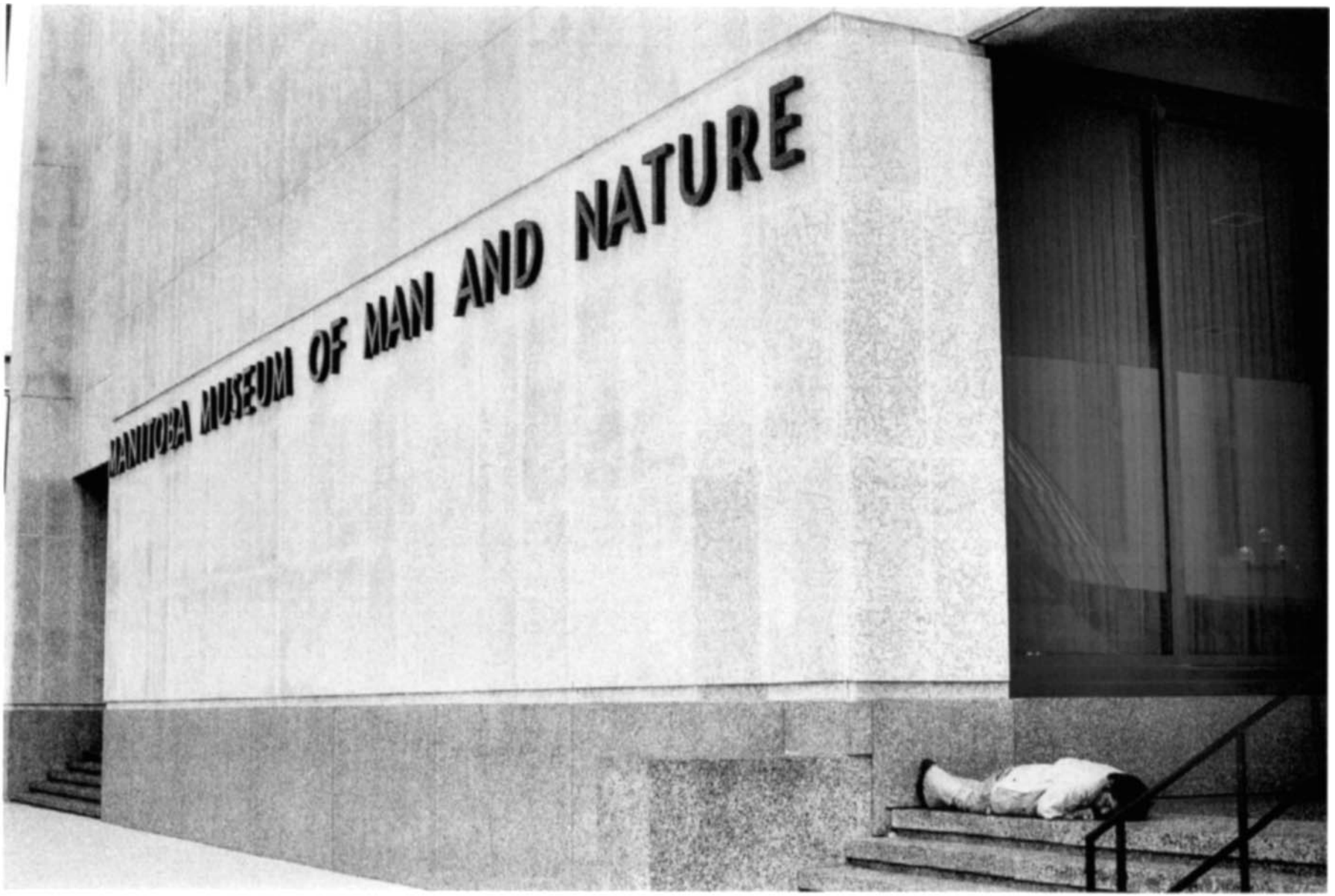
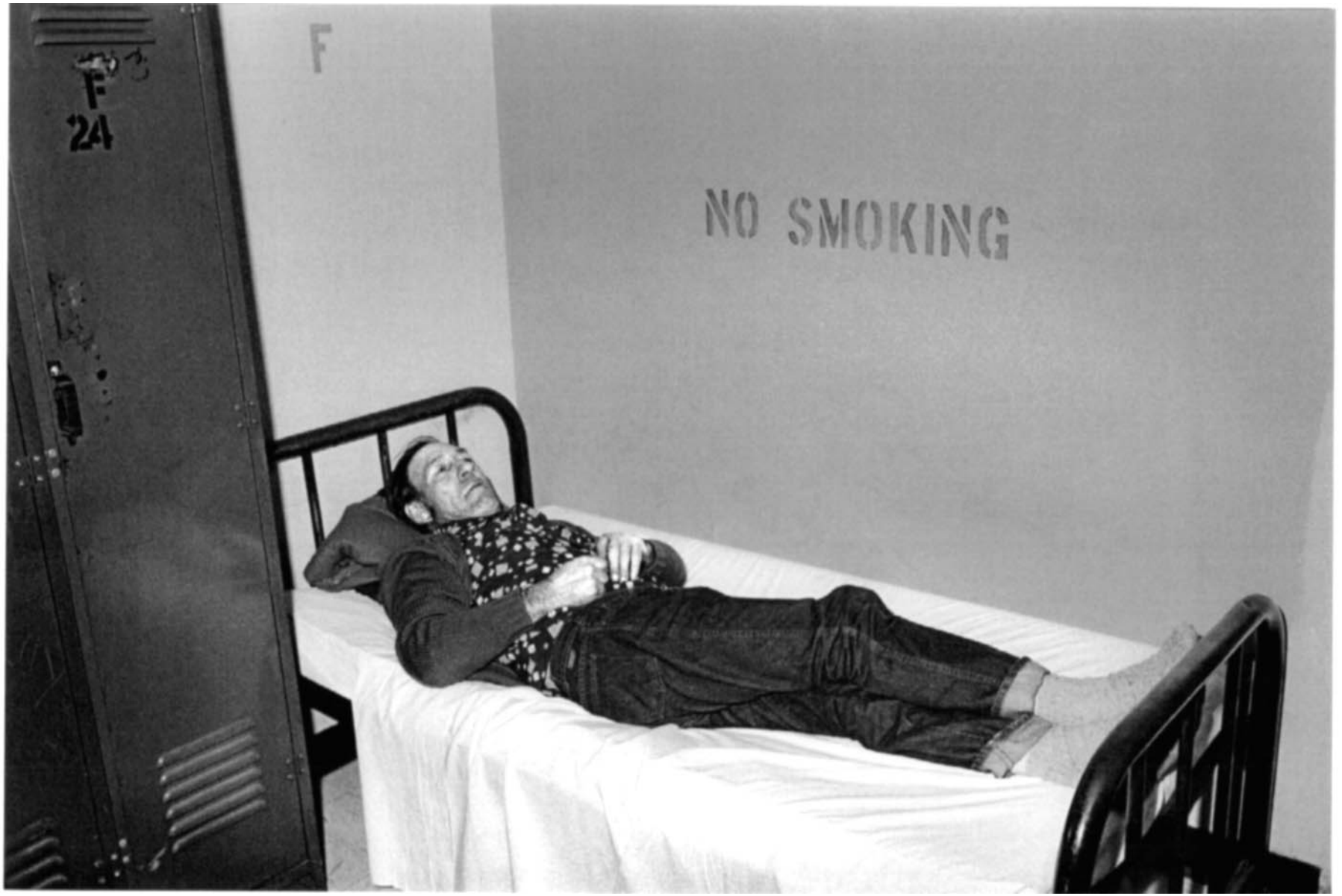



MANITOBA MUSEUM OF MAN AND NATURE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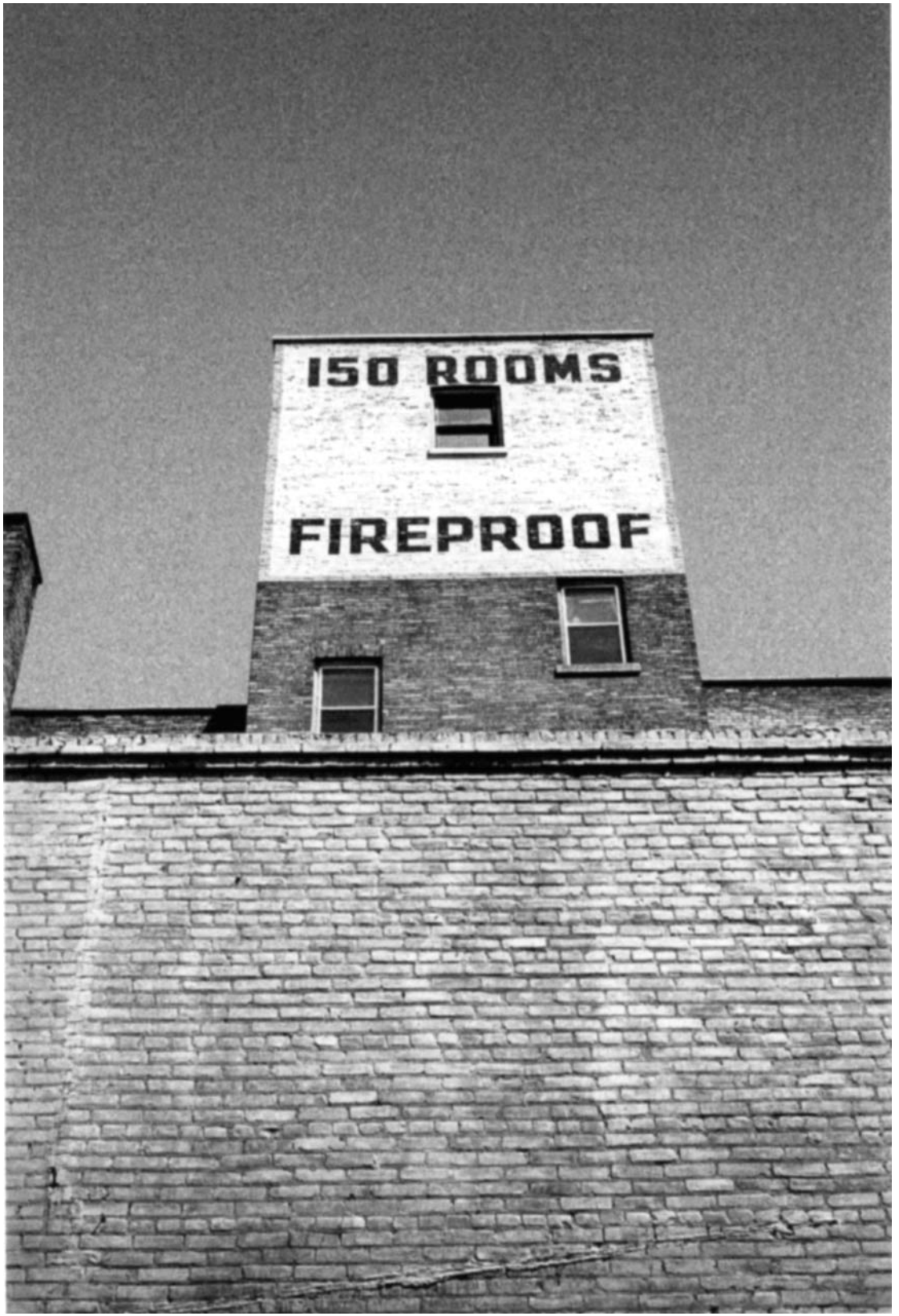
NO SMOKING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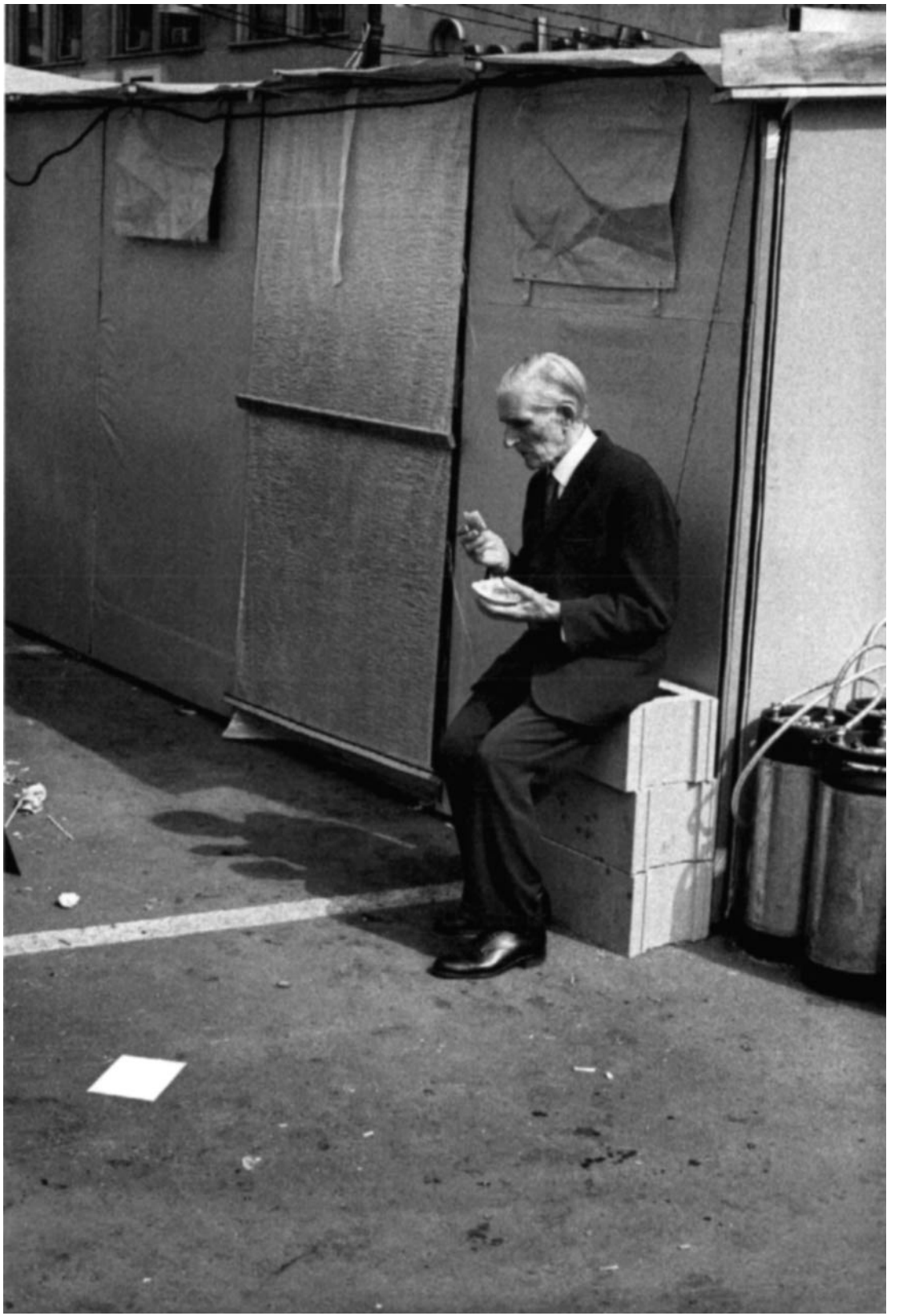
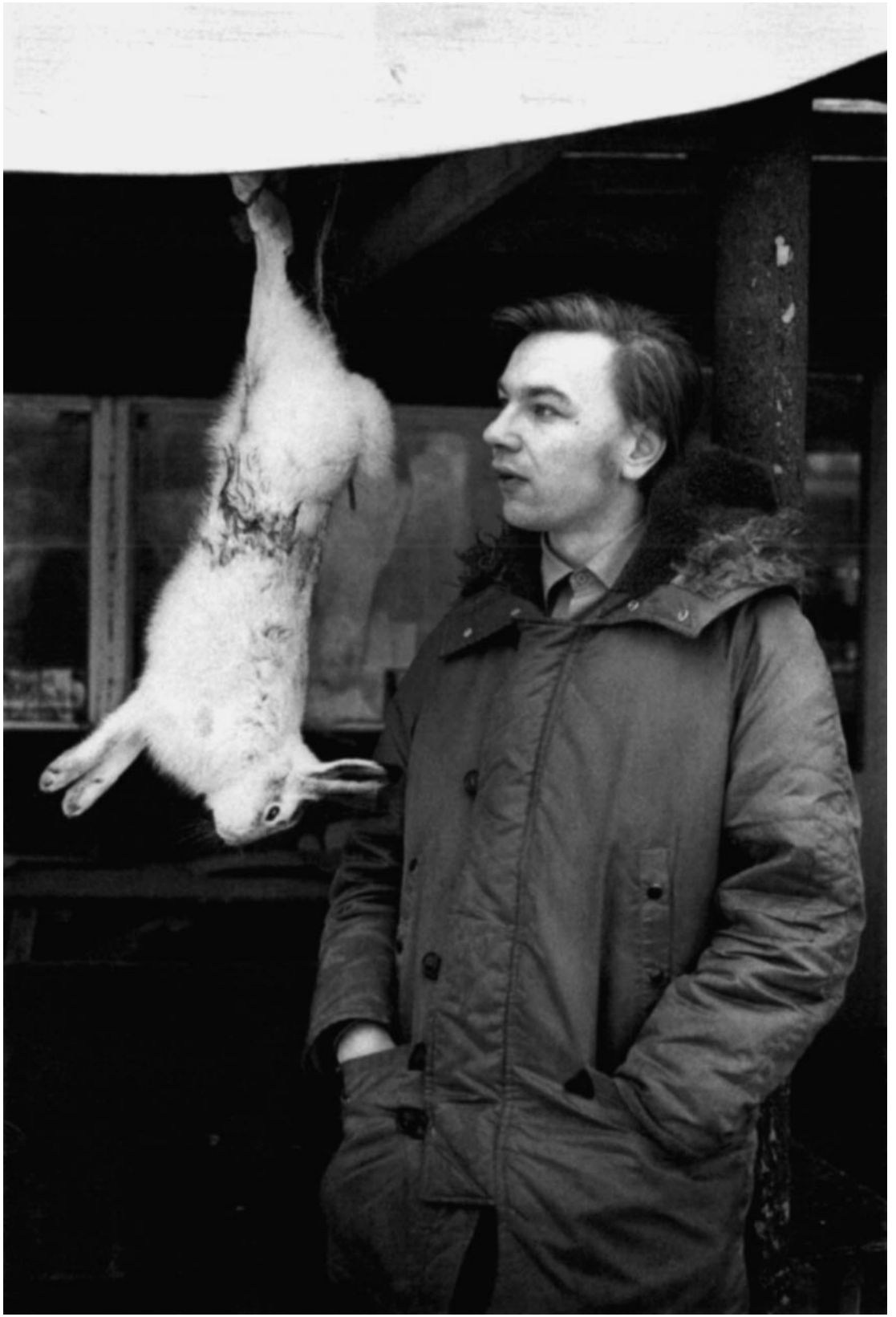
QUICK GUN



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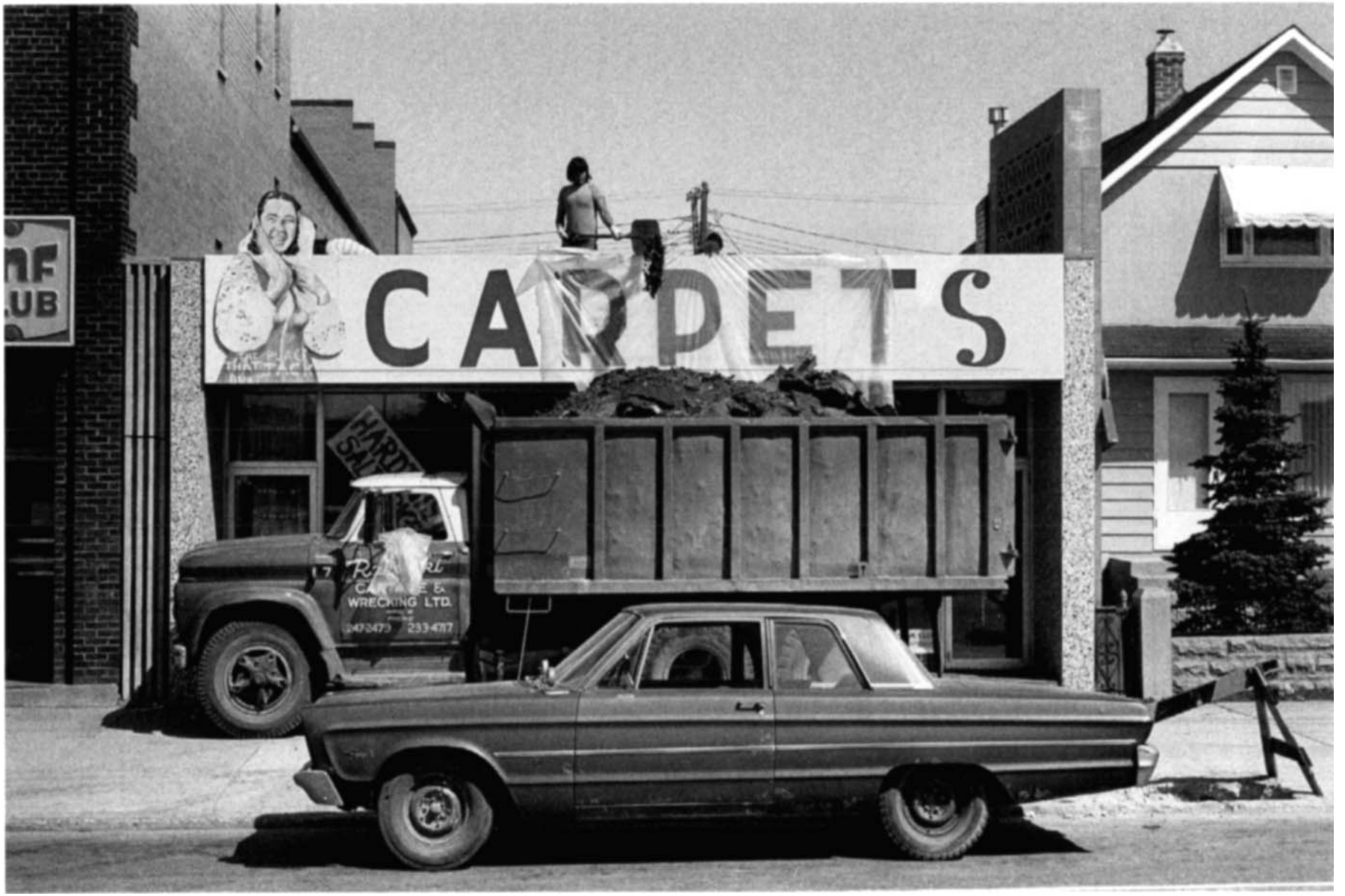
AUTO SALE
STEVE KORMILO
943
IMPALA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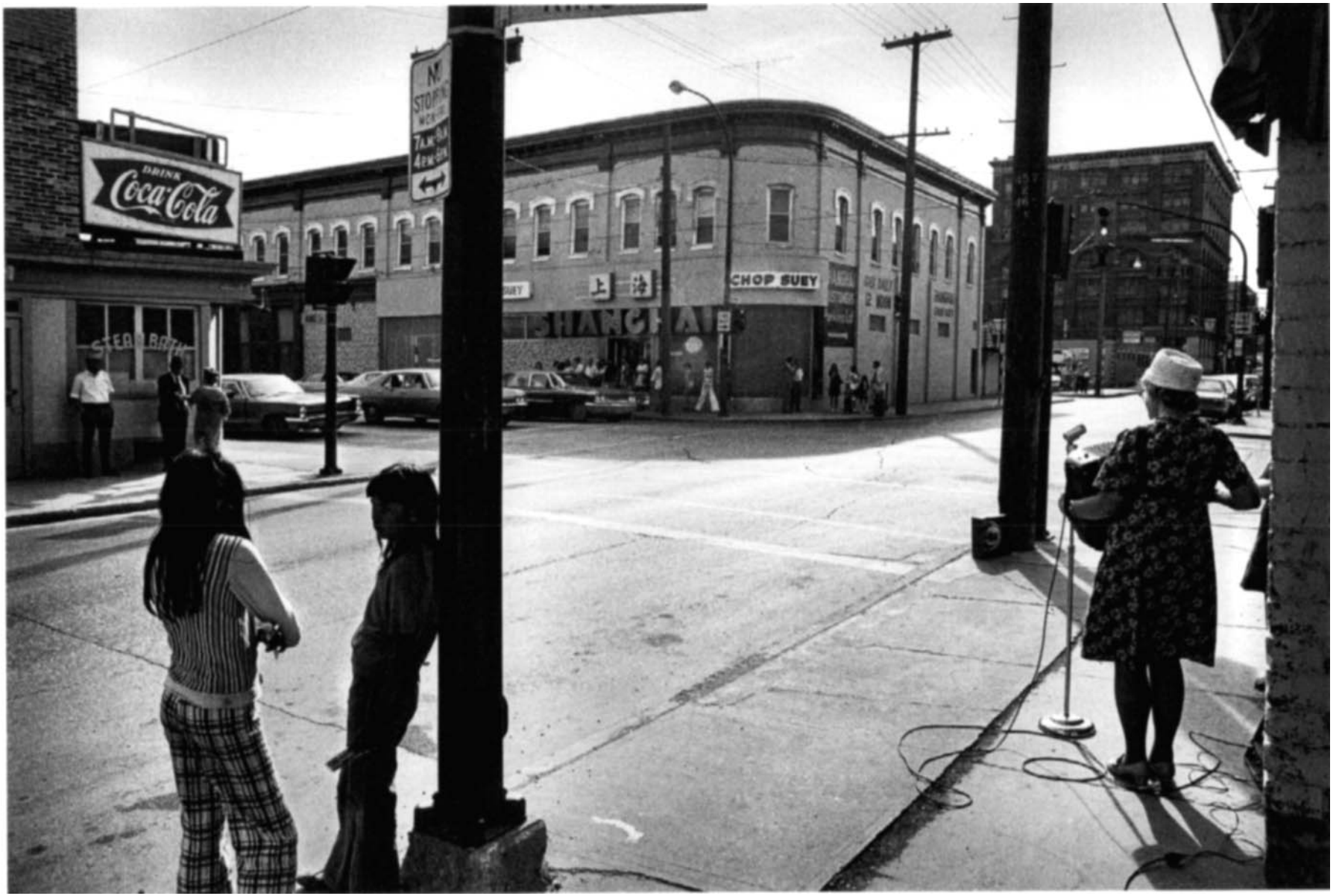
DRINK
Coca-Cola
CHOP SUEY


Act, 17:30
God now
commands
all men to
Repent
from Sin


Hi Brother!


Hi Brother!


RT GARRY TRUST
Bill


STOP
Sears

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Acknowledgements

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