Real Worlds

Real Worlds:

Brassaï
Arbus
Goldin

Hilton Als
Maggie Nelson
A.L. Steiner

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Lanka Tattersall

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Real Worlds: Brassaï, Arbus, Goldin brings together the works of three of the twentieth century's most influential photographers of modern life. Drawn primarily from The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles's extraordinary photography collection, the exhibition provides a remarkable opportunity to explore the work of Brassaï (1899–1984), Diane Arbus (1923–1971), and Nan Goldin (1953–).

This exhibition would not have been possible without the acquisition, in 1995, of an astounding collection of over two thousand photographs. We are tremendously grateful to The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, Audrey Irmas, and the Susan Bay-Nimoy and Leonard Nimoy Family Foundation for supporting the purchase of works from the collection of Robert Freidus. This impressive collection of photographs continues to foster rich discourse and inspire thoughtful and provocative exhibitions. MOCA extends sincere gratitude to the numerous individuals who have contributed to this exhibition and publication. Our deepest thanks goes to the entire Board of Trustees, including Co-Chairs Maurice Marciano and Lilly Tartikoff Karatz. We are especially grateful to Assistant Curator Lanka Tattersall for organizing the exhibition and accompanying publication, and to Chief Curator Helen Molesworth for her commitment to providing access to the institution's extensive and historic permanent collection. Our gratitude extends to MOCA's exceptional team, especially: Jill Davis, Director of Exhibition Management; Jillian Griffith, Assistant Registrar; Andy Kolar, Exhibition Technician; and Rebecca Matalon, Curatorial Associate.

We are honored to have worked with Conny Purtill on the design of this publication and Donna Wingate, who served as the book's editor. For their support we would also like to thank: John Pelosi, Esquire, Matthew Marks Gallery, and Fraenkel Gallery.

Above all, our heartfelt thanks goes to the estates of Diane Arbus and Brassaï, artist Nan Goldin, and the contributors to this publication: Hilton Als, Maggie Nelson, and A.L. Steiner. Arbus, Brassaï, and Goldin continue to inspire scholars, artists, and viewers alike. Their manifold contributions to the art of the last century have fundamentally expanded the definitions of documentary photography, while offering simultaneously elegant, brutal, and tender depictions of their "Real Worlds," worlds that our brilliant contributors—Als, Nelson, and Steiner—have generously and keenly explored within this publication. I am deeply grateful to each for lending their critical voice and vision to this project.

Philippe Vergne
Maurice Marciano Director, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

PREFACE

Photography books are remarkable objects of art and desire. In 1844, following swiftly on the heels of photography's invention, Henry Fox Talbot published the first installment of *The Pencil of Nature*, a manifesto on photography recognized as the first commercially published book to be illustrated with photographs. Since then, photobooks have invited close study and intimate encounters with photographic images. Photobooks may be read, poured over, carefully contemplated, returned to repeatedly, committed to memory, and, especially, touched. Brassaï's *The Secret Paris of the 30's* (1976), the posthumous *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph* (1972), and Nan Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986) are three of the twentieth century's most celebrated, influential, and enduring volumes of documentary photography. Each of these artists obsessively used the camera to reflect and transform the world around them, with a focus on the daily—if extraordinary—lives of distinctive individuals.

From exuberant nightclubs to covert brothels and festive gay balls, Brassaï's photographs seductively capture a nocturnal 1930s Paris, preserving a demimonde that, with the coming war, was on the verge of disappearing. During the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, Diane Arbus rigorously photographed a wildly diverse range of individuals. These included suburban families, queers, senior citizens, and nudists in moments that are at once euphoric and quotidian, and which powerfully reveal the potential for human vulnerability positioned on both sides of the camera lens. In *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, a formidable book adaptation of the artist's original 35mm slide presentations, Goldin's raw and intimate color photographs document her own experiences and her milieu in the 1970s and 1980s. From New York to Berlin, a stunningly unflinching portrayal of love, longing, and pain is seen through the lens of her own life.

MOCA is extremely fortunate to have the full set of 126 prints from *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, all eighty prints from the Arbus monograph, and a nearly comprehensive holding of prints from *The Secret Paris of the 30's*. Robert Freidus, a New York gallerist and collector who focused on acquiring complete groupings of photographs reproduced in photobooks, originally assembled these collections together (which the museum acquired in 1995). This scholarly approach allows for in-depth examinations of individual artists' bodies of work, while also drawing attention to photography's primary form of distribution in the twentieth century: not the limited edition print, but the mass-produced reproduction.

This book arose from the desire to explore these photographic collections from new perspectives, specifically by inviting three of today's most magnificent thinkers: writer and critic Hilton Als, writer Maggie Nelson, and artist A.L. Steiner, to reflect on these artworks. Each of them very generously agreed to sit down with me in the early months of 2017 in Los Angeles for in-person, in-depth conversations. Als's critical essays on Arbus and Goldin are some of the most astute and poignant writings on either artist; he was interviewed about Brassaï, an artist that Als had not previously spoken about at length. Maggie Nelson discussed Arbus, having been asked to expand upon a passage in her deeply insightful book *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (2011), in which Nelson writes that Arbus reveals "how many conflicting truths there might be within a singular image, moment or person."[1] For the past two decades, A.L. Steiner has documented an exuberant and radical community of artists and friends, while providing cautionary tales about the hazards of environmental damage and patriarchal oppression; for this book we talked about Steiner's own formative contact with Goldin, as well as her work and legacy.

Looking back on the occasionally myopic reception of *The Ballad*, in 2012 Goldin wrote: "[journalists] talk about the work

I did on drag queens and prostitution, on 'marginalized' people. We were *never* marginalized. We were the world."[2] The title of this exhibition and volume is a tribute to Goldin's sentiment, as well as a winking nod to the MTV show *Real World*, which first aired in 1992 and ushered in the contemporary era of reality television. The show's blurring of popular culture and life augured the theaters of self-fashioning that so many of us now beam around the world via Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook. Important, indeed vital, precedents for such modes of self-presentation are found in the works of Arbus, Brassaï, and Goldin.

The ever mutable and often contentious relationship between mass media, activism, politics, and art is one that is continually subject to negotiation and critically hinges on questions of representation and visibility. In related ways, Arbus, Brassaï, and Goldin keenly understood how to use photography to probe, unsettle, preserve, advocate for, and celebrate the dynamic and myriad worlds that we fashion every day.

Lanka Tattersall
Assistant Curator, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

1. Maggie Nelson, *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 143.
2. Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, rev. ed. (New York: Aperture, 2012), 145.

Brassaï

Brassaï, *At the Cabane Cubaine in Montmartre*, c. 1932.
Gelatin silver print, 11 7⁄8 x 9 in. (30.2 x 22.9 cm)

LANKA TATTERSALL IN CONVERSATION WITH HILTON ALS ON BRASSAÏ

Lanka Tattersall: In 1924, Brassaï arrived in Paris, a move that allowed him to escape the regime of the right-wing Hungarian government. In his writings in *The Secret Paris of the 30's*, there is a sense that Paris was a certain kind of dream world, suggesting it was a place of refuge. You've written about Diane Arbus being Jewish in New York: "Everyone in New York being Jewish, a refugee from worlds where they have to adjust or continually arrange themselves, not so much to fit in as not to be killed."[1] Do you perceive the experience of flight or exile in Brassaï's photographs or writings?

Hilton Als: I think that the sense of exile he would have felt as an artist or a writer was that he was admitted into a milieu that he wasn't truly a part of. He hung out with the demimonde, but he wasn't really there—he was working. And when you have a work relationship with a certain world, it means that you have distance from it, that you're making something constructive out of something that is really not constructed at all. The only construction might be, for example, "I'll meet you at Albert's at 8:00," etc.

That's how society happens: by chance. Brassaï recorded accidental encounters between people or designed encounters, but even the designed encounters are still filled with chance. Chance is always there in life if you're going to have any kind of closeness to another person. And so he was recording all of these moments of possibility.

Eugène Atget's project was to record how modernization was overtaking Paris. The pictures of his that I love the most are always the sitting rooms, where in the décor you can see the ghostly impressions of people's bodies on pillows and stuff.

In Brassaï, we don't see this so much. His pictures are about activity. Things are always happening in his pictures, so they are

not still lifes. It goes back to the journalistic impulse to see action or to record activity, and because of this there is a cinematic quality to the book in those three or four pictures that, together, are an extension of the journalistic desire to know what's happening in the *now*, as opposed to reflecting on it after the fact. That's why I keep coming back to this idea of him not using photography to do an in-depth study of something, but to use it to make postcards—postcards from the edge. They're relatable because they're not psychological portraits—they are illustrations of a particular kind of society. If they were more psychologically fraught, for example, I think he would have been relying on the subject to reflect that. I think he was very interested in the illustrative, in asking, "How do I remember?" But the deeper part for him was the writing, and the photographs acted as postcards that he could refer back to, in order to go back into his subconscious to write. The photographs are a little bit stilted in a way, or when I look at them, I find that a subject had so much more to offer psychologically, like this woman on the left in *At the Cabane Cubaine in Montmartre* (c. 1932) (p. 14), for instance—I'm always fascinated by her.

LT: Yes, all the specifics of her look are so compelling, like this little kerchief hat. That speaks to the intense crispness of so many of Brassaï's photographs; there is a kind of fidelity he was after. There is a tension between the things that are in process, but that won't remain fixed in time, and this is a key aspect of Brassaï's work, his crystallization of moments and gazes.

HA: Her face powder—all of that stuff interests me. At some point, Brassaï says the fashion went away.

LT: The text of *The Secret Paris of the 30's* is striking for that reason, since the photographs were made in the 1930s but the book wasn't actually published until 1976. There is an almost feigned naïveté in the tone of the writing. He's looking back at these images fondly and casting them in a romantic and literary light. Something that haunts the whole book is that he was writing from the other side of World War II.

HA: Brassaï makes a very specific point about modernization. These pictures are a bridge between antique and modern Paris. They are pictures of a transformation. The world of old Paris, the City of Lights, romanticism, are all giving way to a deeper sort of post-World War I but pre-World War II kind of socialization.

This world is an extension of the world that Charles Baudelaire started to write about in "The Painter of Modern Life" (1868), where life is happening very quickly and you can only sketch it. Sketches become the only reasonable means of recording this life. For Brassaï—in the way that Baudelaire talked about the artists of his time—the camera could be used to quickly sketch this particular aspect of society.

He didn't have what Arbus or Goldin had: extended time. They would spend years with the subject in order to understand a particular person. I think Brassaï was really a photographically quick sketch artist compared to Arbus or Goldin. And his work is a real extension of Baudelaire's dictum that beauty in modernization is really about self-presentation, about the eye.

Also, his subject was a city. And the queerness he saw can only happen in a city where there are other like-minded people and possibilities. He couldn't have done his work in rural France. He would have had to bike around the countryside, constantly looking for people. There was a concentration—of possibility, of chance, and of queerness—that was interesting to him. Because it's not only about gender, it's about many different kinds of queerness. There's race and sexuality, there's gender, there are drugs. There's marginalization—people who really live a less than hand-to-mouth existence. But throughout, there was this incredible style that all his subjects evinced in the pictures. There is something deeply Parisian about the ways in which they presented themselves.

The poorest person here has their face made up in a certain way, and there is also a certain thinness that was becoming more in vogue in Paris as a way of indicating urbanity. The body was

changing; French bodies were going from a voluptuous form to, for instance, the form of the femme woman in *A couple at Le Monocle* (c. 1932) (p. 24). Instead of a voluptuous attitude there was a more emaciated—or modern—thinness. Coco Chanel was such an influential figure at this point, and she was emphasizing a kind of boyish flatness—women with big breasts and hips and all that were no longer the ideal. The femme-gay women were exercising this Chanel-influenced thinness and flatness of form, and it was becoming more chic. It was a movement from the bustle to Vionnet to Chanel.

In *The Secret Paris of the 30's*, Brassaï writes: "During the seventeenth century, before becoming a depot for packing cases and crates belonging to the merchants of Les Halles, and a den of Arabs, this street was the headquarters of the bank owned by the financier Law until his notorious bankruptcy. In the thirties, the Rue Quincampoix had another specialty: it was full of fat girls, 'floozies,' who were called *'Nanas,' 'punaises,' 'morues'* ('bed bugs' and 'codfish') in slang. Contrary to the mobility streetwalkers usually display, they waited, immobile and placid, along the sidewalk like a row of caryatids for the butchers and tripe-sellers from Les Halles, men who were accustomed to dealing with huge masses of flesh. One day I took a room in a hotel across the street and watched from my window these odalisques and the men who would stroll past them ten or more times, back and forth, cigarettes dangling from their lips, before stopping in front of their choice."[2] So it was a very particular type of woman.

LT: That description is just so visceral, ". . . huge masses of flesh" like hunks of meat. As much as there is a saccharine tone in his writing, there are passages that are cruel.

HA: I like that he rented that hotel room and was looking at the women—what he's really describing, looking at, was the behavior of the men. He's talking about women's bodies in a way that is brutal but honest, in terms of how desire is played out and what people are attracted to.

I had a friend, a very thin woman, and she said her boyfriend liked to put things in her mouth during sex, and it wasn't to silence her. It was like he fetishized feeding or "stuffing" her. And I wonder if that was something that these guys who liked bigger women were interested in doing, watching them eat, or since they were right there in the meat packing district at the time, I wonder if it was about feeding them at a certain point—about the mother being bigger than you are.

LT: There's eating, and then there's also excreting, which appears a few times in the book—the cesspool cleaners, the urinals, the woman in the brothel sitting on the toilet.

HA: I think he was very interested in the ways in which bodies perform their functions, and that they also have this kind of maquillage and appearance. It's a kind of dirty sophistication, right? His pictures are almost tinted green, as if all these people are subterranean. But there is a real ardor and pride in self-presentation in his photographs.

There is this moment in the section where *A prostitute playing Russian billiards, Boulevard Rochechouart, Montmartre* (c. 1932) appears. At the end, Brassaï says something very prescient and important about the book as a whole: "As for the younger generation, they have since the War begun to be bored by the 'old-fashioned' décor of these dance halls, by the accordion orchestras and the jerky waltzes. They have turned to jazz, to jukeboxes, to rock. The underworld has changed, too. The menacing atmosphere of former days hasn't disappeared, far from it, but the underworld has abandoned its former ways of life, its habitual, clearly defined fiefdoms, which were too accessible to the police. Now, the mobsters prefer the bars along the Champs-Élysées to the saloons and dives of the Rue de Lappe. The red neon signs still wink at the passers-by, but they are no longer menacing. Nothing is left of the dance halls of yesterday but their décor, their picturesque and anachronistic customers, and the accordion, which still holds forth between the starry sky."[3] So he ruins it with that

last sentence. But before that, he gives a very good idea of how history is changing.

LT: Why do you say he ruined it with that last sentence?

HA: Because he gets sentimental, a little treacly.

LT: Speaking of décor, what do you make of his use of mirroring—for instance, the images of couples in the bar?

HA: For Brassaï, it's almost like pornography in a certain way, maybe doubling his pleasure. He was just getting more of what he's interested in: people. In this mirror picture [*A happy group at the Quatre Saisons* (c. 1932)], there are six people, and also here with the lovebirds [*Lovers, Place d'Italie* (c. 1932) (p. 26)]. I think he was just interested in more information.

I want to ask you a technical question: What kind of flash was he using? He says that he taught himself the technical aspects through books, and then, when he was taking these photos, he was staying in a *hôtel particulier*, or a kind of rooming house where he could rent another room as a dark room. I want to know because using flash is such a different thing for the people you're photographing. I know that Arbus, for instance, was very confrontational with her subjects, who saw everything that was happening. I don't know how much Brassaï was doing that. The flash is there—you can see it. And I think that accounts for the performative aspect of the pictures. But I wonder how much he was asking people to hold still or pause. It appears that he was asking them to do certain things and hold the pose for a second. Though I don't think the film speeds were that fast at that time.

LT: We know he used magnesium flares, and there is a great quote from Picasso, who called him "the terrorist" because this magnesium flare was so startling. But then, you're exactly right: when we look at some of his photographs, we don't in any way have the sense—

HA: That people were bothered by it.

LT: Yes, exactly.

HA: I also think that the beauty of the book is found in his introduction, when he says, "I lived at night," and it appears that he had an incredible sense of gentleness with people.[4] So when he meets a homeless guy and the homeless guy says something like, "I don't want to be rude, but you'd get us in trouble or get us kicked out of here—but come back at seven for a meal." There are just all these great French manners around eating and being together. And there's gentleness in what are heart-wrenching portraits—not just photographic but linguistic—like his portrait of Kiki de Montparnasse [*Kiki with her accordion player at the Cabaret des Fleurs, Rue de Montparnasse* (c. 1932)], who was basically orphaned by her mother, who then later tried to get her back—ultimately her life did not end very well. I'm wondering how many more stories there are of people's lives not ending well in the book. Kiki was a more public figure, but the book is filled with anonymous ones.

One thing that Arbus was able to do was to use her great charm. She described paying attention with the camera as a formidable kind of attention, and I have the feeling that people in Brassaï's pictures felt the same about him—that because of him, they wouldn't be forgotten. And I think part of what really haunts us about these pictures is that his subjects have a lot of pride and trust.

LT: There is a sense that Brassaï's field of inquiry was not the authenticity of any individual, but rather an attempt to have an objective view of the members of the Parisian demimonde. For me, this is reflected in the way that so many pointed details bubble up to the surface.

HA: In this picture of two men [*Young couple wearing a two-in-one suit at the Bal de la Montagne Sainte-Geneviève* (c. 1931) (p. 27)], I'm struck by the jacket and the trousers, and the nakedness of one and the nakedness of the other. But when you think about framing and so on, it's not really that remarkable of a picture. He's interested in the people, not the photograph. So

he's not a photographic artist in the way that Arbus would have you sit on the bed for many, many exposures until something psychological happens. She was really very aware of what the frame looks like.

I don't think Brassaï was aware of what the frame looks like. He was aware of what the person looks like, and he was very interested in the play between cosmetics and how you look. He was also interested in how people are together: how they are coupled, how they are isolated.

The really powerful thing about the pictures is that he leaves us with stories that we want to actually finish ourselves. That's why we're always thinking, "I wonder what happened in the next moment?" Or: "I wonder what happened the next day? I wonder what happened to Kiki after she sang that song?" Or: "I wonder what happened to these two lovers? Did they go off to live a nice life together?" Brassaï has an interesting relationship to how dreams fail. A lot of the people in this work have some relationship to hopes that get dashed. He has an interest in that tragedy.

LT: This reminds me of the incredible story of the butch woman in *A couple at Le Monocle*; it's really a bit shocking. "Historian Xavier Demange has identified the larger woman in *Lesbian Couple at Le Monocle, Paris* as Violette Moriss [sic], a French weight-lifting champion, nicknamed 'discus thrower of the cut breasts' because she had had a double mastectomy. Before the war, she killed a man during an argument in her home; during the war, she collaborated with the German Gestapo and was allowed to torture female prisoners. The Resistance assassinated her in 1944."[5]

HA: I really want to know more about this woman.

LT: I know.

HA: Is that all we have?

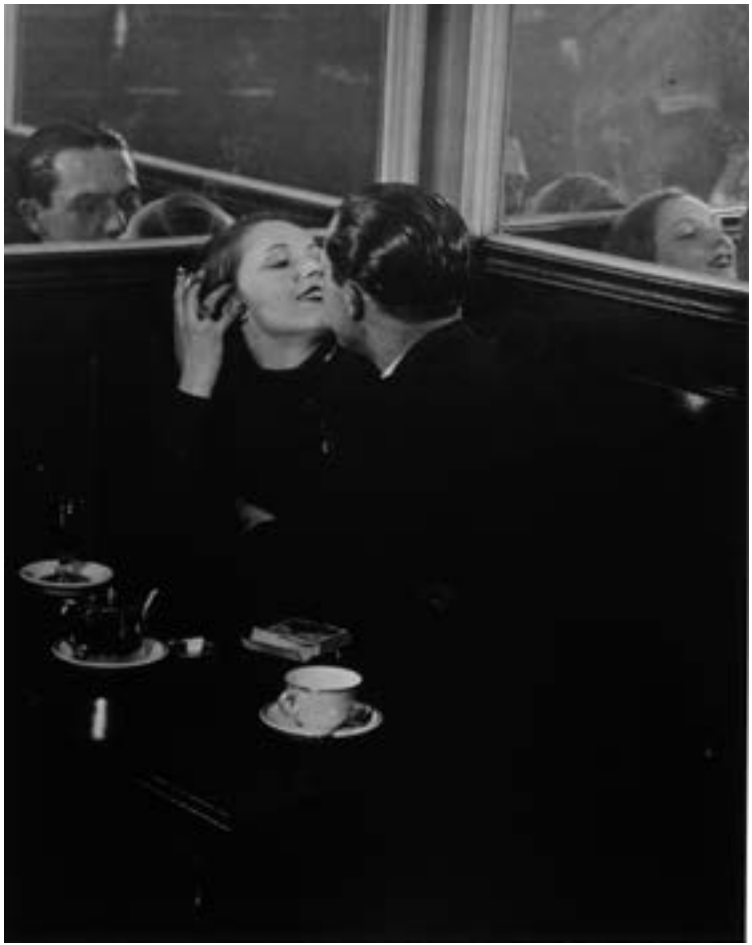
LT: That's all we have.

HA: I think that's one of the great, powerful things about his pictures: he leaves us with unfinished stories, and we want to know what happens. That's really what the power of the pictures is: that these people existed, and that all of these elements of style and self-presentation were happening. We become attached to them as stories. We want to know more stories about them.

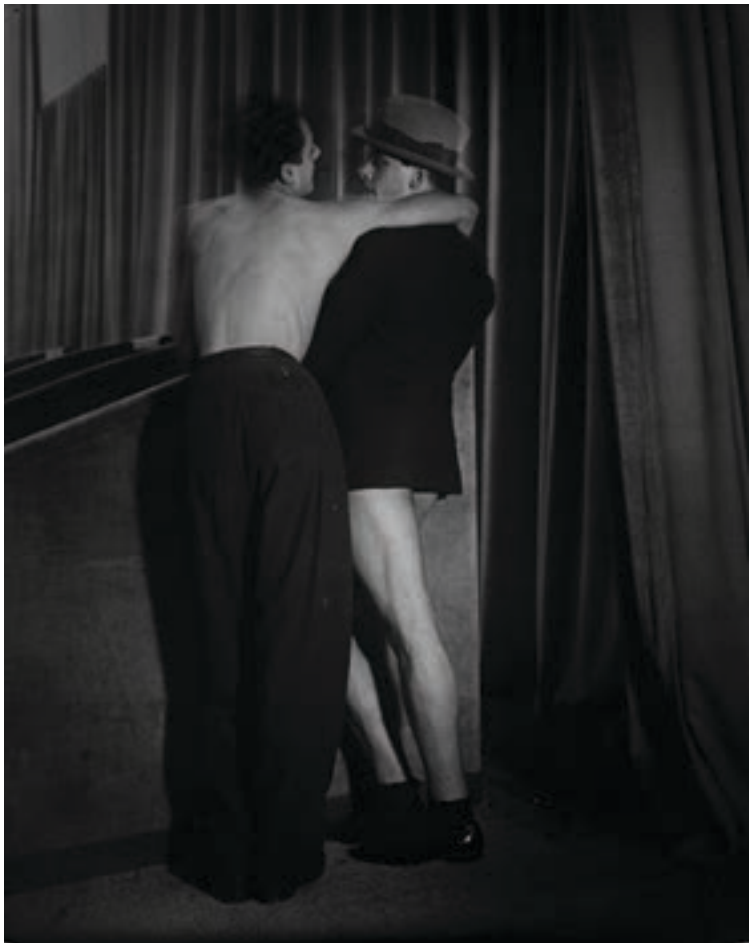
1. Hilton Als, "Diane Arbus in Manhattan," *Stuart Regen Visionaries Series* (video of lecture, New Museum, New York, September 15, 2015), https://livestream.com/accounts/3605883/events/4338723/videos/99348982, accessed July 18, 2017.
2. Brassaï, *The Secret Paris of the 30's*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Random House and Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1976), n.p.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Anne Wilkes Tucker, "Brassaï: Man of the World," in *Brassaï: The Eye of Paris* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1998), 43.

Brassaï, *A couple at Le Monocle*, c. 1932.
Gelatin silver print, 15 ¼ x 11 ⅛ in. (38.7 x 28.3 cm)

Brassaï, *Streetwalker near the Place d'Italie*, c. 1932.
Gelatin silver print, 12 x 8 ¾ in. (30.5 x 22.2 cm)



Brassaï, *Lovers, Place d'Italie*, c. 1932. Gelatin silver print,
14 ½ x 11 in. (36.8 x 27.9 cm)



Brassaï, *Young couple wearing a two-in-one suit at the Bal de la Montagne Sainte-Geneviève*, c. 1931. Gelatin silver print,
11 ⅞ x 9 ⅜ in. (30.2 x 23.8 cm)

Arbus

Diane Arbus, *Untitled (6) 1970–71*. Gelatin silver print, 20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm)

LANKA TATTERSALL IN CONVERSATION WITH MAGGIE NELSON ON DIANE ARBUS

Lanka Tattersall: How did you come upon Diane Arbus as one of the subjects that you wanted to discuss in your book *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (2011)?

Maggie Nelson: I was focusing on different people who had in some way been accused of having their work be cruel, ethically suspect, or exploitative, or, in the case of Arbus, kind of slumming it or making cross-identifications that were somehow foul.

I was interested in different figures, such as Kara Walker, Diane Arbus, and Ana Mendieta. I didn't want to try to reclaim an artist's work by saying what they were doing was ethically sound and wonderful, that Arbus was, say, bringing these freaks to light, to be appreciated by all Americans—I didn't want to go that route. We can let their artworks remain conflicted and ambivalent, let cross-identifications simply remain as confusing as they are.

If an artist [such as Arbus] has already said: I'm a complicated person and my urges toward my subjects seem complicated to me and marbled with the array of human emotions that comes from looking at and making art of other humans; you know, if she already knew all that, then it doesn't seem very interesting to play around with charging her or not charging her.

LT: Arbus talks about feeling a mixture of shame and awe for her subjects. "Freaks . . . I just used to adore them . . ." she's said.[1] And there is a palpable desire for a connection with her subjects in the photographs.

MN: I'm interested in the way that Arbus followed her impulses about whom she wanted to photograph. There wasn't a program of underrepresented people and an agenda to make them more represented. It was more about following her intuitive curiosity. When I look at these pictures now, they look like

time capsules: How did it feel to be her at that moment in that time? How did it feel to be the subject? I know all of it reaches apotheosis in the final pictures in the book.

LT: [Looking at *Untitled (6) 1970–71* (p. 30)] Why do you see these untitled photographs, which appear as a discrete group at the end of the Aperture monograph, as an apotheosis?

MN: I think that whenever people are potentially disabled, or when it's questionable whether or not a person consents to their representation—especially children—it makes people nervous. I remember when I first saw these pictures, I thought they were some of the spookiest pictures I'd ever seen. They really had a visceral effect on me. It's interesting because the more I look at them, they don't have that same effect.

For the most part, it seems as though what is transpiring in these photographs is a real sense of play, joy, and engagement with Arbus—a readiness to pose and the pleasure of the time. It makes me think: Who are we to judge whether or not these people are able to engage with her? They seem to want to be there. And so I think it actually puts the question back upon the viewer—who are you to think that these people have no capacity to decide; who are you to question their agency, their pleasure?

Aesthetically they have a lot in common with the nudist colony pictures in the way that they are outside in a field, or a place where people are comfortable and in their element.

LT: It's true, in both places they're having a great time, and they want to be photographed.

MN: It's very easy for Arbus to be the fall guy for your own feelings about their way of living.

LT: Totally, and you can sense that already in some of the early reviews of her work from the late 1960s. There's one critic who refers to an Arbus exhibition as having "the perpetual, if criminal, allure of a sideshow."[2] Another just describes some of Arbus's subjects as "not particularly appealing."[3] It's remarkable

to read the range of deeply subjective responses people have had to this work right from the beginning, from aversion to admiration.

I also distinctly remember the first time I saw an image of *Untitled (6)*. I was a teenager and had a cooler, older punk rock friend who was an artist who idolized this image, and Arbus's work in general. I remember that for us at the time—as young Los Angeles misfits—the *Untitled* works were almost utopian images of a community of outsiders. It was really a space that we felt a kinship with, in a certain way.

MN: It seems really on par with Harmony Korine movies or stuff like that.

LT: Right.

MN: And again, with cross-identification—I mean, there aren't really, like, whole rafts of people out there who actually feel any real camaraderie with freaks. And in that sense, over time the pictures are heroic in that they create a record of people who otherwise we might not have seen. As Jack Halberstam has said, if you're looking for butch-femme photographs from the past (as Jack was), you're delighted and thrilled that Arbus took that amazing picture *Two friends at home, N.Y.C. 1965* (p. 40), because in this endless invisibility train, these iconic pictures stand as proof of the existence of people.

LT: Right, and of their relationship. For me, this image is deeply iconic; it's burned into my memory. But it's also the title, *Two friends at home*, in which you feel the impossibility of actually saying "a lesbian couple at home" or "two women in their bedroom."

MN: It's interesting that the Arbus titles move in between euphemism, or not even euphemism, but the limits of the time, and some that feel like she was taking a step out of that to name something. But in and of themselves, the titles constitute this interesting record of not just sayable/unsayable but her perspectives on different people.

LT: That makes me think of her photograph, *A young man in curlers at home on West 20th Street, N.Y.C. 1966*. We don't know that this is actually a young man in curlers. Who knows how this person would identify themselves on any given day?

MN: You can easily see how a politically correct history, trying to read our current terms in reverse, would find a lot of her titles disagreeable. But on the other hand, she didn't shy away from putting her finger on interesting nomenclatures or things that would make us think. I like that. Arbus's photograph *Transvestite with torn stocking, N.Y.C. 1966* is one, for example, and *Transvestite at her birthday party, N.Y.C. 1969* (p. 41).

LT: *Transvestite at her birthday party* is such a great photograph. It's a birthday party for two, I suppose, the photographer and her, and that could be all it takes to have a fabulous celebration. There's so much in the image that that kind of concision in her titles actually opens up the images.

MN: Absolutely. And this could easily be a Nan Goldin photograph in terms of the interior urban spaces and how people choose to lightly decorate them. Things are scotch-taped on the wall; the balloons are hilarious.

LT: To come back to cruelty and Arbus's own recognition of her particular kind of coolness or coldness: How do you think about the camera's role in that? She talks about how the camera is always kind of cool and that there's a cruelty in the photographic apparatus itself.

MN: Since most all of her subjects seem to be willing—and, in fact, she enjoyed the awkward pose as a kind of aesthetic—I think it would be really far-fetched to think about it as a cruelty of her practice. I mean, you could argue that taking pictures, or the camera itself, is inherently violent—people have often talked about that. But that doesn't seem like a very interesting line to me.

When people speak about the cruelty of Arbus's images, they are also pointing out that the "humanity" of the people she photographs doesn't read in the same way that most photography

aiming to isolate the so-called human qualities (like someone in emotional duress) reads. She's interested in a garish strangeness, where the psychosis of the "normal" is made visible. Sometimes I think that the impression of cruelty can come from the way some of the people in her pictures seem so wax-like. She's capturing people in these very off moments, where they might not seem like real people. It could be that the waxiness of us, or our own garishness, is hard to bear. Perhaps we look like that to each other sometimes, which is a little alarming and is also something inherent to images of people in pictures.

LT: And because it's a complex project, this also includes an affluent-looking trio at a gallery opening and an image like *Masked man at a ball, N.Y.C. 1967*, a presumably wealthy man in his milieu.

MN: People have written about Arbus in the context of the project of normalizing freakdom and de-normalizing the normal. I think you can't really take in the pictures individually, which is why it is so important to look at all of Arbus's work because her project puts all of these different characters together.

LT: Which photographs seem most iconic to you?

MN: *Boy with a straw hat waiting to march in a pro-war parade, N.Y.C. 1967* (p. 42) is one. And *Patriotic young man with a flag, N.Y.C. 1967* would be another. Right now, with Trumpism and the ghoulish rise of white supremacy at the level of the White House—these pictures reveal something about white American psychosis here, of imperialist war. These are things that, to the naked eye, can seem really unremarkable. But in her pictures, we can re-see them as psychotic. Because they are. This seems really pertinent these days.

LT: *Boy with a straw hat*, in comparison to some of the other images, is actually an image of loneliness in a certain way.

MN: I agree.

LT: He's completely alone, isolated, waiting for the parade. We don't know if the parade's going to show up. You feel as if

he might just be there all by himself on the street corner, waving his little flag.

MN: And his kind of apple pie innocence is contrasted against his "Bomb Hanoi" button. And it does seem like in these cases, she's focusing on youth, and she's really interested in the props that people have. Her subjects look like people struggling to find their way via props and things.

LT: The flag and the button, in some ways, speak more for the person. As viewers, we land on the face first, but then you're drawn to the details of their accoutrements.

MN: She's also such a great editor—selecting what to print from what she's shot, these "in-between" expressions. For instance, in *Patriotic young man*, he could be laughing, he could be about to vomit, or he could be about to smile—it's hard to say.

As I mentioned in *The Art of Cruelty*, there's not any truth about humanity that an artist reveals. Arbus gives us Arbus figures. Francis Bacon paints Bacon figures. It would be preposterous to imagine that art could liberate us from the idiosyncrasy of our eye—that's not what it does.

It is true that Susan Sontag is critical of Arbus for this: her photographs do have a sameness, and clearly she is attracted to particular expressions or off-kilterness. I can understand why people sometimes feel that it's a bit *Little Shop of Horrors*. Everyone looks freakish in Arbus's work, which seems universalizing. She takes her vision and puts it on everybody: Why is *Mexican dwarf in his hotel room in N.Y.C. 1970* any freakier than the *Masked man at a ball*?

LT: You mentioned your feeling of pleasure when looking at Arbus's work—could you elaborate on that sense of pleasure?

MN: Many people may have the opposite reaction of my feelings about the freaks, but I feel a lot of recognition with many of the people that she's photographing. Depending on your point of view, a lot of the people in her pictures seem to have a kind of knowingness in their eyes, as if to say: "Yeah, I'll let you look at

me." I don't actually feel any resentment from any of them. I sense there's a familial feeling, and I find this pleasurable in a lot of her work. For instance, with the interracial couple, *A young man and his pregnant wife in Washington Square Park, N.Y.C. 1965* (p. 43). I really love that picture. And in looking at it, I feel like I can't know what they know. But there's something about it . . . They—

LT: I think they know they look good!

MN: I think they know they look *really* good. And the struggle is palpable just by indicating that she is pregnant, which is not visible to the naked eye. And this is a place where instead of naming their nationalities or ethnicities, she's just saying; *A young man and his pregnant wife*. So there's a lot of things that she was drawing a circle around while giving them what they are, which is the dignity of a man and his wife who is pregnant. But when I look at the picture I see: "I've got you guys." And you feel the burden of the different weights that they're carrying, but they're also just going through their day.

The couple thing ostensibly breaks this idea of the solo, private individual. But the couples are also shown as a new version of a private unit. And I think that's why they seem really private—not private as if I'm intruding on their space, but in these pictures it's as if there's something knowing between them that we don't know. She likes highlighting sameness and difference. *Identical twins, Roselle, N.J. 1967* and *Two girls in matching bathing suits, Coney Island, N.Y. 1967* are the most obvious ones that are interested in this: how different these people are that nonetheless look the same. But there's a clunkiness to how people get together in these pictures. Like *The King and Queen of a Senior Citizens Dance, N.Y.C. 1970*. I can't help but think: How did these people find each other? How do we get together? Did they stay together? What happened?

In looking at these pictures I feel somebody touching all these different people. Not in a cheesy way, as in: "Can I celebrate you? I think you're part of the human family." Not like that. It's more:

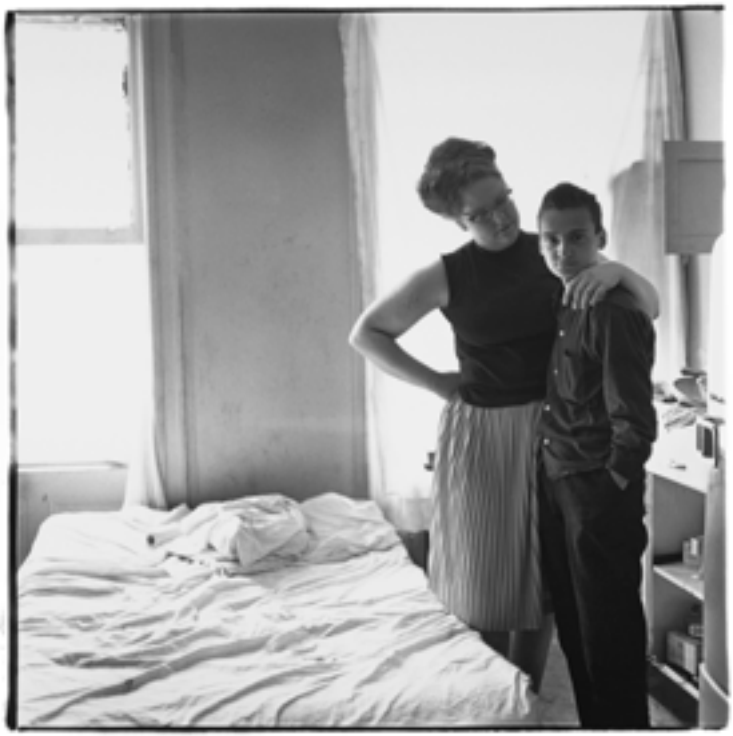
"We're all here and I see you." It's who you want to spend your time with. These are the people that Arbus wanted to spend her time with. Sontag can mock it as being about the thrill Arbus got from going out to photograph; but ultimately, who do you choose to spend your days with? And I feel like these are the people that Arbus wanted to be around and become enmeshed with.

So in some sense you have this universalizing project where everyone's self-performance is at stake. But I think she also did something a little bit different, which is that in a lot of the pictures of the transvestites and the nudists, they're not actually dolled up. They're not on stage or in performative settings; a lot of them are at home.

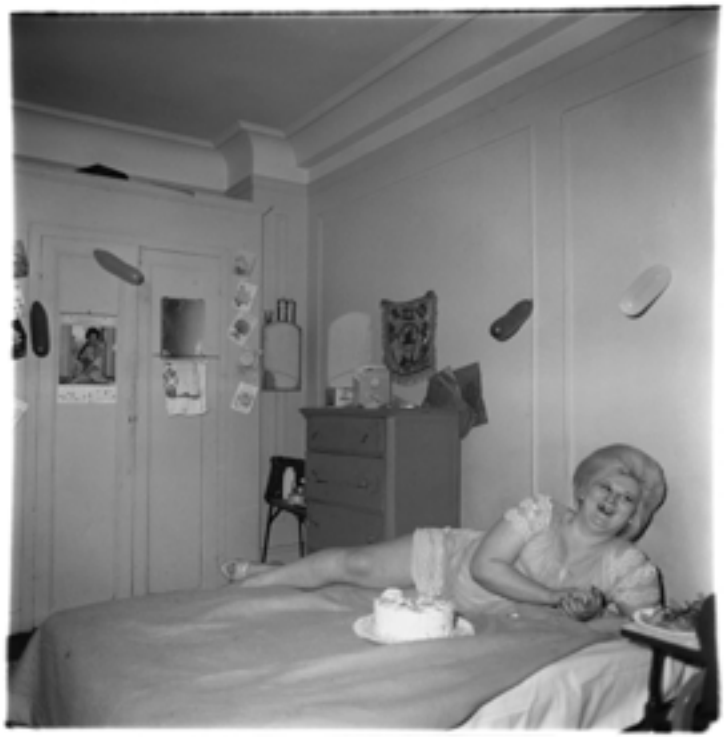
Arbus's subjects know things that she doesn't know, and they're often looking at her specifically from their worlds, as if to say: "Yeah, we're an interracial couple in the '60s in the park. Here's how it is to be us. You don't know, but here we are." Or: "Here we are—we're these three midgets in a home. And we know how it feels to be us." The photographs don't seem to puncture those spaces as much as they have this kind of admiring distance from them.

Everyone keeps trying to pin down Arbus's work and lay claim to where its value lies. If someone says it repels humanity and they're simply shell-like pictures of garish people, somebody else will come along and insist that she is looking into the souls of people who were underrepresented. But I think it does all of those things at once, in a swirl. And most interestingly, I think it does look different at different times, and it will continue to look different at different times, and that's what's so fascinating about her work. For better or for worse, her focus on uneasy couplings, subcultures, gender-queer people, mental disabilities—I mean, if we look at the list of who and what will suffer under Trump's presidency, we're going to find all these folks. It's like we're still figuring out which American family we're talking to, or caring about, or representing; Arbus was on to that.

1. Diane Arbus, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph* (New York: Aperture and The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1972), 3.
2. Marion Magid, "Diane Arbus in New Documents," *Arts Magazine* (April 1967) in *Arbus, Friedlander, Winogrand: New Documents, 1967* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2017), 157.
3. Frank Gaynor, "Documentary Photos," *Newark News*, March 5, 1967, in ibid., 155.



Diane Arbus, *Two friends at home, N.Y.C. 1965*. Gelatin silver print,
20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm)



Diane Arbus, *Transvestite at her birthday party, N.Y.C. 1969*.
Gelatin silver print, 20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm)

Diane Arbus, *Boy with a straw hat waiting to march in a pro-war parade, N.Y.C. 1967*. Gelatin silver print, 20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm)

Diane Arbus, *A young man and his pregnant wife in Washington Square Park, N.Y.C. 1965*. Gelatin silver print, 20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm)

Goldin

Nan Goldin, *Nan after being battered*, 1984. Cibachrome print, 11 x 14 in. (27.9 x 35.6 cm)

LANKA TATTERSALL IN CONVERSATION WITH A.L. STEINER ON NAN GOLDIN

Lanka Tattersall: When you received the invitation to participate in this book and discuss the work of Nan Goldin, what were your thoughts about being invited?

A.L. Steiner: I was incredibly honored because, of course, Nan's work was ovarial in my development.

LT: Ovarial?

AS: Ovarial—as opposed to seminal—in my interest in photography itself, not necessarily as an artist, by any means, not the identity of an artist, but just being really interested in photography. *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*—in book form—was my first encounter with her work.

LT: Do you remember how you came across it?

AS: Yeah, I do. I was in a bookstore on St. Mark's Place while I was visiting New York in the '80s. I saw the book, and I immediately opened it because of the cover—it has a beckoning, emotive power, sexualized imagery and energy. I was mesmerized by the diaristic Manhattan-centric narrative. Did I ever tell you the weird story?

LT: Tell me the weird story.

AS: Layla [Childs, Steiner's partner in the 1990s and early 2000s] and I were wandering around the West Village in the '90s, and Nan was walking down the street. She stopped and said, "Hey, you guys are so great," cruising us.

LT: I'm sure she was thinking: look as this gorgeous young couple in love.

AS: We were totally in that early stage! She said, "Do you want to come upstairs?" And of course I knew who she was, but Layla said, "Wait . . ." And I was like, "It's Nan Goldin." So we went up and hung out, and she was really fun and sweet. She wanted to watch *Pretty Baby*.

LT: So, you went upstairs, and she asked if you want to watch *Pretty Baby*?

AS: Well, no. She was writing a piece for some publication and she said, "I've got to write this thing, maybe we should watch. . ." We hung out with her, she eventually fell asleep, and we quietly left. She'd snapped a couple of pictures of us, never to be seen. One day years later Nan's assistant Nicolas Pages called and said, "I found them!" We ran over to the Bowery, but it was two other lesbians [*laughter*].

In 1998, she chose me for an exhibition called *The Choice* at Exit Art in New York, where an established artist selected a younger artist to show. She was a super supportive figure, a person that I could never have imagined helping me. It was luck, kismet, and an incredible privilege. But I was confused because at that point I wasn't an exhibiting visual artist.

LT: Did that experience change the way you thought about the possibility of being an artist?

AS: That kind of support was a life-changing thing. It influenced me—in terms of thinking about the archive, and collage, and this transitional type of interpersonal experience. I was the photo editor for *Out Magazine*. After we'd met on the street, I contacted her to shoot for the magazine, among other people I really admired.

LT: How did you understand those distinctions between photography for *Out* and fine art photography?

AS: Those lines were blurring in the '90s. Nan and a lot of other artists were shooting for publications, commercial media, and corporate consumer entities. There weren't concrete distinctions any longer. Worlds began to collide more and more as image culture became dominant and expansive.

After Nan included me in *The Choice*, she came to my first solo show, *sensorymemory*, in 2000.

LT: What did you mean by "sensory" in that title?

AS: The lure—you know, the hook. That's how it's framed,

commercially. You've got to have a hook, an understanding of manipulation. How are you going to get people to look at the work? How do you lure them in?

LT: To come back to *The Ballad*, what you're saying connects to the narrative aspect of the work's slide show format. Goldin is especially good at the lure, the hook.

AS: She was able to talk about pop culture and allowed her work to be connected to the outside world in ways that other forms of photography didn't. Like the music in her work—it's central, it's not peripheral. It's integrated into her process, rhythmic. It helps her think and understand, to feel. And yet the medium of photography is so conservative—people still don't do what she did. You'd think a lot of people would have at this point.

LT: How would you define photography? What is it? Does it have any limits?

AS: "Photography" is a catchall term for the image world we live in. Photographs, pictures, images. We relate to people as picture profiles without knowing them. Photography is this bridge—visual culture is our primary relationship. Image media, mediation.

When Nan was making these images and slide shows it was a time of both personal discovery and crisis for her, as well as the HIV/AIDS epidemic that was unraveling and ravaging people's lives and decimating a generation that I felt very connected to. *The Ballad* was made during a time when photography was more specialized. Our engagement—our understanding of the image world—the ecology of the image world, as Susan Sontag put it, was not yet fully consuming in the ways it is now, as humans produce billions of images daily.

When my work has been compared to hers, I see the format similarities, of course, and the content similarities in some ways, because we're both queer-identified. We think about marginalization and empathic response, and we think about heteronormative culture.

LT: What I see as a common thread between your work and her work is this idea of a profound intimacy. But Goldin seems to be drawn to the drama of the devastating image. She really knows that she's crafting a narrative experience that is intended to take you through highs and lows, whereas I think the intimacy in your work is about offering forms of possibility and making images of a world in which we might want to live, while still being critical.

AS: I would say that I shoot from the same place as Goldin, utilizing intimacy, but then, I don't believe that people accrue chronically diaristic knowledge about my life from my installations. What do we do or say about this question of an artist being present and vulnerable in their own work? I think of Nan's self-portraiture, some of the most iconic pictures of her, like the one after she'd been beaten [*Nan after being battered* (1984) (p. 46)]. What do we make of that position as an artist? Not the simplicity of seeing a photo of Nan with black eyes, but what I mean is, the question: "What do we do with this?" The larger question of how we represent the human condition—our pain, our sense of responsibility within this cacophonous image world. That question is compelling and is connected to a lot of mythologies about the "artist," as an identity, that have always fascinated me.

LT: Right, Nan has described that photograph as the "central image" of *The Ballad*.[1] By strongly foregrounding her own pain, the relationship between her biography—the mythologies around her—and her position, or responsibility, as an artist in society have become deeply entangled.

AS: Art is answering questions regarding responsibility in different ways. For example, I've been interested in Ian Svenonius's recent book *Censorship Now!!*, which is about the imperialist violence of American culture and its worldwide spread of violence and environmental destruction via "freedom of expression": we're free to express ourselves, so we don't *necessarily* or *inherently* have responsibility. Thus, Nan's responsibility is to offer her story and

allow viewers, friends, strangers, critics, arts administrators, and scholars to respond to that, as long as it's culturally relevant.

LT: That's the whole affirmative culture paradox/problem. Is there a way to actually get outside? Is there any form of culture that doesn't actually just affirm hegemonic power?

AS: No, to put it succinctly.

LT: Even as Nan was documenting the so-called demimonde, or the underworld, as Hilton Als has discussed in his writing on *The Ballad*, there are all kinds of questions about class that are underscored in the work. Who are the privileged that can go on massive, intoxicated benders and then have someone to pick them up off the floor?

AS: Yes, class privilege, race privilege, the complications of what we call "shooting" or "taking" pictures. This language is colonizing and weaponizing. Nan's photographs of drag queen culture have compelled some of the performers to express their dismay or criticize the worldwide dissemination of that work. Others are agreeable or celebratory of it. In what ways do all of the players, Nan included, and sociocultural struggles benefit from the use of photography as a platform? This isn't just a documentation of "Nan's life," they are documents of people. I'm interested in pictures of people who also made their own photographic work, for instance, this picture of the artist Greer Lankton [*Greer and Robert on the bed, New York City* (1982) (p. 56)].

LT: Right, there's a way in which these photographs capture people's lives with intimacy, but in a way that they may or may not have wanted to be represented, which can appear perhaps devastating and strung out, or tough, or tragic. For some of us, our understanding of this image of Greer has changed since the 2014 Participant Inc. exhibition [a landmark retrospective of her work in New York] now that we know more about her life and her work. She has become a hero for us.

AS: A *shero*.

LT: A *shero*!

AS: Yeah. I think that's why I'm interested in this kind of amalgamation or configuration of things that define each other, rather than a singular image holding so much meaning.

LT: Goldin also talks about how the idea of not forgetting is at the heart of her work. She's motivated by the memories of her sister, who committed suicide when Nan was eleven. In her introduction to *The Ballad*, she writes, "I don't really remember my sister. . . I don't ever want to lose the real memory of anyone again."[2] Her archive is intensely personal and is about an individual wanting to preserve her specific experience. But I think there's something so specific and exacting about her project that it opens up and becomes universal.

AS: I think it's so interesting when she says something like, "I can't remember my sister's voice. You know, I can't. I wish I could." It's as if she's saying, if I had focused more on looking and observing, documenting and turning that into feeling and emotion, then I would've had a deeper connection. At the same time, there's also the impulse to purposely repress certain painful memories, like letting go of something and not remembering, of wanting to forget. The contemporary is so slippery. There is a difference between seeing *The Ballad* in clubs as a slide show, smoking and drinking, or seeing it in a museum. And now it's rarefied—but continually alive, an archive. Nan seems to not want it to be a mausoleum piece.

LT: Right. She's continually reconfiguring it, still to this day.

AS: But at a certain point, in a way it did die in the context of how it was birthed. It is of a time. And it's reborn in the museum, in this kind of cultural-institutional context, which I consider to be a reflection of the imperialist, hegemonic nation-state. That's what the cultural institution is. A bar isn't that.

LT: What you're saying makes me think of the photograph *"Variety" booth, New York City* (1983) (p. 57), which is a picture taken on the set of the film *Variety*, about a woman who sells

tickets to porn films in Times Square. That version of Times Square doesn't exist anymore; it's a dream image of a place that no longer exists.

AS: Yeah, there's that dangerous sense of nostalgia, wanton pictures that compel a longing for the past.

LT: When admission was only two dollars and who knows who you'd bump up against.

AS: I remember seeing that picture and thinking that unlike so many of Nan's other pictures, this person has a job at a peep show and is at once a collaborator and a subject, a participant and an observer in their work day.

LT: I'm curious to know your thoughts on Nan's use of the slide show format.

AS: I think the slide show provided an amazing transitional format, that wasn't film or video, and activated the photographs in an interstitial way.

LT: And they were initially meant to be shown in semi-public spaces.

AS: Right, the slide show was domestic. I remember looking at peoples' travel slide shows that way at home. She didn't invent the format, but she applied it, without rules. The slide show was supposed to be for travel or pedagogical purposes, not commonly used for showing pictures of your community partying, or people having sex.

[Turning to the photograph *Picnic on the Esplanade, Boston* (1973) (cover)]

LT: I love this photograph.

AS: I know, me too.

LT: It just seems so utopian, these exuberant, ambiguously-gendered people on an esplanade in Boston of all places, eating cake and enjoying each other's company. Boston looks like Paris in this picture.

AS: Boston never felt so good.

LT: So glamorous. This brings us back to what you were saying

about commercial photography. Nan's photographs can be glamorous. What do we do with that idea? I think your work can also be glamorous.

AS: How would you define that?

LT: I was going to ask you the same question. If I had to hazard a working definition of glamour in both of your bodies of work, it is that it presents a vision of a world that, for many people, lies outside of accessibility or even total intelligibility. The friends you photograph often seem to be performing in a rarified space that provides a kind of pleasure or access to an emotional state, even if it's pain, that is outside of the scope of the everyday or the ordinary. There is the sense of something or someone rare, which brings us back to conversations about access and privilege, but also self-fashioning.

AS: Well, to be the focus of a photographer's attention is something a lot of people want. I think the people that are in my life intimately tend to be exhibitionists, or performative. Barbara Ess said something interesting a long time ago that I haven't forgotten. We were having a really nice conversation, talking about each other's work, and she said, "I feel like your portraits are very much about the ecstatic."

LT: Speaking of the ecstatic, I think one thing you and Goldin share is a passionate use of color. I think of Nan as also someone who is clearly in love with color, like that stunning red in *Kim and Mark in the red car, Newton, Mass*. (1978) (p. 58).

AS: She's obsessed with light and color. Like William Eggleston's dye transfer prints, there's the rich tapestry of being able to paint, but not painting, and being able to capture something that feels akin to the pleasure of playing inside of color and light. Using the camera to do it is an addictive trap, which produces beautiful results.

LT: Why is it a trap?

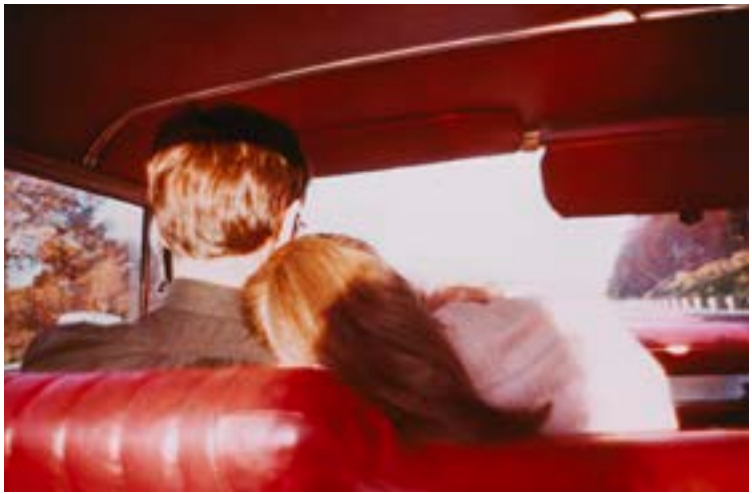
AS: Iconographic image culture constantly duplicates, replicates, mediates the thing that you're experiencing. Jean Baudrillard called it hyperreality; we are fascinated by our own *seeing*. We're fascinated by looking, the flickering or the screen . . . We're hypnotized by capturing things we deem beautiful or sublime. That's the terrible trap: the wondrous disconnect of this simulacra, the ubiquitous embrace of mediated enchantment. Photographs are efficient in being sufficient.

The magic of the darkroom—the transition from painting, to diorama, to photography—is a historical marker for our obsession with the self, the portrait, and the expression of the "self." I'm really interested in the tension between visible and invisible, and photography relies heavily on the visible. Maybe that's a better word for realism: visibility.

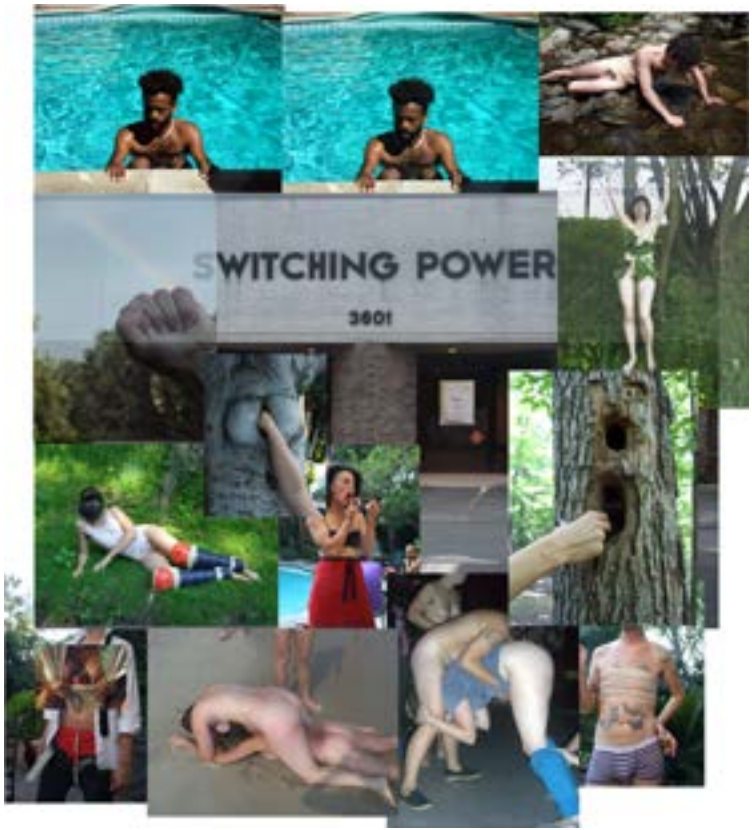
1. Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (New York: Aperture, 2012), 146.
2. Ibid., 9.

Nan Goldin, *Greer and Robert on the bed, New York City*, 1982.
Cibachrome print, 10 ¾ x 14 in. (27.3 x 35.6 cm)

Nan Goldin, *"Variety" booth, New York City*, 1983.
Cibachrome print, 14 x 10 ¾ in. (35.6 x 27.3 cm)



Nan Goldin, *Kim and Mark in the red car, Newton, Mass.*, 1978.
Cibachrome print, 11 x 14 in. (27.9 x 35.6 cm)



A.L. Steiner, *Positive Reinforcement* (sketch), 2009. Digital files

CONTRIBUTORS

Hilton Als has been a staff writer at *The New Yorker* since 1996, a theater critic since 2002, and chief theater critic since 2013. His first book, *The Women* (1996), is a meditation on gender, race, and personal identity. His most recent book, *White Girls* (2013), discusses various narratives around race and gender and was nominated for a 2013 National Book Critics Circle Award in criticism. In 2017, Als received the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism. His work has appeared in *The Nation*, *The Believer*, and *The New York Review of Books*. He lives in New York City, where he also serves as professor in the Columbia University MFA Writing Program.

Maggie Nelson is the author of nine books of poetry and prose; her nonfiction titles include *The Argonauts* (2015), a *New York Times* bestseller; *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (2011); *Bluets* (2009); *The Red Parts: Auto-biography of a Trial* (2007, reissued in 2016); and *Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions* (2007). Her poetry titles include *Something Bright, Then Holes* (2007) and *Jane: A Murder* (2005). She has been the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in Nonfiction, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Poetry, an Arts Writers Fellowship from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and a MacArthur Fellowship. She holds a PhD in English literature from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and is currently a Professor of English at the University of Southern California.

A.L. Steiner utilizes constructions of photography, video, collage, curation, performance, writing pedagogy, and installation as seductive tropes channeled through the sensibility of an ecofeminist androgyne. Steiner is co-curator of Ridykeulous, cofounder of Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.), a collective member of Chicks on Speed, and she collaborates with numerous writers, performers, designers, activists, and artists. Her work is in permanent collections, such as the Brooklyn Museum, the Marieluise Hessel Collection of Contemporary Art, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the Hammer Museum, and The Museum of Modern Art, New York. She is on the faculty at Yale University's School of Art and has recently received awards from the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, the American Academy in Berlin, and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts. She stands in opposition to omnicide, annihilation, and destruction in the capitalocene.

Lanka Tattersall is Assistant Curator at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, where she is currently organizing a major survey exhibition of the work of Berlin and Seoul-based artist Haegue Yang, and the first solo museum exhibition of the work of artist Cameron Rowland. Prior to joining MOCA, Tattersall was Curatorial Assistant at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, where she was a member of the curatorial team for *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963–2010*. Her recent essays include contributions to the publications *Kerstin Brätsch: Innovation* (2017), *Kerry James Marshall: Mastry* (2016), *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963–2010* (2014), and *Inventing Abstraction 1910–1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art* (2012).

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Published on the occasion of the exhibition
Real Worlds: Brassaï, Arbus, Goldin
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
March 4, 2018–September 3, 2018

Curator: Lanka Tattersall
Curatorial Associate: Rebecca Matalon

MOCA

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Los Angeles, CA 90012
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www.moca.org

Exhibitions at MOCA are supported by the MOCA Fund for Exhibitions with lead annual support provided by Sydney Holland, founder of the Sydney D. Holland Foundation. Generous funding is also provided by Delta Air Lines, and Jerri and Dr. Steven Nagelberg.

In-kind media support is provided by KCRW 89.9 FM and KCETLink.

Design: Purtill Family Business
Editorial: Donna Wingate and Marc Joseph Berg, Artist and Publisher Services, New York
Proofreading: Beth Marino
Printing: Typecraft, Pasadena

Photo credits: Pages 14, 24–27: courtesy The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation Photography Collection. © ESTATE BRASSAÏ – RMN-Grand Palais; pages 30, 40–43: courtesy The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation Photography Collection. © The Estate of Diane Arbus; cover, pages 46, 56–58: courtesy The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Susan Bay-Nimoy and Leonard Nimoy Family Foundation. © Nan Goldin, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery; page 59: courtesy the artist. © A.L. Steiner

ISBN: 978-0-914357-03-2

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