

TOGETHER AS KIDS
Dan Colen, Ryan McGinley and Dash Snow
in New York

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the art and friendship of Dan Colen, Ryan McGinley and Dash Snow, who worked in different mediums but made their interconnected lives the subject of their art. Together these artists became synonymous with the downtown art scene in New York that developed after 9/11. As the first extensive study of these artists, this thesis aims to situate their practices both art historically and within the legacies of the downtown. Although not a work of biography, this thesis uses biography to consider how selfhood can be performed both privately and in public in ways that prefigure many of the current debates regarding social media. This approach relies on interviews and anecdote, published profiles and photoshoots. Gossip and storytelling therefore serve as both research material and a point of inquiry for thinking about how histories are encoded and spread. Finally, this thesis explores the shifting landscape of New York City, its institutions and its downtown art scene to think about how narratives of the city affect the different ways in which these artists have been framed and considered.

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Figure 100: Screenshots from Ryan McGinley's Instagram account @RyanMcGinleyStudios, July 27, 2017. Ryan McGinley Studio.

Reproduced from @RyanMcGinleyStudios, <https://www.instagram.com/ryanmccginleystudios/?hl=en> (accessed on December 10, 2018).

Figure 101: Screenshots from Ryan McGinley's Instagram account @RyanMcGinleyStudios, July 13, 2016. Ryan McGinley Studio.

Reproduced from @RyanMcGinleyStudios, <https://www.instagram.com/ryanmccginleystudios/?hl=en> (accessed on December 10, 2018).

Figure 102: Screenshots from Ryan McGinley's Instagram account @RyanMcGinleyStudios, July 27, 2016. Ryan McGinley Studio. Reproduced from @RyanMcGinleyStudios, <https://www.instagram.com/ryanmcginleystudios/?hl=en> (accessed on December 10, 2018).

Figure 103 Screenshot from Ryan McGinley's Instagram account @RyanMcGinleyStudios, July 13, 2016. Ryan McGinley Studio. Reproduced from @RyanMcGinleyStudios, <https://www.instagram.com/ryanmcginleystudios/?hl=en> (accessed on December 10, 2018).

Figure 104: Screenshot from Ryan McGinley's Instagram account @RyanMcGinleyStudios, July 13, 2015. Ryan McGinley. Reproduced from @RyanMcGinleyStudios, <https://www.instagram.com/ryanmcginleystudios/?hl=en> (accessed on December 10, 2018).

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Reproduced from *Harper's Magazine*, <https://harpers.org/blog/2018/06/bathers-justine-kurland/> (accessed on December 1, 2018).

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Reproduced from *GQ*, <https://www.gq.com/story/brad-pitt-gq-style-cover-story> (accessed on December 2, 2018).

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Reproduced from The Brant Foundation Art Study Center, <https://brantfoundation.org/exhibitions/dan-colen-help/> (accessed on December 12, 2018).

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Reproduced from The Brant Foundation Art Study Center, <https://brantfoundation.org/exhibitions/dan-colen-help/> (accessed on December 12, 2018).

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Reproduced from The Brant Foundation Art Study Center, <https://brantfoundation.org/exhibitions/freeze-means-run/> (accessed on January 1, 2019).

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Reproduced from The Whitney Museum of American Art Online Collection, <http://collection.whitney.org/object/18196> (accessed on December 10, 2018).

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Reproduced from The Brant Foundation Art Study Center, <https://brantfoundation.org/exhibitions/freeze-means-run/> (accessed on December 10, 2018).

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DECLARATION

I hereby confirm that all the work in this thesis is the author's own and has not been submitted at any other institution or published anywhere else. All sources are acknowledged as references.

INTRODUCTION

In the March 2016 issue of *Text zur Kunst*, critic David Rimanelli wrote what was ostensibly a review of the exhibition *Freeze Means Run* at The Brant Foundation Art Study Center. Spanning his brief career, *Freeze Means Run* was the first retrospective of work by Dashiell (Dash) Snow (1981-2009) in the United States in almost a decade; the show opened more than six years after his death. The works exhibited represented the range of mediums that Snow used: snapshot photography, collage, video and sculpture. Snow's prolific but abbreviated career is widely-known but his art remains poorly collected, and The Brant exhibition presented a large platform to showcase his work, much of which had never been exhibited before. The Brant Foundation, located in Greenwich, CT, was established by Peter Brant, the publishing magnate whose company, Brant Publications Inc., owns *Interview* and *Art in America*. The foundation's program pulls from Brant's own interests, which skew heavily towards Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and the artists who operate within a contemporary downtown aesthetic. The exhibitions are held in an attractive old barn down the road from Brant's own estate, a far cry from New York's downtown neighbourhoods where the works were created.¹

In the editor's introduction to the review, Rimanelli is quoted as saying "I would kill you a 1000 times just to have Dash back for one night," and he began the text by establishing his relationship with Snow's art: "Why do we, like miserable, arty beggars of the spirit, have to engage in special pleading for Dash Snow? Who cares about why we—or why I, David Rimanelli, who knew him

¹ In March 2019, the Brant opened a second space in a former substation in the East Village that Walter de Maria used as his studio until his death in 2003. The inaugural exhibition was a solo presentation of works by Basquiat.

very well and who knows his work very well—feel the need to convince people?”² Rimanelli claims that, for anyone willing to sit and engage, “the art speaks for itself,” but in the following five paragraphs, he nonetheless attempts to persuade readers that yes, this work is valuable and worthy.³ He begins by pronouncing criticism of Snow’s work as tinged with the “bile of voyeurism.”⁴ As Snow often made his life and community the subject of his art, in many ways, voyeurism is unavoidable; the contention here is that critics are unable to comprehend how Snow rebelled against the “codes of neoliberal creative professionalism.”⁵ The implication being that critics, curators, buyers and institutions have failed to grasp Snow’s work and failed to take it seriously. Rimanelli then contrasts Snow’s version of ‘badness’ with that of filmmaker Hito Steyerl, to suggest that his deployment of violence was authentic whereas hers is merely a “pictorial strategy.”⁶ Rimanelli attempts to reinforce this assertion by recounting Snow’s role in the racially diverse and LGBTQ-friendly graffiti crew IRAK as proof of a personal and thus authentic involvement with the people he photographed.

In the last third of the text, Rimanelli introduces *Freeze Meets Run*, which he characterized as a “gracious, thoughtful presentation.”⁷ Longer is spent classifying and appraising reactions to the exhibition, which he divided into two categories:

On the one hand, certain parties (be they the fan base or the self-declared Reasonable and Just), feeling Snow’s work to be so ‘of the streets’, and raw and rough, etc., *ad nauseam*, that it is somehow wrong to display it in Greenwich—particularly at the public, non-profit exhibition space of a noted collector. To that species of opinionizing, I ask: Was it *wrong* that the Whitney had a Keith Haring retrospective in 1997? On the other hand,

² David Rimanelli, “Nobody Ever Did What We Did,” *Texte zur Kunst*, vol. 101 (March 2016), <https://www.textezurkunst.de/101/nobody-ever-did-what-we-did/#id1>.

³ IBID.

⁴ IBID.

⁵ IBID.

⁶ IBID.

⁷ IBID.

there are those who believe this show in Greenwich somehow “proves” that Snow is a fraud, in death as well as life.⁸

It is somewhat misleading to equate The Brant with the Whitney Museum of American Art, although both were founded by wealthy art collectors. Nevertheless, in two not-so-short sentences, Rimanelli has summarized some of the major questions that envelop Snow’s practice: how does the art relate to the artist’s life, and how have both been institutionalized? Or, as he poses just a few sentences later, who exactly has authority over this art, its legacy and its presentation? Rimanelli titled this review “Nobody Ever Did What We Did” after one of Snow’s collages in which the six words hover over a brown paper bag overflowing with American staples: a flag, a television, a machine gun, a bottle of whisky (fig. 1). Rimanelli’s appropriation, however, also professes his emotional involvement through the inclusive ‘we’. The pronoun channels a collective brashness that manifests almost as self-protection, perhaps owing to the intimacy of friendship. The ‘we’ implies an investment in the outcome and makes his personal stakes public.

In response to Rimanelli’s impassioned defence, curator Karen Archey penned her own at times caustic reply in *e-flux conversations*. Broadly, Archey takes issue with Rimanelli’s framing of authenticity, and she immediately zeros in on The Brant, which, she argued, appeals to a monied crowd thrilled by the idea of edgy art: “They want to buy it and hang it on their office wall to remember the good old days when they didn’t have to wear a tie and have a soul-crushing job pushing money around.”⁹ For Archey, the stakes of Snow’s practice remain unclear; as an heir of the de Menils, one of the United States’ greatest art collecting families, what exactly was he

⁸ IBID.

⁹ Karen Archey, “David Rimanelli’s defense of Dash Snow a feat of cognitive dissonance,” *e-flux conversations*, March 2, 2016, <http://conversations.e-flux.com/t/david-rimanellis-defense-of-dash-snow-a-feat-of-cognitive-dissonance/3325>. But the art also needs these collectors to be seen as subversive, and without these collectors, the images have no thrust.

rebellious against? Likewise, she finds the comparison between Snow and Steyerl to be both “strange” and false as their practices, interests and backgrounds are so dissimilar as to almost be incomparable.¹⁰ Archey unpicked Rimanelli’s understanding of authenticity as one predicated upon a personal connection: “To suggest that an artist somehow maintains a bourgeois critical distance for not having a personal relationship with her subjects is a red herring thrown out to obscure the absence of any real justification for extolling this artist’s work other than that he’s Rimanelli’s friend.”¹¹

On balance, Archey finds any attempt at a redemptive narrative to be undeserved. That said, she is not advocating for a blanket rejection of Snow’s art and acknowledges that he may have been “an important figure in the post-9/11 New York art world and reportedly a great friend.”¹² But the role of friendship is key to her suspicions, the implication being that Rimanelli’s backing comes from sentiment and not a methodical study. Despite complaining about the lack of serious engagement with Snow’s art, Rimanelli fails to do much looking himself. “Nobody Ever Did What We Did” is a cursory contemplation that, without formal analysis or in-depth context, reads like a prickly plea.

The positions taken by both Archey and Rimanelli are indicative of the questions that have plagued Snow’s career almost from the get-go. Was the art mediocre or superb, tragically overlooked or

¹⁰ IBID.

¹¹ IBID.

¹² IBID.

smartly forgotten, singular or cliched? Ultimately, both arguments come down to judgments of worth, be that aesthetic, historical and financial: whether this art practice mattered and continues to resonate. Although the crux of her rebuttal concerns Snow, Archey also briefly mentioned artists Dan Colen (b. 1979) and Ryan McGinley (b. 1977), two of Snow's friends and fellow "purveyors" of the same bad boy aesthetics.¹³ Both Colen and McGinley were born in New Jersey and became friends in high school through skateboarding. One of McGinley's first memories of Colen is talking about art in the parking lot behind a poolhall.¹⁴ When McGinley moved to New York to attend Parsons the New School of Design, in Providence, RI, he met Snow through friends of friends.¹⁵ At that point, Colen was enrolled at the Rhode Island School of Design and he spent all his weekends and summers in the city; the three developed a fast and inseparable friendship which has become the lens through which their practices are most often discussed. Colen, McGinley and Snow quickly became synonymous with the art scene emerging in downtown New York after 9/11. Theirs was a tightknit community steeped in the city's artistic past that bonded together in the face of drastic changes to the urban fabric. These artists mined both their physical environment and social networks to produce an art of and about their lives.

On paper, there was little overlap between their developing practices, but as friends, they were united by their art and by the wildness of being young, the latter a theme they probed and a lifestyle they enacted in distinctive ways. As the bulk of this thesis attends to these intersections and points of frustration amongst their careers, I am hesitant to present an exhaustive survey here, but I will sketch in a concise summary of the central elements of their work: Colen was and remains

¹³ IBID.

¹⁴ Ryan McGinley, "Dan Colen," *Interview*, August 17, 2010, <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/dan-colen/#>.

¹⁵ Ryan McGinley, "Remembering Dash Snow, July 14, 2009," *Vice*, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/4w4v3n/remembering-dash-snow-980-v16n8.

interested in the histories contained within the artist's mark, which he explores predominantly through painting and, more recently, sculpture.¹⁶ McGinley is a photographer, and over the course of his career, which now encompasses a successful commercial practice, the theme of bodies has remained at the fore in his photographs. Finally, as mentioned above, Snow wholeheartedly embraced a variety of materials but is most well-known for his Polaroids. All three are often recognised as artists whose art is held not by public institutions but rather in private collections; certainly, this is true of Snow, but Colen and McGinley both have works in major, mostly American museums including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among others. A primary goal here is to situate the roles that Colen, McGinley and Snow have played within the art world, and to understand how their practices came to be defined.

Many of the works discussed herein are premised on biography and this thesis endeavours to explore how these different lives resonate against one another. Any encounter with the biographical, requires a consideration of biography as both a framework and a subject. As an art historical methodology, it has fallen somewhat out of favour since the shift towards “depersonalization” gained traction in the 1960s and 1970s when the work was no longer seen as a surrogate for the artist.¹⁷ In part, this is due to influence of queer and feminist methodologies on

¹⁶ See Dan Colen's artist statements at both Lévy Gorvy and Gagosian galleries.

¹⁷ Charles G. Salas, introduction to *The Life & The Work: Art and Biography*, ed. by Charles G. Salas. (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2007), 7. For more, see Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” in *Image, Text*,

biographical writings which have an interest in how the self is constructed and performed.¹⁸ It is also a result of shifting understandings of the genre itself. As Paula R. Backscheider observed, the conversation around biographical writing has moved to consider not just the subject matter but also these texts literary merits and construction.¹⁹

My use of biography concerns identity, particularly in regard to its formation and the differentiation of one's public and private selves—and if such a distinction actually exists. Certainly, slippages between the two have only grown more pronounced since the period I examine. Biographical writing can impose an “artificial isolation” onto an individual who, in actuality, exists within a larger network of friends, colleagues, family members and acquaintances.²⁰ As Barbara Caine noted in her study of the genre, “Biographies of groups, of friends and of networks also allow for the sustained analysis of how people are linked to each other and of the importance of the changing nature of those links over time.”²¹ Group biographies, like this thesis, make the connections between people, be they emotional, physical or intellectual, their primary subject.²² In doing so, they reveal the interdependency of communities and the ways in which people construct themselves in response.²³ Caine writes, “For while the choice of roles and representations that a person makes clearly reflects something of her personality, both the need for particular forms of self-representation and the range of available possibilities is determined by a

Music (London: Fontana, 1977): 142-147, and Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *In Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977): 124-127.

¹⁸ For more, see Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Caine argues that questions of self-presentation were central to biographies of women because these accounts often address gender and its many signifiers.

¹⁹ For more, see Paula R. Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 233-235.

²⁰ Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

²¹ Caine, *Biography and History*, 61.

²² *IBID.*

²³ Caine, 98.

particular society and period of time” and this thesis hopes to locate Colen, McGinley and Snow within such a web, understanding that these representations are often evolving forms.²⁴

The question of how to author a private self in relation to a public identity is one that I return to throughout this thesis and is a point of interrogation to which feminist scholars have repeatedly attended. I consider myself to be a feminist art historian, even though I have chosen to write about men. Canonical art history is a profoundly masculine subject and thinking about feminist texts to write explicitly about men feels risky, but to ignore my own politics seems worse. In the course of this research, I have found myself reading texts invested in (re)positioning the female artist, and many of the methodological problems resonate, especially as art history about women often focuses on the relationship between the artwork and the artist’s life; as Kristen Frederickson asks, why do “art historians often relate the significance of art made by women to events in those women’s personal lives?”²⁵ Consider, for example, Anne Wagner’s inquiry into the link between Eva Hesse’s biography and her art—and how scholars take this link for granted: “But knowing her means knowing a version of her.”²⁶ This assumption and how it develops is central to my thesis, which presents a focused look at three men for whom the interpretation of their art has been overwhelmingly shaped by their lives, and whose presentations of biography are often taken as truth.

²⁴ Caine, 102.

²⁵ Introduction to *Singular Women: Writing the Artist*, eds. Kristen Frederickson and Sarah E. Webb. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 13. This is not a claim only applicable to women, and anyone who isn’t a white man is vulnerable to this approach, for example, black artists whose works are discussed in terms of a supposed inherent blackness.

²⁶ Anne Wagner, *Three Lives (Three Women): Modernism and The Art of Hesse, Krasner and O’Keefe*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 225.

My approach to biography is indebted to Janet Malcolm's *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*, which itself operates as a meta-biography. Using published accounts, critical reactions, and interviews with their authors, Malcolm reflects upon the afterlife and the retrospective (re)authoring of Sylvia Plath's life. In all these narratives, Plath herself hardly ever speaks, and excluding a few diary entries and poems, her voice is noticeably absent from the many texts. But by looking to those who work on Plath and not to Plath herself, Malcolm discerns how a biography truly comes into being. She writes, "But, of course, as everyone knows who has ever heard a piece of gossip, we do not 'own' the facts of our lives at all. This ownership passes out of our hands at birth, at the moment we are first observed."²⁷ In a similar sense, I too am doing the same. Because of his death, Snow is unable to speak for himself in my thesis, and I have looked to his friends and to his former partner Jade Berreau, who oversees the Dash Snow Archive, as well as to journalists, critics and gallerists, to piece together an understanding that will never be a complete account. And by doing so, I am adding to these accounts as well, further proving just how changeable and erratic biography can be.

The first article I read about Colen, Snow and McGinley was journalist Ariel Levy's "Chasing Dash Snow" for *New York* magazine. Published in 2007, this story remains one of the top search results on Google even though it is over ten years old. It is also still, in many ways, one of the most substantive pieces of criticism written about these artists together. For a period, Levy followed the three around downtown New York and to Art Basel Miami, and the story catapulted them if not

²⁷ Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993, 1994), 8.

into celebrity then certainly out of obscurity. Their reaction to the article was not positive, and Snow's displeasure is particularly well-known. His general takeaway, as I understand it, was that Levy herself was too concerned with sensationalism and too obsessed with appearances; neither of which mattered to Snow. Fashion critic Glenn O'Brien remembered how "mortified" Snow was primarily because Levy wrote about his past and did not gloss over the fact that he came from old money.²⁸

For this thesis, I read and reread "Chasing Dash Snow", and ultimately, I found it neither flattering nor offensive. The story isn't lurid or even particularly critical, and Levy even cautions against cynicism, writing:

Because if you were to get caught up in the insanity and the creativity and the ridiculousness of their world, it could mean certain things. That maybe this city has still got it going on, antiseptic as it can seem. That the wild life is still out there for the taking, and the only difference between them and you is that they're taking it and making some out of it.²⁹

It may not be in-depth analysis, but *New York* isn't an academic journal. True, it brought up the partying and the drugs, but at its worst the writing is sceptical and not nearly as gossipy as so many similarly likeminded exposés. In fact, "Chasing Dash Snow" is altogether earnest and even flattering. So much so that critic Jerry Saltz slammed Levy for fawning: "Inside, a 12-page spread gushed about how Ryan McGinley, Dash Snow, and Dan Colen are showing everywhere and making fistfuls of money; one of the trio is a drug-addled scion of an American fortune, another has an 'impressive penis.'"³⁰ Instead of contributing to the pre-existing debates about worth and

²⁸ Glenn O'Brien, "A Eulogy for Dash Snow," *purple*, July 17, 2009, <http://purple.fr/diary/a-eulogy-for-dash-snow-dash-snow-is-dead-the-great-dash/>.

²⁹ Ariel Levy, "Chasing Dash Snow," *New York*, November 25, 2007, <http://nymag.com/arts/art/profiles/26288/index3.html>.

³⁰ Levy, "Chasing Dash Snow."

reputation, “Chasing Dash Snow” asked its readers to consider what it takes to make something out of the aesthetics of a lifestyle, and why that process might be messy and hard to articulate.

What Levy does take time to illustrate, however, is why people hate these guys which, in large part, was a reaction to their behaviour. The article foregrounds the importance of biography to these artists, not only in how they were discussed but also how they chose to present their own lives and work; this remains the central problem to reading this art which this thesis will address.

Much of the ‘self-authoring’ that Snow, Colen and McGinley did consisted of interviews and profiles in magazines and newspapers, many in publications that operate at the nexus of art and fashion, such as *Vice*, *i-D*, *purple* as well as *New York*, which a friend once described as neighbourly, if your neighbour took party drugs that is. In part, a nascent career needs publicity in whatever form, but also these publications both add to and confirm the perception of everlasting youth and endless fun so often attributed to these artists; they reinforce the accusation that Colen, McGinley and Snow were not serious. The periodicals I quote from are often purposefully informal and strongly opinionated, while the newspapers, both dailies and weeklies, are somewhat more reserved. Still, all are beholden to expectations dictated by reputation and readership. In the case of *Texte zur Kunst* and *e-flux conversations*, for example, both journals target a literary and culturally hip audience interested in the discourses of contemporary culture. Yet these audiences are not entirely similar, and the subtle differences inform the final content and the ways in which a work, a life, are pitched and framed. Archey’s condemnation of elite collectors has more traction in the unapologetically left-leaning *e-flux conversations*. Rimanelli, by contrast, is much more deferential towards The Brant, perhaps influenced by his role as a contributing editor of *Artforum*,

a magazine whose advertising revenue is dependent upon the art market. Regardless, the language used becomes not only a part of the public record, but also a means of encoding history. Pulling from a diversity of publications has helped me to chart these artists' growing fame as well as how their identities evolved both symbiotically and antagonistically to published accounts. Using these accounts alongside these artists' own words, illuminates how Colen, McGinley and Snow saw themselves and were seen by their contemporaries.³¹

Every publication has its own set of motivations that govern and impact content; correspondingly, Colen, McGinley and Snow, too, had their own reasons for working with or seeking out certain forms of publicity. Unquestionably, how these practices are framed is a result of such publicity, and there are many ways to read these artists. Are these practices sincere, narcissistic, radical or complicit, and is it even possible to disentangle one from another? As questions around how visibility is constructed are key to this research, I am interested in the cooperation and conflict between the media and the artist in fabricating a public identity, be this relationship explicit or otherwise. Accordingly, the language used to depict and define Colen, Snow and McGinley is a point of consideration, especially as it relates to the process of institutionalizing, and in the case of Snow memorializing, these practices. In addition to the numerous interviews Colen and McGinley have given, I interviewed both artists on multiple occasions, in person and over the phone, and our correspondences have also continued over email.³² Both published accounts and my own conversations are woven into this thesis; indeed, I rely upon and am invested in the production of gossip and anecdote, and how different acts of story-telling produce the narratives

³¹ Caine, 98.

³² There are far fewer interviews with Snow, because he died at twenty-seven but also because he was distrustful of email and the internet. He was a notoriously difficult subject to get a hold of in general.

that we take as truth. Language is essential to self-invention; as Paul John Eakin argued in his compelling study of autobiography, “The writing of autobiography emerges as a second acquisition of language, a second coming into being of self, a self-conscious self-consciousness.”³³ The use of ‘I’ can be both intentional and a form of self-objectification, which then allows for a mutable identity.

In conceiving of the relationship between image and truth, I have turned to Irit Rogoff’s essay “Gossip as Testimony: a postmodern signature.” Rogoff’s interests lie in how gossip can be used as a lens through which visual culture is examined both *as* history and *in* history, as well. She seeks to recuperate gossip from its widely held “morally inferior position” as an aimless activity, instead suggesting that it can offer up new modes for address.³⁴ Gossip, Rogoff argues, can destabilize master narratives by encouraging “phantasmic projections by audiences which can alert us to the ways in which we shape narratives through our own desire.”³⁵ Briefly, she turns to her research on artist circles in pre-World War II Munich to look at how gossip can structure historical accounts. In the case of the Munich avant-garde, rumours of infidelity and polyamory contributed to an image of a bohemian lifestyle: “Gossip, then, is one of the main tools by which the past can be represented as romance.”³⁶

Quoting Patricia Spacks, Rogoff writes of gossip as a new “oral artefact,” a site of inquiry that moves beyond archived testimony and physical proof.³⁷ This line of thinking is taken up in Gavin

³³ Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 9.

³⁴ Irit Rogoff, “Gossip as Testimony: a postmodern signature,” in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. by Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 2003), 269.

³⁵ Rogoff, “Gossip as Testimony: a postmodern signature,” 273.

³⁶ IBID.

³⁷ Rogoff quoting Patricia Spacks, “Gossip as Testimony: a postmodern signature,” 273.

Butt's *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963*. In the book, Butt addresses how work by the artist Larry Rivers was "downgrad[ed]...at the hands of art history," which, he argues, was a result of the gossip that Rivers himself perpetuated.³⁸ Rivers self-consciously and purposefully staged himself as an artist figure through his dress, use of drugs and flamboyant behaviour. In doing so, he "scandalously flirt[ed] with sensationalized narratives of art and artistic identity."³⁹

In addition to this artistic persona, by ostensibly representing scenes of his social and sexual life in paint, Rivers' canvases themselves did the gossiping for him.⁴⁰ As Butt writes,

Refusing to stabilize as either true or false, as 'straight' or 'gay', River's photographic self-staging...gives license to the play of our interpretative curiosity, rather than providing us with an easily assimilable and definitive self-image of the artist. It is in this way, then, that we might appreciate how River's art could be said to engage its viewers in a 'gossipy' spectatorial relationship.⁴¹

These were further reinforced in his autobiography *What Did I Do? The Unauthorized Autobiography* published decades later in 1992. *What Did I do?* is an exuberant leap into life in 1950s New York and the book cements gossip as history; previously the stories about Rivers existed solely as unsecured "speech acts."⁴² In the case of McGinley and Snow, their snapshot photography practices serve as a similar type of evidence that was seen to corroborate their lives and public personas; the images let audiences share in the unfolding of both art and person.

Accordingly, I have tried to remain doubly aware of the language used both by these artists and to describe them, which can strike a tone that is casual and friendly. This warmth has informed how

³⁸ Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 12.

³⁹ Butt, *Between You and Me*, 75.

⁴⁰ Butt, 76.

⁴¹ Butt, 105.

⁴² Butt, 8.

I write and think about this art. Undoubtedly, there have been times when it has swept me up. When interviewing McGinley, for instance, we spoke easily and comfortably, and the openness suggested a candour which itself is also a form of performance. My writing and speech have drawn closer together, asymptotic and at times only narrowly divided. This problem is indicative of the tensions surrounding Colen, Snow and McGinley specifically, but also how contemporary art is written about and theorized more broadly. Art history as a discipline, argues Margaret Iverson and Stephen Melville, developed out of and was influenced by Erwin Panofsky's conception of historical distance.⁴³ Panofsky expressed an "attachment to objects as detachment from them" by taking "such detachment as the general shape of art historical objectivity."⁴⁴ That is, he cleaved the object from the present, and the discipline became an act of looking backwards.⁴⁵ The legacy of an indispensable, almost requisite objectivity implies that any subjective standpoint clings too closely to criticism. Art history has difficulties responding to the 'now'. As Janet Kraynak has observed, "What this entails essentially is an *elimination* of the perspective of the present, which is viewed as necessarily and problematically subjective."⁴⁶ Unquestionably, studying the contemporary privileges the role of the viewer in ways so often lost or unavailable in historical analysis. While reception theory is its own beast, thinking about reception is reason alone to study art at its moment of creation, "not in order to recover the 'real' or originary meaning of a given work, but because there is a mode of experience that occurs."⁴⁷ Part of this thesis endeavours to

⁴³ See the introduction to Margaret Iverson and Stephen Melville, *Writing Art History: Disciplinary Departures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁴⁴ Margaret Iverson and Stephen Melville, *Writing Art History: Disciplinary Departures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 26.

⁴⁵ Iverson and Melville, *Writing Art History*, 24.

⁴⁶ Janet Kraynak, 'Art History's Present Tense,' *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions* (London: Routledge, 2007), 88, emphasis in the original.

⁴⁷ Grant Kester, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'," *October*, vol. 130 (Fall, 2009), 8.

retrieve these originary reactions, to serve as a record as well as a moment of study unto themselves in order to challenge how artworks are assimilated into art history.

As a result, there are moments in the thesis where I use the first person to consider my relationships to the people, images and sites discussed. I became interested in these artists at this moment because I lived adjacent to this world; this thesis never would have existed if I wasn't the daughter of a New Yorker and if I hadn't gone to New York University. Over the course of this research, it became clear to me that it would be impossible to pretend as if I was so detached. We lived very close to one other and frequented many of the same places, which in turn influenced how I thought about these neighbourhoods, streets and bars.

While I am not interested in using a psychoanalytical approach, the relationship between biographers and subjects is one that has been discussed within that context; Sigmund Freud wrote that many scholars make “their hero as the subject of studies because – for reasons of their personal emotional life – they have felt a special affection for him from the very first. They then devote their energies to a task of idealization.”⁴⁸ Certainly, my background influences how I looked at these artists, but this thesis endeavours to provide the first critical examination of their practices which includes both the strengths and the weaknesses. Instead of Freud's understanding, I prefer Paula R. Backscheider's description of this relationship: “The biographer becomes the subject's closest ally and bitterest enemy.”⁴⁹ In her *Reflections on Biography*, Backscheider describes how affinities develop; she argues against Freud's take, asserting instead that identification is ongoing

⁴⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood*, trans. by Alvin Tyson (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1963), 177

⁴⁹ Backscheider, xv.

and emerges over the course of writing.⁵⁰ In my case, I spent over four years with these men; they were the protagonists of my life. Writing myself into the thesis allows for a degree of transparency regarding my assumptions and handling of what were an evolving set of questions. Including my voice can “make obvious [the] things that are hidden from the ordinary reader.”⁵¹

In a photograph used to illustrate the *Guardian*'s posthumous profile of Snow, he is shown standing alongside McGinley and Colen (fig. 2). Their arms are looped around one another, and together they look young and beautiful. Yet, even though their bodies are intertwined, all gaze off in different directions. They neither engage with the camera nor with each other, and despite their physical proximity, the space within this photograph is ill-defined. In posed group portraiture, we expect some form of interaction since participation in the photograph requires a degree of association; the image is a demonstration of unity and connection, even though members are always both of the group and independent. In the photograph of Colen, McGinley and Snow however, they are visibly caught between the two.

In my use of group portrait, I am speaking about voluntary and adaptable compositions “whose members and image are not preestablished but must be formed and represented, and are always subject to change.”⁵² To write about a group, any group, is to participate in a balancing act; how

⁵⁰ Backscheider, 228.

⁵¹ Backscheider, xx.

⁵² Bridget Alsdorf, *Fellow Men: Fantin-Latour and the Problem of the Group in 19th Century French Painting* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 18. Alsdorf's text is far from New York in the early aughts but nonetheless has provided me with a vocabulary for thinking through these friendships. Using a close analysis of the group, both its representation and as a locus of gender dynamics, Alsdorf unpacks the tensions between individual and collective identity, and the consequences for the modern artist. For me, the text was one of the few examples I found of an extensive piece of scholarship that was focused on inter-artist relationships.

to know which story and which body to privilege, as each participant is always positioned against the others and against the greater whole.⁵³ For so long, Colen, McGinley and Snow have been conceptualized as a single entangled entity, and this thesis does not contest this grouping. In part, this is because the connection is still regularly used. Consider the opening to a recent review of Colen's show *Mailorder Mother Purgatory* (2018) held at Lévy Gorvy gallery:

A lot has changed in the years since Dan Colen's meteoric rise in the downtown New York art scene of the mid-aughts. Alongside the late Dash Snow and photographer Ryan McGinley, Colen was one-third of a cool-kid art triumvirate dubbed 'Warhol's Children' by *New York Magazine*, whose version of the Factory was a hotel room filled with shredded phone books and lots of drugs.⁵⁴

To frame these artists in this manner suggests that each needs the men beside him, and that even if time passes and people grow up, this will always be the case. It suggests that these artists are only individuals to a certain extent. It says that Colen needed McGinley and Snow, that they all needed each other and still need each other, even though Snow is dead and almost ten years have elapsed.

This thesis, therefore, is bookended by two events: September 11, 2001 and then Dash Snow's death on July 13, 2009. Both serve as historical dates for this group's personal mythology. I have tried to adhere to a somewhat chronological account and most of the art considered within the first four chapters was created during this almost nine-year period. The final chapter, however, extends this timeline to what has transpired since Snow's death. I have mainly focused on these artists'

⁵³ That art history has long been bad at dealing with groups is nothing new and is also true of biographical studies more broadly. Although recent scholarship has begun to contest the monographic framing of art history, texts on paired or groups of artists remain somewhat limited. See Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron, *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996) which deals with pairs of romantically linked artists, and Charles Green, *The Third Hand* (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 2001) on artist collaboration after the 1960s as examples.

⁵⁴ Caroline Goldstein, "See How Dan Colen Tackles the Anxieties of Adulthood and Mail-Order Catalogues in His Comeback Show at Lévy Gorvy," *Artnet.com*, May 11, 2018, <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/dan-colen-levy-gorvy-1283570>. The emphasis is in the original and is erroneous.

emerging careers, their late teens and early twenties, because this is the period during which the idea of the self seems at its most malleable, informed and affected by so many external forces. Certainly, much of the works considered in this thesis entertain a specific relationship with late adolescence. Broadly, I am interested in the images and materials of youth culture which serve as touchstones throughout this thesis, especially as identity formation can be a protracted process of trial and error that often requires physical signifiers that signpost belonging. Still, this chronology is loose, and at times the narrative doubles back or skips forward in the way that only memories can do.

The central works of art discussed herein were selected to illustrate how community and friendship are visually manifested. This is most obvious within collaborative and photographic works in which there are multiple authors or multiple crosspollinating subjects. All three feature heavily in McGinley's and Snow's photographs, for example, and as Snow and Colen collaborated on *Nest*, an installation at Deitch Projects, evidence of their relationship is built into the work. But Colen's paintings and sculptures, too, I will argue, illustrate their friendship, a discussion which will be taken up in the second chapter.

Together as Kids opens on the eve of September 11th, the beginning days of a new century. Although Snow, McGinley and Colen knew each other before 9/11, the attacks on the World Trade Center set the stage for a new decade and for a new New York. Downtown New York has long been mythologised as "avant-garde terrain," and a central aim of this thesis is to look at whether these practices continue or complicate this legacy in the wake of 9/11.⁵⁵ This image, argued Sally

⁵⁵ Sally Baines, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (London: Duke University Press, 1993), 3.

Baines, dates to the 1960s when artists relocated to Greenwich Village and made the neighbourhood the backdrop of their utopian dreams; this ethos would become the bedrock of the downtown and lay the foundations for countercultural movements of the 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁶ Extending beyond the Village to include the whole of lower Manhattan, these later histories were rooted a vision of the downtown as a “historic mecca” for bohemians.⁵⁷

This idea is reinforced in how biographies of artists are presented. For example, *David Wojnarowicz: A definitive history of five or six years on the lower east side* is ostensibly a biography of artist David Wojnarowicz, but also functions as an oral history of the city relayed through a collection of interviews by his friends, partners and collaborators who use specific icons of downtown New York to structure their stories. By relying upon specific geographical sites, including the Mudd Club, CBGBs, and Danceteria, among many others, these narratives become contingent upon a vision of the city itself. This is further emphasised in the book’s endpapers which show maps of the Village, East Village and Soho. Atop of these simplified streets are caricatures of famous figures and locations including Keith Haring’s Pop Shop, Jean-Michel Basquiat’s studio on Great Jones Street; where Madonna lived. Downtown, these maps say, is for artists; downtown is a place where creative history is made and lived.

The concentration of artists gave these districts a “distinctive appeal” that was “intensely cool, identifiably local, and ethnically diverse.”⁵⁸ The notion of an urban authenticity is central to Sharon Zukin’s *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, which contends that the

⁵⁶ Baines, *Greenwich Village 1963*, 8.

⁵⁷ Baines, 5.

⁵⁸ Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16.

understanding of downtown New York is historically located. If an urban authenticity is tied to the past, then the ideal of the city is fixed and fantastical, suggesting that in an older New York lies the Golden Age. This suggestion makes the city lifeless and forces its artists into a prescribed and predetermined definition which has enduring consequences for how these communities continue to be seen. Central to this thesis are the ways in which Colen, McGinley and Snow both challenge and fortify these understandings of New York City.

Within the arc of this thesis, the first chapter functions as scene setting and contextualizes some of the themes that will be foundational to the subsequent four chapters. Generally, this first chapter considers how disaster is represented in photography and the types of images used to shape the narratives which emerge from a trauma. It also establishes some of the culturally sanctioned visions of New York City, and the ways in which Colen, McGinley and Snow, as well as celebrities, the art world and the media both reinforce and foil them. I begin by discussing two of McGinley's photographs that undermine the then-developing political narrative around 9/11 which called for a unified national identity. Much of the artistic response to 9/11 relied upon a series of expected iconographies and signs that were derived from the originary event itself. It was an art forced upon New York and not one that necessarily and organically materialized. Instead of joining this national narrative, I argue that Colen, McGinley and Snow embraced not an overarching Americana but each other, an understanding that requires a belief in small narratives. This chapter also responds to institutional presentations that either directly grappled with September 11th or reacted to subsequent shifts in attitude as a result of the event itself. This discussion allows me to lay out some of the questions surrounding the institutionalization of Snow's, Colen's and McGinley's practices which I will pick back up in the later chapters.

The second chapter is anchored by a close reading of Colen's painted sculpture *Secrets and Cymbals, Smoke and Scissors (My Friend Dash's Wall in the Future)* (2004). The large work reproduces one of Snow's studio walls, a potpourri of images, text and paraphernalia rendered in oil paint; it was a pivotal work in Colen's early career and is a visual representation of their friendship; the work highlights the porous nature of these relationships. *Secrets and Cymbals* was painted when Colen was living with McGinley, and through a close reading of the work, I consider the reciprocity between the professional space (the studio) and the domestic (the bedroom). There was such a constant flow of information—of life!—between these artists which brings to the fore questions of authorship, ownership and performance. This chapter also begins a discussion around self-presentation, here examined through bedroom décor, which I will expand upon in chapters three and four.

In the third chapter, I look at the seemingly meteoric rise of McGinley's photography practice. I trace his initial and short-lived interest in snapshots and look at the early influence of fashion photography on his embryonic career. At first, McGinley took thousands of candid photographs of his friends, but his practice evolved quickly as he shifted towards the construction of a snapshot aesthetic and away from the spontaneous gesture itself. I compare these photographs with Snow's Polaroids which also image their shared friends and New York community; these are documents of extraordinary intimacy. These two bodies of work were selected to consider first how intimacy and community are imaged, and second what it means to stage and identity. The chapter concludes with a discussion of McGinley's 2017 mid-career retrospective *The Kids Were Alright* held at the

Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver. Here, I think about how these images have framed his career and what it means to look backwards now.

Much of the thesis thus far attends to concerns around the publicity of a private self. Chapter four looks at the public side and the ways in which Colen, McGinley and Snow courted fame as well as the role public-facing institutions played in shaping their identities. Here, I engage with Colen and Snow's hamster nests. For much of their friendship, Colen and Snow made what they called hamster nests in hotel rooms, during which they would get high, tear up phonebooks, and roll around in the mess. These were private, hidden and relatively unobserved activities, but in 2007, they agreed to create a nest for Deitch Projects, a gallery in New York's SoHo neighbourhood. This was one of the few explicitly collaborative works made by these artists in which all three participated, to varying degrees. In my analysis of both the hamster nests and *Nest* (2007), the installation, I look at how these artists attempted to control their reputations and representations, and how their aesthetic rooted in a lifestyle fits into broader ideas around the accepted conception of the artist figure as bohemian. A central consideration of this chapter is whether these practices are cynical or earnest in their efforts to navigate the present conditions of the art world. This chapter also considers the identity and geography of downtown New York, and how the language used to describe the city operates as an analogy for thinking about Colen's, McGinley's and Snow's careers. Indeed, a central ambition of the thesis is to map out these artistic practices in relation to New York's downtown after 9/11, a discussion which will be continued here.

The final chapter begins with Snow's death in 2009 and most of the text reflects upon different forms of memorialisation. I engage with the various memorials and newspaper obituaries in

contrast with new media models, specifically McGinley's Instagram account, to flesh out questions around legacy and reputation. What do monuments and memory look like after the internet? The second half of the chapter considers developments in McGinley's and Colen's practices as they effectively withdrew from the scene in the wake of Snow's death. To conclude this chapter, I return to Snow's exhibition *Freeze Meets Run* at The Brant Foundation to debate the stakes held in his legacy specifically, and these practices more broadly: who has the authority to define these practices and how might those meanings function?

This thesis is not a survey of New York's entire downtown scene; instead, I have focused on Colen, McGinley and Snow because their work and practices best reveal the questions I wish to unpack and because, even after so many years, and even after Snow's death, their names remain linked together. In this sense, their identities continue to be fused, and I am hoping to say something about this grouping while still preserving the individuality of each artist. Still, a focused study has benefits but is also inherently limited. There are other artists and other players who were key to this world and whose exclusion means I am privileging one specific view at the expense of anything else. Given the scope of the project and the resources available to me, I did not feel I could realistically discuss everyone evenly. Although there were other artists within this community including, for example Hanna Liden, Kunle Martins and Agathe Snow, they did not receive the same coverage in part because the art world and the media have long favoured white men.⁵⁹ How reputations are established is an important consideration for me.

⁵⁹ Most of what has been written about these artists can be found in magazines such as *PAPER*, *Let's Panic*, *Purple*, and *Interview*, among others. For example: Nate Lowman, "Hanna Liden," *Interview*, October 15, 2010, <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/hanna-liden>; Jade Berreau, "Hanna Liden," *Purple*, Fall/Winter 2010, <http://purple.fr/magazine/fw-2010-issue-14/hanna-liden-2/>; "A Conversation with Kunle Martins," n. date, <http://letspanic.tv/kunle-martins-2/>; Christopher Bollen, "Agathe Snow," *Interview*, November 29, 2008, <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/agathe-snow>.

I have decided against giving each artist his own chapter, evident in the outline above. To study each individually surely would have led to a fruitful and sustained analysis, but as Anne Higonnet so aptly put it: “Cassatt in the context of a monograph is not the same as Cassatt in the context of a cultural history.”⁶⁰ A cultural history aims to identify, destabilize and communicate shifts in meaning and unlike a monograph, it can weaken or recontextualize an artist’s status. Moreover, and specific to this thesis, the case study design would have undermined an element of the research. I set out to illustrate the way lives are shaped by one another, and the intersections and points of correspondence are necessary. Although structurally complex, this is how communities function: people circle in and out, some more permanently than others, events play minor and then major roles, there are acts and reprises and second chances. For Dan Colen, Ryan McGinley and Dash Snow, narratives became plastic and pliable.

⁶⁰ Anne Higonnet, “Two Ways of Thinking About Mary Cassatt,” *Singular Women: Writing the Artist*, eds. Kristen Frederickson and Sarah E. Web (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 100.

Beginnings: the place of the lost towers

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Dan Colen and Ryan McGinley, along with their friend Kunle Martins, were passed out in their apartment at 106 East 7th street, having only fallen asleep around sunrise.⁶¹ Earlier in the evening they had been out at a party celebrating the fashion designer Marc Jacobs' Spring Collection at The Park in Chelsea, a restaurant which had opened a few months before. It was the third day of New York Fashion Week, and Jacobs had just wrapped his runway show at Pier 54. The clothes had a clear 80s vibe, what *Vogue* would call the "so-hip-it-hurts Danceteria" aesthetics, a reference to the now-defunct Flatiron District nightclub.⁶² Jacobs' guest list included Monica Lewinsky, Sarah Jessica Parker and Donald Trump, and the show started 90 minutes late because the car carrying the clothing was held up in heavy traffic.⁶³

The Park was the perfect place for a decadent afterparty. The enormous former taxi garage has a retro sort of vibe; *New York* magazine called it a restaurant for those who miss Area, the 80s nightclub where everyone from Grace Jones to Jean-Michel Basquiat and Wall Street traders used to party (fig. 3).⁶⁴ Area distinguished itself with constant reinvention, and every month brought out a new theme and décor, a "revolving interior art installation."⁶⁵ In that vein, Jacobs carted in grass and picnic tables which were then covered in cascading fruit, like some sort of Dutch Golden

⁶¹ Ryan McGinley, "Dan Colen," *Interview*, August 17, 2010.

⁶² "Spring 2001 Ready to Wear Coverage: Marc Jacobs," *Vogue*, accessed on April 7, 2018, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2001-ready-to-wear/marc-jacobs>.

⁶³ Ginia Bellafante, "The Year in Fashion, Before and After; So Sept. 10: Epitome of the Former Age," *New York Times*, December 25, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/25/style/the-year-in-fashion-before-and-after-so-sept-10-epitome-of-the-former-age.html>.

⁶⁴ "The Park, *New York*, accessed on January 9, 2018, <http://nymag.com/listings/restaurant/park01/>.

⁶⁵ Dan Cameron, "It Takes a Village," in *East Village USA*, ed. Michelle Piranio (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), 58.

Age painting, like Jan Davidsz. de Heem's *Still Life with Lobster* (1643) (fig. 4). The Park was the type of place where you might go if you were feeling flush, or if you wanted to bask in the glow of a flush, a place that so believed in the security of the Clinton years and the Dot-com Boom.

McGinley and Colen themselves were nowhere near any sort of flush (or any sort of celebrity for that matter) and most likely they weren't even invited to the Marc Jacobs afterparty, but they enjoyed the thrill of parties, and crashing parties, nonetheless. Reminiscing, McGinley said, "It's always been a bottle of Jack, a bag of coke, and some beers. And lots of bathrooms... That's what our lives were. Adventures on drugs."⁶⁶ Eventually, they would have had to make their way back across town to their shared apartment in the East Village where they stayed up late getting high; Martins ended up crashing there.⁶⁷ So when McGinley's then-boyfriend, Marc Hundley (known affectionately as the Librarian) knocked early, just after 9:00 AM EST, it was unexpected and unwelcomed.⁶⁸

That morning at 8:46 AM EST, American Airlines Flight 11 flew into the World Trade Center's North Tower. Two minutes later, local television station WNYW Channel 5 aired the first footage of the burning building. By 9:00 AM, all major television networks, including ABC, CNN and NBC, had interrupted their regular programming to cover what was then an unknown: accident, attack, crash, suicide. So, by 9:03 AM EST, when the second plane United Airlines Flight 175 was driven into the South Tower, it happened live on television for millions of people to witness. And when the Towers collapsed, first the South Tower at 9:59 AM followed by the North Tower at

⁶⁶ Ana Finel Honigman, "Dash Snow: Death of an Art Star," *The Daily Beast*, July 16, 2009.

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/dash-snow-death-of-an-art-star>

⁶⁷ Ryan McGinley, "Dan Colen," *Interview*, August 17, 2010, <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/dan-colen>.

⁶⁸ Dan Colen in an email exchange with the author, January 27, 2017.

10:28 AM, this, too, was seen and heard around the world. This chapter will consider different responses to the images of 9/11 and the types of narratives that become acceptable in the wake of such an event. This chapter addresses several forms that these responses took, a conversation which will set the stage for the development of McGinley's, Colen's and Dash Snow's respective art practices and intertwined community. By looking to other visual responses, this chapter speaks to how these artists positioned themselves as united to the city itself.

In response to Hundley's knocking, McGinley grabbed his camera, and along with Colen, Martins and Hundley, biked downtown to see about helping. He remembers: "The streets were covered in dust. The fire department had just started flooding the streets. I remember finding bits of papers and documents scattered around. I remember seeing huge stacks of Poland Spring bottled water for the soldiers that had set up base down there. It was all so bizarre. If you lived downtown, you could smell the dust for a few weeks afterward."⁶⁹

When shooting, McGinley takes thousands of photographs, obsessively and relentlessly clicking the shutter closed on the hunt for the perfect frame. In the earliest days, when he was teaching himself photography, he would burn through rolls of film.⁷⁰ On 9/11, he shot thirty to forty rolls, and there must be hundreds of unseen photographs tucked away in his archive but so far, he has only printed a few, and neither much resembles what we think a 9/11 photograph would look like. They are not images of the airplanes, or burning metal, or shocked faces; in fact, they aren't even

⁶⁹ Ryan McGinley, "The Kids Were Alright," *VICE*, March 1, 2008, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/the-kids-were-alright-v15n5.

⁷⁰ Although digital photography allows a person to take a thousand photographs in just a few moments, this is not a new impulse: contained within the word digital is digit or finger, which suggests a particularly analogue interaction. Thanks to Tamar Garb for pointing my thinking in this direction.

obviously taken in New York. In the first, *Sam (Ground Zero)* (2001), McGinley's friend Sam Salganik rides a bicycle; the shirt tied across his face pulses with Bridget Riley-esque pattern (fig. 5). It looks like a warm night, maybe because he is shirtless but also because everything is bathed in soft yellow tones, and the smears of light look like painterly streaks. The background appears pliable and melty blurring with Salganik's body, skin and stone both shades of the same creamy gold. It could be any midnight in summer when it is sweltering and too humid to be inside, and the weather on September 11th was notoriously and incredulously perfect, a sky so clear you could see the planes gliding like scissors through a wrapping paper sky. Salganik stands on the pedals and standing while cycling suggests a certain disregard. It is a way to lose control, to speed down a hill carried away by momentum. But it also implies a secondary type of urgency, the positioning needed to climb a hill. Salganik's body is tense, perched between stillness and motion as he holds himself upright. But really everything in the frame is held in suspension, and this urgency mirrors McGinley's own as he moved his camera through the city.

Snapped minutes before or maybe hours after is McGinley's other photograph, *Dan (9/11)* (2001). This is an electrified image, lit almost entirely by the camera's flash (fig. 6). Colen's face is flattened into an indistinct half-moon, faint eyebrows and little else, his mouth protected by a green bandana. He is a spectral figure in an otherwise nondescript landscape where atmosphere and buildings have melded together. There is no real depth to the image, and space appears to have collapsed onto itself; the towers' ashes lightly dust the car, forming frost on the windows. In a soundless, motionless image, somehow *Dan (9/11)* conveys an overwhelming sense of silence, the way that 9/11 made New York so silent even though explosions seem like just about the loudest

thing; New York only gets quiet during blizzards and tragedies: “Whole parts of the city seemed mute—most strikingly, its typically loquacious residents, who walked the streets speechless.”⁷¹

In photographs like *Dan (9/11)* and *Sam (Ground Zero)*, the titles are the only means of stabilizing what are otherwise unfixed, almost imprecise images. McGinley’s twin photographs are too ambiguously located, too void of detail, but by titling them as he did, he consciously fastened them both geographically and in time, tethering them permanently to an event. A title such as *Dan (9/11)* clearly and perceptibly secures a photograph to one exact moment, even though there is little on the film itself that perceptibly ties it to the day. We have come to believe in the authenticity of proximity, that nearness gives a person or an image certain legitimacy, and perhaps without the titles, we may not completely trust these scenes; while a deceptive painting “falsifies the history of art,” a deceptive photograph “falsifies reality.”⁷²

That journalism and science have relied on photographic evidence is part of the reason photography is so tied to claims of truth-telling.⁷³ In these fields, images are almost always mediated by text, so titles play a different role than they do in other media. Captions provide information, point to an image’s role as illustration and, occasionally, act as an afterthought. In

⁷¹ Kera Bolonik, “Quiet,” *New York*, August 27, 2011, <http://nymag.com/news/9-11/10th-anniversary/quiet/>.

⁷² Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1973, 1977), 86. The idea that captions guide meaning is integral to the study of documentary photography. For more, see Alan Sekula, “Reading An Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capitalism” in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (New York: Routledge, 2003), 445.

⁷³ As there are limits to surface vision, the scholarship around the photograph as evidence is vast and fierce, and further complicated by the rise of new technologies. For a look at how photographic evidence was treated in the 19th century, and the development of its use as scientific evidence, see Jennifer Tucker, *Nature Exposed: Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). For more on the news image, its history and relation to art history, see *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of the News*, eds. Jason Hill and Vanessa R. Schwartz (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015). For a discussion around skeptical looking, see Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Faced with a culture saturated with images, Leja traces the public’s simultaneous distrust of visual documents and embrace of new technologies as conditions for modern looking.

short, they append. In art photography, we are taught to believe that words, a photograph's name, are a gift from the artist, an aid to help us understand; they can be as varied as there are letters, and yet in photography they so often simply describe what can be seen, adding identification and making an image read like a document. Titles often reinforce the certainty of what we see, as in Diane Arbus' staccato descriptors, but they also, as obvious as it may be to point out, influence how we see. David Goldblatt's wordy mini-essays, for example, provide so much more than anything that can be directly observed. Consider Goldblatt's photograph of a man sitting on a bed (fig. 7). He stares insistently into the camera, but otherwise, this is a rather ordinary scene. However the photograph is titled *Emmanuel Luthuli in his bedroom where he allegedly raped two girls. Sponjane, Eshowe, 30 August 2010 (4_A0719)* (2010), and the title makes it impossible to form an opinion just by looking. It does more than simply substantiate what we see and instead tells us how to look.

On September 11th, Magnum photographer Thomas Hoepker captured a group of five New Yorkers seated on the Brooklyn waterfront, bodies bathed in sunlight. *USA. Brooklyn, New York September 11* (2001) is composed of a series of intersecting angular planes: a slatted bench, columnar smoke echoing the lines of the Manhattan Bridge suspension cables, sloped spines, the peninsular remnants of a pier (fig. 8). It is peaceful and summery, which is why the smoke cutting across the sky seems so incongruous. Although Hoepker contributed other photographs from 9/11 to the Magnum photography collection *New York September 11* (2001), he chose not to print *USA. Brooklyn, New York*. The photograph was eventually published in 2006 and

included in the fifth anniversary edition of the book; *USA. Brooklyn, New York* was instantly controversial. What critics found so damning was the way the sitters lounge apparently unbothered and oblivious to the burning towers in the background. In an opinion for the *New York Times*, writer Frank Rich contended that the photograph demonstrates a particularly American attitude, a resilience coupled with forgetfulness: “What [Hoepker] caught was this: Traumatic as the attack on America was, 9/11 would recede quickly for many. This is a country that likes to move on, and fast.”⁷⁴

Three days later, Rich’s take was contested in *Slate* by journalist David Plotz who ridiculed the implication that the five were out for a joyride or enjoying an extended lunchbreak. Plotz responded, “These New Yorkers have not turned away from Manhattan because they have turned away from 9/11. They have turned away from Manhattan because they have turned toward each other for solace and for debate.”⁷⁵ Then Hoepker himself weighed in, an attempt to explain his simultaneous fascination and revulsion with the ambiguity of the scene at hand. Speaking in 2006, his tone was moralizing all in all: “How could this group of cool-looking young people sit there so relaxed and seemingly untouched by the mother of all catastrophes which unfolded in the background?”⁷⁶ (Years later, in an interview for the *British Journal of Photography*, he moderated his language somewhat saying, “It took me a while to understand this was a very interesting, unusual way to approach such a horror which was absolutely shocking for New

⁷⁴ Frank Rich, “Whatever Happened to the America of 9/12?” *New York Times*, September 10, 2006, WK12.

⁷⁵ David Plotz, “Frank Rich is Wrong About That 9/11 Photograph,” *Slate*, September 13, 2006, <https://slate.com/culture/2006/09/frank-rich-is-so-wrong-about-that-9-11-photograph.html>.

⁷⁶ Thomas Hoepker, “I took That 9/11 Photo Frank Rich Wrote About,” *Slate*, September 14, 2006, <https://slate.com/culture/2006/09/i-took-that-9-11-photo-frank-rich-wrote-about.html>.

York, for the world.”⁷⁷) Finally, Walter Sipser and Chris Schiavo, two of the photograph’s subjects, got in touch with *Slate* to dispute what Rich and Hoepker had said. Sipser wrote:

Thomas Hoepker did not ask permission to photograph us nor did he make any attempt to ascertain our state of mind before concluding five years later that, "It's possible they lost people and cared, but they were not stirred by it." Had Hoepker walked fifty feet over to introduce himself he would have discovered a bunch of New Yorkers in the middle of an animated discussion about what had just happened.⁷⁸

And in the way that the internet can cause anything to blow up, the photograph became the subject of a variety of blog discussions that have carried on for years. Blogger Alec Selwyn-Holmes summarized the debate surrounding *USA. Brooklyn, New York* for his website “Iconic Photos” on June 17, 2010, five years after its initial publication. Commenter Lily responded a year and a bit later, on September 11, 2011 at 9:00 PM: “What response would be deemed acceptable...lying prostrate on the ground, screaming in disrepair?”⁷⁹ Six months later, at 4:22 AM, on February 22, 2012, Alecur Lazar wrote, “If you’ve ever wondered who the ‘Occupy’ crowd is, their [sic] sitting right there laughing as 3000 people die.”⁸⁰ And a year after that, Ebie added, on January 12, 2013 at 4:01 PM, “There’s no ambiguity. It’s a lie. It just happened to be a pretty day, and the asshole photographer deliberately found a fetching angle, and greenery, and a moment when it looked like people were laughing about a ball game or something.”⁸¹ The most recent comment is from 2015, almost a decade after the photograph was initially published. Even given the expanse of time, in the middle of the night people have continued to argue with one another about the correct way to visualize mourning.

⁷⁷ “VIDEO: Thomas Hoepker on taking the most controversial photo of 9/11,” *British Journal of Photography*, September 11, 2015, <https://www.bjp-online.com/2015/09/video-thomas-hoepker-new-york/>.

⁷⁸ Walter Sipser, “It’s Me in that 9/11 Photo,” *Slate*, September 13, 2006, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2006/09/i-was-in-that-9-11-photo-frank-rich-wrote-about-here-s-what-i-think-about-his-column.html>.

⁷⁹ Alex Selwyn-Holmes, “Comments for 9/11 – Thomas Hoepker,” *Iconic Photos*, Blog, June 17, 2010, <https://iconicphotos.wordpress.com/2010/06/17/911-thomas-hoepker/>. Usernames are copied here in full.

⁸⁰ Selwyn-Holmes, “Comments for 9/11 – Thomas Hoepker.”

⁸¹ Selwyn-Holmes, “Comments for 9/11 – Thomas Hoepker.”

Compositionally, *USA. Brooklyn, New York* doesn't much resemble McGinley's kinetic photographs, and in terms of content, all these three images share are youthful subjects, though even that was disputed. As Sipser quipped to *Slate*, "Still, it was nice being described as a young person [by Hoepker]. I was forty at the time the photograph was taken."⁸² The greatest difference between the two images, however, was that Hoepker did not know who he was photographing, whereas McGinley's friends understood that he went everywhere with a camera. They had long ago acquiesced to being photographed. Hoepker, on the other hand, snapped and made a snap judgement about what he thought he saw. Sipser's chief complaint was that the scene was a manipulation, that, devoid of any context, a single frame is always somewhat false: "A snapshot can make mourners attending a funeral look like they're having a party."⁸³

What the three photographs do have in common is a similar affect owing, in part, to their in-between status. They are documentary but not exactly documents. Perhaps this is the reason that Hoepker's *USA. Brooklyn, New York* was so hated: the criteria weren't clear. The photograph reaches beyond the boundaries of photojournalism, of photo-as-document, limits we have come to understand as predetermined and ridged. By becoming the type of photograph we might see in a gallery, *USA. Brooklyn, New York* does more than simply witness. It is caught between a "beautification" and a "moralized idea of truth-telling," and as a result, Hoepker's photograph, purposefully or otherwise, was dragged forcefully through debates around representation and comprehension—how to go about interpreting a moment.⁸⁴

⁸² Sipser, "It's Me in that 9/11 Photo."

⁸³ Sipser, "It's Me in that 9/11 Photo."

⁸⁴ Sontag, *On Photography*, 86.

Hoepker is a member of Magnum Photos, a cooperative of photojournalists, whereas McGinley, at that point, had only ever presented himself as an artist. He did not have the same sort of platform. *Dan (9/11)* and *Sam (Ground Zero)* were shown only within an art context and, in 2001, that would have been the tiniest of art galleries, in homemade zines, and in prints circulated to friends and friends of friends. Two years later, however, they were included in McGinley's solo show *The Kids Are Alright* (2003) at the Whitney Museum of American Art, an institution with wide-reaching influence. By exhibiting the two photographs in an art gallery, McGinley made clear that they were objects to be judged according the "aesthetic double standards" that can come from framing a scene in a photograph.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, knowing that McGinley's photographs were taken on September 11th ensures that any discussion will inevitably move beyond compositional considerations. Images do not simply show the world; they show the world as seen by somebody, and as such present an "evaluation."⁸⁶ Photographic seeing, therefore, means that photographs cannot escape the fact that they operate concurrently as both image and record, but also, at times, as an art object too. By showing the world, the photograph is held captive by both aesthetics and politics, and interpretation is dependent upon one's view of both. Or, as writer Teju Cole explains, "A picture of something terrible will always be caught between two worlds: the world of 'something terrible,' which might shock or move us to a moral response, and the world of 'a picture,' which generates an aesthetic response."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Sontag, *On Photography*, 103.

⁸⁶ Sontag, *On Photography*, 88.

⁸⁷ Teju Cole, "A Photograph Never Stands Alone," *New York Times*, March 14, 2017, MM14.

In public responses to tragedies, the tone is often rooted in gravitas, respect and reverence. The 2018 exhibition *Age of Terror* at London's Imperial War Museum gathered together artworks that mostly resembled what art about 9/11 might look like: serious, infused with pathos, and overtly forceful. The materials used were varied, the artists diverse, and yet most of what was shown felt derivative. That is, it looks like what happened on September 11th. Light artist Iván Navarro's matching installations, for example, are the towers in concave form, two receding illuminated holes. Hans-Peter Feldman's *9/12 Front Page* (2008) assembled the front pages of 151 newspapers from September 12, 2001; Feldman considers himself more of a compulsive collector than a visual artist. The Imperial War Museum is an institution devoted not to art but rather to all conflicts after 1914 that British or Commonwealth forces have been involved with, and most of the permanent displays present a collection of archival objects and ephemera. *Age of Terror*, as an art exhibition, differed from much of the museum's regular programming, yet it wasn't surprising to encounter works that veered towards a "faithful transcription."⁸⁸

Out of the works assembled for *Age of Terror*, only American new-media artist Tony Oursler's *9/11* (2001) was created on September 11, 2001. The hour-long film documented September 11th as it unfolded both immediately and in the coming days and months (fig. 9). Oursler began filming right after the North Tower was struck, the disbelief and confusion as Manhattan's streets filled with onlookers. In the film you can hear the deafening bang of the plane smashing

⁸⁸ Jill Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics: Events, Affects and Art after 9/11*. (London: I. B. Tauris & Co, 2012), 158.

into the second tower. These are not sweeping, cinematic shots; we can only see what Oursler sees and sometimes that view is blocked or jumbled. The beginning of the video captures the stunned reactions of bystanders, uneasy laughter, how Oursler and his girlfriend donned gasmasks, the crowds rushing through the streets, the rolling clouds of dust. He continued to record and, that evening or the next, Oursler went to visit the massive makeshift shrine in Union Square: a sea of candles, messages inked on sheets of paper stuck amongst flags, photographs, and tiny towers, reborn and undamaged. In a way, everyone was creating new images of the Twin Towers, little effigies to erase the past. In the weeks that followed, he journeyed to Ground Zero to film the throngs of people who pilgrimaged downtown. Many took photographs of the construction site, poking their cameras and cell phones through the draped tarps. Every now and then someone posed for a portrait, and there were even a few selfies.

A lot of what I saw in *9/11* felt theatrical in part because I watched it on a large screen in a darkened room. Viewing the video within a blackened theatre made it feel more like cinema (subjective) than the news (objective, in theory), though this was partially due how different it felt to the Imperial War Museum's programme. Oursler's laughter made me uncomfortable, but so did his gasmask militancy. Within the black theatre, the drama was heightened. So much of history is understood through movies and television and the ways in which these images can shape memory and the representation of the past. Oursler's *9/11* cleaved closely to the day and also could only ever provide a perspective unique to him.

In McGinley's exhibition *The Kids Are Alright*, which opened a year and a half after 9/11 and is maybe the best manifestation of the resilient yet forgetful vibe that so bothered the *Times*'

opinion writer Frank Rich, *Dan (9/11)* and *Sam (Ground Zero)* are displayed alongside photographs of Dash Snow tagging the Brooklyn Bridge and their friend Oliver Roberts, ethereal and delicate in paper 3D-glasses, tripping on acid. There is a laissez-faire, ‘everything is okay man’ attitude in the photographs of McGinley and his friends getting high, having sex and adventuring around New York. Despite everything, the kids really would be alright, and they had a strange yet unshakable understanding of how to move forward. Rich worried that soon, sooner than anyone thought, September 11th would be overlooked, but *The Kids Are Alright* proposed an alternate reading. Distilling down a larger, all-encompassing narrative renders 9/11 small, but doing so also means that it can be made personal.

For everyone that wasn’t in New York, and for many that were, September 11th was both immediate and mediated, experienced live, but through television screens and radio broadcasts. And in the days and weeks that followed, it was reexperienced and re-enacted endlessly and on a loop, a “pornography of planes smashing over and over into buildings,” according to architect Michael Sorkin.⁸⁹ It was an overwhelming and riveting media spectacle, and these images were instantly caught between aesthetics and morality. In his column for the *Los Angeles Times*, written only four days afterwards, critic Christopher Knight noted that 9/11 was the first event where “pictures preceded language.”⁹⁰ That is, the story of 9/11, what was happening and why, was told as it unfurled. Vietnam may have been the television war, but those were pre-recorded videos; 9/11 was the first to happen to us live and at such a scale. It was the first visual event

⁸⁹ Michael Sorkin, *Starting from Zero: Reconstructing Downtown New York*. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 20.

⁹⁰ Christopher Knight. “Elusive and Illusionary,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 2001, <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/sep/16/news/mn-46425>.

and, as Jean Baudrillard so aptly put it, those images both “exalt[ed] the event” and took it “hostage.”⁹¹

On September 11th, thousands of cameras turned towards the Towers, and the volume produced was overwhelming and unprecedented. In the aftermath, two impromptu exhibitions in New York’s SoHo neighbourhood grappled with the onslaught of images. *Here is New York: A Democracy of Photographs* and *The September 11th Photo Project* both showed thousands of photographs submitted by professionals and amateurs alike. I would like now to think about how these exhibitions present ways of wrestling with and imaging such a devastating, almost incomprehensible tragedy. In many ways, McGinley’s photographs would have been at home in both exhibitions, yet ultimately, the strategies used were slightly, but significantly, different.

Here is New York (the title cribbed from E. B. White’s 1949 essay) was the more systematically curated of the two. All the photographs submitted, by a mix of professionals and hobbyists, the young and old, were re-printed to be the same size, eleven-by-seventeen inches, and these were hung equidistant from one another. The team behind the show included Charles Traub, Chairman of the MFA Department of Photography and Related Media at the School of Visual Arts, Magnum photographer Gilles Peress, curator Alice Rose George, and Michael Shulan who went on to be the Creative Director of the September 11th Memorial Museum. In the introduction to the exhibition’s catalogue, Shulan explains how *Here Is New York* developed: “The key,” he wrote, “was to act fast.”⁹² George began contacting magazines and newspapers to source images. Shulan

⁹¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London: Verso, 2002), 27.

⁹² Michael Shulan, introduction to *Here Is New York: A Democracy of Photographs*, eds. Alice Rose George, Gilles Peress, Michael Shulan, and Charles Traub. (New York: Scalo, 2002), 7.

visited several galleries to determine an “appropriate” way to hang the show.⁹³ Traub and Peress handled printing and volunteers. This was a methodical undertaking especially when compared with *The September 11th Photo Project*. Located three blocks to the south on Wooster Street, *The September 11th Photo Project* had more of a “grassroots” sensibility.⁹⁴ Its organizers, amateur photographer and former Wall Streeter Michael Feldschuh and James Austin Murray, a firefighter and 9/11 first-responder, wanted to preserve the feeling of the spontaneous shrines that had cropped up around the city.⁹⁵ The photographs were presented as they were submitted, and many were accompanied by texts that had been sent in as well. Both creators saw the project as long-term, open-ended and, like the AIDS memorial quilt, growing over time.⁹⁶

Yet, the narrative the organizers sought was, at best, imprecise, foreshadowing the “flattening of complexity in U.S. attitudes.”⁹⁷ That these photographs were exhibited in both cases without biographical information, without a name, meant that they lacked a maker yet because of their content and the space of the exhibition, they were all supposed to be seen as important, secured to 9/11 by virtue of the venue and their imagery. Theoretically, this ensured that the photographs were curated without bias. But, authorless, they were documents and not works of art. Without makers, these photographs operate more similarly to news images, which are aimed at the most “generalized conceivable public” and structured by “the temporality of the short term.”⁹⁸ They were not intended to become art photographs, but could, over time, be transformed as such.

⁹³ Shulan, introduction to *Here Is New York: A Democracy of Photographs*.

⁹⁴ *The September 11th Photo Project*, ed. Michael Feldschuh (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), vii

⁹⁵ *The September 11th Photo Project*, iix.

⁹⁶ Jeffrey Schandler, “Review: New York September 11 by Magnum Photographers et al,” *The Journal of American Art History*, vol. 89, no. 3 (2002): 1013.

⁹⁷ B. Ruby Rich, “After the Fall: Cinema Studies Post-9/11,” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 43, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 112.

⁹⁸ Introduction to *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of the News*, eds. Jason E. Hill and Vanessa R. Schwartz. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 5.

In a review comparing *Here is New York* and *The September 11th Photo Project*, art historian Julie Wosk criticized the ways in which *Here is New York* commercialized 9/11. By selling copies of the exhibited prints, Wosk felt the entire exhibition degraded the tragedy, no matter that all profits went to victim assistance and relief organizations.⁹⁹ Buying a photo is still an act of consumerism even when the profits go to charity. And the sterility of the exhibition, with its regulated and regimented organization, contributed to this effect.¹⁰⁰ The uniformity of the show, like the title suggests, may be equalizing but it is also anesthetizing, and looking seemed akin to browsing for paint samples or detergent.

Certainly, we all remember President George W. Bush's exhortation to "go shopping" after 9/11.¹⁰¹ Bush meant that buying groceries or makeup was a way of reminding ourselves that the terrorists couldn't defeat the American way of life, as well as a means to keep the economy going, but shopping therefore became conflated with patriotic duty. A whole industry developed out of 9/11. Flags were sold everywhere, and in all shapes and materials, as were pins, baseball caps, t-shirts, bumper stickers, and even snow-globes, which seems particularly cruel given how the Tower's ashes had rained down. There were commemorative manicures, nails dotted with a crystal stars and stripes. *Here is New York* included a photograph of a women's shoe store where each stiletto was presented on a pedestal draped with the flag, as if buying a shoe (or even a flag) was a way to showcase your faith in America (fig. 10).¹⁰² Although only a selection of the photographs

⁹⁹ Julie Wosk, "Photographing Devastation: Three New York Exhibits of 11 September 2001," *Technology and Culture* 43, no. 4 (2002): 775.

¹⁰⁰ Wosk, "Photographing Devastation: Three New York Exhibits of 11 September 2001," 775.

¹⁰¹ George W. Bush, "Islam is Peace" (speech, Washington DC, 17 September 2001), The White House Archives, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010917-11.html>.

¹⁰² Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch and Consumerism from Oklahoma to Ground Zero* (London: Duke University Press, 2007), 57.

exhibited were presented in the catalogue, *Here is New York's* editors chose to reproduce this shot suggesting that it summed up and signified a number of other, similar scenes and outlooks.

Still, we forget that the World Trade Center was always tied up with commerce. (In fact, we forget that the Twin Towers were despised for decades. Their construction was protested – an appalling use of public funds! a neighbourhood ruined! – and once completed, the buildings were seen as an enormous eyesore. That the towers are remembered fondly defies their past but is entirely understandable as tragedy can collapse the divide between history and memory so subtly and softly that it can go unnoticed.) The tenants themselves represented a variety of for-profit industries including banking, finance, trade and transport. As the buildings came to dominate the skyline – the site was so large it had its own postcode – the World Trade Center grew into a tourist stop, an identity that was slowly but proudly embraced. You could ride the elevators to Windows of the World, a marbled and mirrored restaurant on the 107th floor (fig. 11). (In the restaurant's obituary printed in the *New York Times*, journalist William Grimes wrote, "Windows of the World was something else, a restaurant that seemed suspended halfway between the earth and the moon."¹⁰³) You could stand on the Top of the World observation decks overlooking the city, and once, when I was very little, I stepped into the windows at the top of one of the Towers. My mother, a native New Yorker, nervously held onto the back of my shirt, a harness to a strip of floor a thousand feet above the ground. It was night-time, the whole city a lattice of lights and neon.

By turning not just physical spaces but also events into tourist sites, history and memory become available for purchase. The 9/11 Memorial & Museum now has its own shop where you can get a

¹⁰³ William Grimes, "Windows That Rose so Close To the Sun," *New York Times*, September 19, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/19/dining/windows-that-rose-so-close-to-the-sun.html>.

necklace shaped like the Ground Zero cross and mugs decorated with cartoon rescue dogs. And while buying a miniature Liberty Bell may be the same thing as buying a Twin Towers mug, these do not feel like equivalent acts. Perhaps because an object comes to stand in for the event itself, just as any vacation souvenir eventually symbolizes the trip as a whole. It is the past moment enclosed in a material thing. In the case of 9/11, that past includes the death of thousands and the destruction and reimagining of a whole swath of New York City, this is exactly what these objects contain. Moreover, any photograph changes its people (and the day) from subjects into objects.¹⁰⁴ It is an act of transformation. As Susan Sontag observed, “Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as a piece of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire.”¹⁰⁵ The flag, or a postcard, or a t-shirt, then, comes to represent history, yes, but it also erases what that history was; it dilutes it into something small and portable. It is history sanitized, but also the encapsulation of history within personal objects. But photographs are overt reminders of grief, and they do not allow for this erasure, which is why buying a 9/11 bracelet and a 9/11 photograph are different. They are anguishing in different ways.

I remember exactly the moment when 9/11 collided with my life. I was twelve and sitting in the kitchen eating Cheerios while reading the comics. The sky was blue and warm, the start of Indian summer, the same as in New York, what writer David Remnick called a “crystal blue bowl of morning sky.”¹⁰⁶ My parents leaned against the kitchen counter and told me and my brother that while we slept two planes crashed into the World Trade Center and the buildings then collapsed.

¹⁰⁴ Ernst van Alphen, *Staging the Archive: Art and Photography in the Age of New Media* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2014), 202.

¹⁰⁵ Sontag, 4.

¹⁰⁶ David Remnick in “Blue: what everyone would remember first,” *New York*, August 27, 2011, <http://nymag.com/news/9-11/10th-anniversary/blue-sky/>.

Sometimes, a souvenir isn't necessary. I don't need to own a photograph to know that history happened.

Nevertheless, in the beginning at least, the aims of both *Here Is New York* and *The September 11th Photo Project* were modest: to understand and humanize 9/11, and to reckon with its representation, so that somehow, out of the tens of thousands of images and a plurality of vantagepoints and views, a narrative might emerge. Many of these photographs look almost identical to one another, taken just inches or a block or two apart. Ash covered storefronts, windows, messages written in dust, candles, rubble, smoke; crowds staring upwards, mouths agape, crowds gathered in front of televisions and jumbotrons, crowds running. The photographs may be individual objects, but they exist within a larger continuum of images, a simultaneous archive if you will.¹⁰⁷ And by showing them alongside one another, the photographs are forced to speak to each other, to link up thematically and express a visual rhythm. Photography is never a purely visual experience, and by asking for a material and physical engagement, these images encourage narration and conversation – they ask for stories – and this is a practice, a ritual, specific to the medium.¹⁰⁸ Through these haptic encounters and their relation to domestic traditions, photographs interact with audiences, steer conversations and exhume memories. As places to exchange stories and reminisce, to commune, in many ways, *Here is New York* and *The September 11th Photo Project* became like memorials.

¹⁰⁷ Cole, "A Photograph Never Stands Alone."

¹⁰⁸ For a discussion of the haptic rituals associated with photography, see Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs and the Sound of History," *Visual Anthropology Review*, vol. 21, no. 1-2 (2005): 27-46.

The Twin Towers fell in New York, but the rings of impact and aftershocks rippled nationally and globally, so the act of looking too was shared. Accordingly, part of experiencing these images, in a book, on television, in an exhibition, had to do with a collective processing, that somehow there will be one narrative, coherent and accepted. But it also means re-experiencing the trauma again and again, a somewhat macabre act. The repetitive photographs, in addition to the thousands on view at *Here is New York* or *The September 11th Photo Project*, not only reproduce the tragedy, but also continue to produce it. They beat you over the head with the same photographs of the same towers burning in the same way. Repeated exposure may ultimately dull any response, but only if the shock loses its acuteness. Otherwise, it is like poking at a bruise: it still will hurt no matter how many times you jab yourself.

9/11 was more than fifteen years ago, and in viewing hours of news reports, I am struck by how hard it still is to watch. Every newscast, every recording from the day: it is all crushing. In Oursler's *9/11*, we see him go from bewilderment to shock to terror, spiralling beyond comprehension all in real time. And I do the same, even though I already know what is coming, all the news and speeches that will happen over the next two decades. Maybe the knowing is what makes this all the harder to view, the way that events played out in the past but also carry over into now. They lack the finality of a full-stop. Roland Barthes described the photograph as a "*thing that has been there.*"¹⁰⁹ It is the past continuing into the now, time overlaid, the grammatical tense known as the present perfect. A photograph shows what was "irrefutably present" and now is already over.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 76, emphasis in the original.

¹¹⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 77.

Barthes wrote about wanting photographs to be “*habitable* not visitable [sic].”¹¹¹ In writing this he was responding to an image of an old Mediterranean house. It is somewhat shabby with window shades outlined in arabesque whorls, and there is, I think, a bright, cloudless sky in a black and white scene. It is that post-vacation glow where you want to be back in the sunshine, but this is also a house, a place to live beyond any trip. A tourist photograph will always fail to satisfy this desire for the habitable because a tourist, by definition, is just a visitor, an excursionist, a sightseer. The tourist ducks in and out, a surface skim in search of a supposedly genuine experience distinct to his or her own ordinary life. So, the visitable provides only a shallow understanding of and engagement with a place. But photographs of tragedies, these devastating 9/11 images, defy such categorization. No one wants to re-inhabit 9/11, but it also seems impossible to access and visit in some cursory and fleeting manner in the way that *Here is New York* and *The September 11th Photo Project* ask of us.

In the photographs of 9/11, however, in those of all tragedies and disasters, there appears to be a second tense, the hypothetical of the subjunctive. The subjunctive is often understood to be the wish tense, the space for desire and intention, but it also offers up counterfactual possibilities, the things that have not happened. In the case of a photograph, looking seems a way of entering a liminal space where alternative realities, be they hideous or beautiful, can play out. It is the same as daydreaming if potentially more terrifying. “If I had been there, I would have...” as a subjunctive construction allows for hypotheses and propositions restricted to the here and now. Any danger is confined to and contained within the temporal frame. We can time-travel in the

¹¹¹ Barthes, 38, emphasis in original.

face of mortality, fear and pain, but it remains a risk-free enterprise. A photograph itself might not be inhabitable but visiting can take on different forms beyond tourism. To look now, almost twenty years later, is to dip into a tragedy and, in some cases, out again. Looking, then, seems to be as much about the act of mourning as it is about confirming life; it can allow for invention and misunderstanding. At the very least, it is to be reminded that if I had been there, I might not be here. Looking, to paraphrase F. Scott Fitzgerald, makes us boats against the current of time, but it also reminds us of this present time as it moves us forward, on and on, ad infinitum.¹¹²

Given this passage of time and what we now know loomed imminently ahead, it makes sense that the Marc Jacobs' post-runway bash has come to be described as the last hurrah at the end of an era no one knew was ending; *PAPER* magazine called it a "tragically dazzling snapshot" of New York before everything changed.¹¹³ But there are always other parties, other restaurants and other finales, all of which would peak and droop, the ebb and flow of a city and its young people. Hindsight is 20/20, but maybe each generation feels like it owns a version of New York and that at some point, that city came to an end; September 11th was just a rather more obvious and louder conclusion, and for Colen, McGinley and Snow, it marked the beginning of an ascent bound up with the city.

Tina Brown's launch for the new magazine *Talk* on August 2, 1999 was another 'last of that era'. The party was going to be held at the city-owned Brooklyn Naval Yards, but Mayor Rudy Giuliani

¹¹² F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925, 1953), 182.

¹¹³ Christopher Barnard, "Looking Back at Marc Jacobs' Fashion Timeline," *PAPER*, September 13, 2017, <http://www.papermag.com/looking-back-at-marc-jacobs-fashion-timeline-2484826398.html>.

objected, supposedly after learning that Hilary Clinton was gracing the magazine's first cover; they were opponents in that year's New York Senate race.¹¹⁴ The venue was switched to the Statue of Liberty where around a thousand guests were ferried from Manhattan for the night. Brown remembers sailing by the blinking glow of the Twin Towers.¹¹⁵ On Liberty Island, partygoers were greeted by strings of fairy lights and paper lanterns. Madonna was there, along with Christopher Buckley, Rupert Everett, Kate Moss and, the woman of the moment, Sarah Jessica Parker. Journalist David Carr called it a "literal fin de siècle."¹¹⁶

Sex and the City, which starred Parker, had debuted only a year earlier but was already a sensation. The show gave us Carrie Bradshaw and her friends, dazzling and unresolved, imaginary, honest—"glamorously unthreatening."¹¹⁷ In Bradshaw's world, you dine at the Monkey Bar and Le Bernardin, shop at Bergdorf Goodman, and lounge in Bryant Park and The Plaza (fig. 12). Plastered in graffiti, the Lower East Side is still edgy enough to be cool, and public transportation is a punishment. In real life, if *Sex and the City* ever could have been real life, Carrie and her girlfriends would definitely have been invited to the *Talk* party. The show is a portrait of Manhattan that privileges a whitewashed and affluent narrative. But, by doing so, it makes the city into an illusion, transforming it into somewhere both recognizable and abstract, glossy, opulent and dotted with the icons of New York, but still entirely fictional. It proposes an alternative psychic reading of the city.

¹¹⁴ Tina Brown, "Longform Podcast #275: Tina Brown," interview by Max Linsky, *Longform Podcast*, December 20, 2017, 50:04, <https://longform.org/posts/longform-podcast-275-tina-brown>.

¹¹⁵ Tina Brown, interview.

¹¹⁶ David Carr, "10 Years Ago, An Omen No One Saw," *The New York Times*, August 2, 2009, B1.

¹¹⁷ Emily Nussbaum, "Difficult Women: How 'Sex and the City' lost its good name," *The New Yorker*, July 29, 2013, 64.

That image of New York City offers a sense of “endless narratives, endless pleasures,” and endless possibilities.¹¹⁸ Cultural historian Deborah Jermyn has argued that this can be traced back to New York City’s identity as keeper of the American dream, both historically (e.g. the literal gates at Ellis Island) and metaphorically (e.g. the lyrics in Frank Sinatra’s “New York”: If I can make it there / I’ll make it anywhere / It’s up to you, New York, New York.) *Sex and the City* simply extends New York’s romantic heritage, a legacy that owes as much to tradition as it does to cinema and literature.¹¹⁹ By filming on location and not on a soundstage like so many other programmes supposedly set in New York, by referencing actual restaurants, streets and stores, this fantasy is enveloped in an aura of authenticity, despite the fact that *Sex and the City* was thirty minutes of pure entertainment. As a result, each episode is decidedly and unashamedly pro-New York City.

What *Sex and the City* and Colen, Snow and McGinley – this downtown scene – share is a complete reliance on and devotion to New York. Both were existences that wholly required a specific, almost fictitious framing of the city. If *Sex and the City* was shot at locations that preserved and promoted an unattainable sense of fantasy, that was because those ‘sets’ made sense for the narrative arc of the show. In this glitzed-up New York, the only problems were personal and small-scale. It is fundamentally narcissistic world. The show may be fiction, but what it encapsulates isn’t entirely fake, just aspirational. It proffers a lifestyle, elite and unusual, that was exciting because of its exclusivity, because it had yet to be watered down, and because it didn’t entirely exist.

¹¹⁸ Deborah Jermyn, *Sex and the City* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), 73.

¹¹⁹ Jermyn, *Sex and the City*, 73.

“The events of 9/11,” argued cinema historian Sarah Projansky, “seemed to be a protected space, somehow beyond analysis and held separate from popular culture.”¹²⁰ This is why in *Sex and the City* there is no September 11, 2001, because this New York is a fairyland and a simulacrum. In fact, there is no September 2001 at all; the fourth season skipped from August 2001 to January 2002 as if the attacks on the twin towers were so big, they had to expunge the entire months around them as well. After 9/11, the towers were edited out of the opening credits, as executive producer Michael Patrick King opted for maximal escapism over reminders of reality.¹²¹ It is a purposeful elision, though in sync with the show’s specific landscape where the political was only ever somewhat personal and never extended into a larger dialogue. In *Sex and the City*, in the New York of the show, the towers simply ceased to be.

I keep reading about how people tried to return the twin towers to the sky, both physically, as in the construction of One World Trade Center which opened in 2013, but also metaphorically too. Speaking about his novel *Let the Great World Spin* (2009), which tells of Philippe Petit’s 1974 tightrope-crossing between the north and south towers, Colum McCann explained that writing “can put the towers back up in the air.”¹²² There are still postcards for sale all over New York that show the World Trade Center, and like One World Trade Center, the photographs imply that making the towers anew is all that is needed to fix the skyline. Putting them back is as much about memorialization as it is about defining what had happened and now is. But if they never existed, there would be no need for rebuilding as there was nothing to be destroyed in the first

¹²⁰ Sarah Projansky, “Teaching through Feelings and Personal Beliefs: 9/11 as Case Study,” *Cinema Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2, (Winter 2004): 107.

¹²¹ Emily Nussbaum, “Sex and the City: was it still okay to drink cosmos?” *New York*, August 27, 2011, <http://nymag.com/news/9-11/10th-anniversary/sex-and-the-city/>.

¹²² Colum McCann interviewed for “9/11: A Reckoning,” *New York Times*, September 2, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/09/02/us/sept-11-reckoning/artists.html#/artists/Colum>.

place. By eliminating the biggest erasure in New York's recent history, *Sex and the City* could continue to project its reality onto the urban fabric. However skeletal it was, it could make New York magical again.

Sex and the City proposed an imaginary embedded in the city's structures, in its glittering and encrusted façade of glass and metal. But this was the same topography that produced Snow's graffiti, which itself suggests another kind of fantasy that too is actively contingent upon these same sites and buildings. Snow along with Kunle Martins founded the graffiti crew IRAK, which stood for 'I rak' meaning 'I shoplift,' and not Iraq the country, though the homonym cannot have been lost on them. From its inception, IRAK positioned itself as a different sort of crew, unconcerned with the bravado most often assumed of taggers. As artist Bruce LaBruce crudely put it:

The fact that both Ryan [McGinley] and Earsnot [Martins] are openly fag in the circles in which they travel is pretty remarkable, but it's something you don't really think about when you hang with them because they are so unfaggy... And most writers aren't really down with the gay thing, so it's pretty brave for this crew to be so "fuck you" about it.¹²³

Their graffiti covered all five boroughs, scaling buildings and subway tunnels, mailboxes, fences and doorways; the IRAK tag was written in a sans serif font with fat, blocky letters. They were supposedly the first crew to include "artist weirdos," purposefully mixing the art world with the city's nightlife, or at least the first crew that claimed to be remembered for doing so.¹²⁴ But Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, among many others, counter this assertion. The legend of IRAK owes much to Snow, who, in 1998, did a fill-in of his tag Sace on the side of the Brooklyn Bridge,

¹²³ Bruce LaBruce, "The VICE Guide To New York Graffiti," *Vice*, December 1, 2001, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/mv3zm3/graf-v8n3.

¹²⁴ Kathy Grayson, "Dash Snow" in *Art in the Streets*, ed. Jeffrey Deitch (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2011), 126.

a site that is exceptionally difficult to climb and thus rarely graffitied.¹²⁵ A year after Snow's death, a collection of IRAK t-shirts and keychains were released by the New York label ALIFE, and the crew continues to be talked about in blog posts and comment threads which praise tags and throw ups of past and present.¹²⁶

"My crew really lived in our own world," McGinley said. "We slept all day and were out on adventures at night. We were really the only people in each other's lives."¹²⁷ He routinely documented IRAK: *SACE (Canal Ledge)* (2001), for example, shows Snow seated on a seemingly unreachable ledge overlooking Canal Street (fig. 13). His face is hidden; we can just make out a mop of hair, outstretched legs and flashy sneakers whose orange is mirrored in both the traffic cones and streaky spray-paint. Everything is bathed in the yellow glow of the lamplight's flare. The photograph fossilizes him at twenty hovering above the world. From our vantage point, it is as if we are hanging over the same ledge too, as if we get the same adrenaline joy, and part of the appeal comes from the discovery of somewhere out-of-bounds.

I am drawn to this image, suckered in by the swirling light and the way it feels like being ridiculous and young. *SACE* feels like staying up until dawn and riding the late subway home, of being stupid and laughing about it later, of having no consequences and no sense that there could be any. It presents an entire outlook in the same way that great fashion spreads show off not just clothing but also an existence and a poetics of the body. It isn't that I necessarily want to wear this specific

¹²⁵ Foster Kramer, "Brooklyn Bridge Tagged With Graffiti for the First Time Since Clinton Was in Office," *The Observer*, June 28, 2012, <https://observer.com/2012/06/brooklyn-bridge-bombed-tagged-graffiti-lewy-06282012/>.

¹²⁶ On Reddit, for example, a thread of comments from July 2018 celebrated sightings of Snow's old tag. See https://www.reddit.com/r/Bombing/comments/8suphm/irak_wish_i_knew_this_story/, accessed on March 22, 2019.

¹²⁷ Kin Woo, "Almost Two Decades Later, Ryan McGinley Revisits His Youth," *T Magazine*, February 6, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/06/t-magazine/art/ryan-mcginley-kids-were-alright-museum-contemporary-art-denver.html>.

dress or pair of heels, but that I want to be the girl who life requires those shoes. Fashion shoots and runway shows are settings for desire, and similarly, *SACE* is a scene supersaturated by its own invincibility; like an advertisement, it seems glamorously straightforward. I can imagine *SACE* blown-up on a billboard and, in fact, the shoes' placement closely mirrors a 1985 advertisement for Nike Dunks. It is also, however, a technically accomplished photograph. The line of Snow's cigarette almost perfectly aligns with the edge of the building; the whole image is a web of intersecting lines. Whereas advertisements traffic in and promote an eternal optimism, Snow's death ten years later has now also been branded into the image's iconography. *SACE* is a nostalgic photograph that was already highly nostalgic when it was taken; in the expanse of time, the image has accrued new meanings. It shows us New York at its most innocent, when dangling out a tall building didn't conjure memories of burning skyscrapers. Even the construction cones crowding the street point to the optimism of new developments and growing up.

In *SACE*, this confidence also comes through its 'outlaw' aesthetics, as the photograph presents graffiti as an exuberant rush. Yet tagging is so often associated with degradation and blight, a concern which extends beyond the physical buildings to include the writers themselves. It is for vandals and hoodlums, and is a punishable crime, but in its essence, graffiti is a totem to the present moment and a sign of the endless variability within an urban environment. These facades are not static, no matter how much we may love them, even though the surfaces painted upon are often those that have been overlooked and neglected: a parking lot or subway tunnel, the subway cars themselves, underneath an overpass. In certain ways, graffiti reinforces this disregard as tagging itself is a clandestine act. But it also occurs out in the open and the product – the text and images

– are wholly visible. Graffiti is both exposed and secretive, words legible to only a select few yet on display for the entire world.

American artist Gordon Matta-Clark was known for his incisions into the sides of buildings, a form of mark making which was not wholly dissimilar to graffiti. In *Day's End* (1975), he cut out a half-moon from the wall of Pier 52 through which the sun curved across the floor like a sail of light (fig. 14). *Day's End* could only have happened in the abandoned piers of the West Side waterfront; elsewhere Matta-Clark would have been seen and reported. The piers have always been both of and entirely separate to the city's fabric, simultaneously symbiotic and incompatible, a relationship reinforced by his intercession into the city physical. It was both creative and destructive, and decidedly irreversible.

If *Sex and the City* presents a love letter to Manhattan, it was committed to one unwavering vision of the city itself. But IRAK's throw-ups and tags, like Matta-Clark's cut, are their own form of admiration that too depended upon this glamorous and fictional world. Graffiti is an intervention into a built environment and a rallying cry, and like most crews, IRAK sought out bold, grand gestures. McGinley told me, "Dash was the most-wanted graffiti artist in Manhattan. He was wanted by the vandal squad. This is why we [McGinley and Colen] fell in love with him."¹²⁸ In the wake of September 11th, these tags illustrate the fluctuating and uncertain identity of New York itself. They may fragment the city, but such fragments serve as reminders of lost projects and unrealized dreams. Graffiti is way to gain power over a place, however brief, before it changes yet again.

¹²⁸ Ryan McGinley interviewed by the author, New York, April 16, 2018.

In the spring of 2006, the 73rd Whitney Biennial, *Day for Night* opened as a post-9/11 reckoning with the ever-evolving political and material present. The underlying theme of *Day for Night* was agency: who has it and how it can frustrate institutions, successfully or otherwise. It was a challenge that was both expansive and curatorially ambitious. More than a hundred artists were represented, and although the exhibition included international artists, the biennial has always had a somewhat nationalist bent, in part as it is staged at the Whitney Museum of *American Art*. The exhibition took as its starting point the belief that “America has become more of a nation than an ideal.”¹²⁹ Much of the exhibited work was suffused with anxiety owing to, the catalogue suggests, the Bush years and ongoing war in Iraq, but also to the tensions between mass culture, institutional power and what the curators termed the underground. How, the exhibition asked, do these affect identity formation, and does knowing that do anything to clarify this strange, particular moment? Both Snow and Colen had works selected for *Day for Night*, an inclusion which brought about greater visibility to their practices. Snow showed a series of Polaroids, while Colen presented *Untitled* (2004), a sculpture of a wooden fence surrounding outlandish objects made of papier-mâché. Inspired by a detail of Jeff Wall’s photograph *The Vampire’s Picnic* (1991), *Untitled* is composed of graffitied planks surrounding a collection of objects including a truck tyre and a monstrous plastic cockroach (figs. 15-16). The Whitney described it as “an evocation of somebody else’s squalid reality and an intoxicating fiction.”¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Introduction to Chrissie Iles, *2006 Whitney Biennial: Day for Night* (New York: Abrams Books, 2006), 19.

¹³⁰ “Dan Colen,” *2006 Whitney Biennial: Day for Night* (New York: Abrams Books, 2006), 206.

Using the imaginary character Toni Burlap to author their catalogue essay, the biennial's curators Chrissie Iles and Philippe Vergne probed the idea of layered identities, both temporally and politically. *Day for Night* included a series of sub-exhibitions, fake artists, false fronts and "uncertain identities", embodied not only in Colen's 'fence' but in works by Elaine Sturtevant and the presentation by the Wrong Gallery, the perennially closed exhibition space in Chelsea.¹³¹ These artists crib from different moments in art history, gestures which point to an art that skips in time but does such a consideration liberate the present from the "repressed moments" of an older order?¹³² Critic's responses were varied as to whether the exhibition staged a radical intervention or if that proposition remained "a tantalizingly, unfulfilled possibility."¹³³ Generally, however, they agreed that it was an ambitious stab at representation and what it may take to upset entrenched institutions.¹³⁴

Much of the art shown addressed and assessed history as a means of understanding the current world. In the wake of a tragedy, a reckoning in time occurs too, as the subjunctive rears its head again. Journalist Rupert Cornwell referred to the years after September 11th as a "lost decade," a direct reference to Gertrude Stein's famous rebuke, "You are all a *génération perdue*."¹³⁵ Lost, for the generation who came of age during World War I, was to be directionless and adrift, not

¹³¹ Mark Stevens, "The Biennial Question," *New York*, February 17, 2006, <http://nymag.com/arts/art/features/16039/>.

¹³² Toni Burlap, "The Euclidean Triangle," *2006 Whitney Biennial: Day for Night* (New York: Abrams Books, 2006), 32.

¹³³ William Powhida, "Pre-Occupation," *The Brooklyn Rail*, April 10, 2006, <https://brooklynrail.org/2006/4/art/whitney-biennial-2006-day-for-night>.

¹³⁴ See: Ben Davies, "Labeling the Whitney," *Artnet*, n. date, <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/davis/davis3-2-06.asp>; Jerry Saltz, "Biennial in Babylon," *The Village Voice*, February 28, 2006, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2006/02/28/biennial-in-babylon/>; and Robert C. Morgan et al, "Whitney Biennial 2006: Day for Night," *The Brooklyn Rail*, April 10, 2006, <https://brooklynrail.org/2006/4/art/whitney-biennial-2006-day-for-night>.

¹³⁵ Rupert Cornwell, "9/11 lost decade: The American dream, and the missing years," *The Independent*, September 10, 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/911-lost-decade-the-american-dream-and-the-missing-years-2352870.html>, emphasis in the original.

missing, though there were plenty missing as well. September 11th, Cornwell argues, had a similar effect, disorienting and, at times, paralyzing. So much so that the enormity of the attacks, the feeling, as Colen explained to me, of “losing New York City,” became a uniting force.¹³⁶ The idea of Generation 9/11 gets tossed around occasionally by places as varied as the *Huffington Post* and the Center for American Progress. No conclusion has been reached as to whether such a generational rupture really exists. You could, for example, bind all those born after September 11th together, a cohort of individuals who have grown up during the longest war in American history and who have only ever known aggressive TSA measures. But the idea of a demarcated generation is amorphous and wobbly. A person born in 1983 and a person born in 1999 are both called Millennials, even though the former remembers the development of dial-up internet while the latter hadn’t even turned ten by the time the iPhone was released. Grouping those together who came of age just before September 11th, their first years of adulthood coinciding with the attack, is just as valid and perhaps more useful. In this framing, 9/11 serves as an indication not of a global shift, but of a personal one, from childhood to adulthood.

Colen likes to stress the importance of September 11th on his life and his friendships: “I think when 9/11 happened we hadn’t [all] really become close yet.”¹³⁷ For him, September 11th marks the day New York changed yes, but also the fusing of his friends into a whole world; the inextricable merging of the macro and the micro. To me, he made it seem almost like his group’s origin story which, if it were true, would be astounding, something out of a superhero movie, the type of tale you would tell your grandchildren. Instead, by 9/11, he and McGinley, friends since high school,

¹³⁶ Dan Colen interviewed by the author, New York, September 6, 2017.

¹³⁷ Fan Zhong, “The NY Art Scene After 9/11: A (Very) Condensed Oral History by Dan Colen and Aaron Bondaroff,” *W*, July 7, 2011, <https://www.wmagazine.com/story/dan-colen-aaron-bondaroff-ohwow>.

were already living together in the East Village and they already knew Snow. And this is what McGinley's photographs suggest: that the only way to contend with the incomprehensible is to translate it into something personal, to make it fit within a life. (Even so, McGinley told me that he doesn't himself invest much in 9/11 within the trajectory of his own life, although there was a view of the Twin Towers from his 7th street apartment.¹³⁸) But I can understand how, as a moment pinpointed in time, Colen could see a clear before and after.

It was partially on this premise, the localized significance of September 11th, that Colen, McGinley and Snow (posthumously) were included in the 2011 exhibition *Post 9-11* at what was then the OHWOW Gallery in Los Angeles. OHWOW (now MORÁN MORÁN) was co-founded by brothers Al and Mills Moran, and Aaron Bondaroff, known as 'A-Ron the Downtown Don', a close friend of Colen, McGinley and Snow's from their earliest days in the city. (On February 5, 2018, Bondaroff resigned from his position at the gallery amid claims of sexual misconduct.¹³⁹) *Post 9-11* featured works by six other artists also associated with New York's downtown scene: Terrence Koh, Hanna Liden, Nate Lowman (Colen's studio partner for a few years), Adam McEwen, Snow's ex-wife Agathe Snow, and Aaron Young. As Colen succinctly put it: "Our lives kind of made this show possible."¹⁴⁰

Post 9-11 presented a "visual memoir of a notable era," but the exhibition featured only one work that was of and about September 11th, a single Polaroid shot by Snow, an index of the day

¹³⁸ Ryan McGinley interviewed on the phone by the author, May 16, 2017.

¹³⁹ Rachel Corbett, "Art Dealer Aaron Bondaroff Resigns From His LA Gallery Amid Accusations Of Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour," *Artnet news*, February 5, 2018, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/dealer-aaron-bondaroff-accused-inappropriate-sexual-behavior-1215893>.

¹⁴⁰ Zhong, "The NY Art Scene After 9/11: A (Very) Condensed Oral History by Dan Colen and Aaron Bondaroff."

itself (fig. 17).¹⁴¹ At some point, Snow had joined his friends downtown, or maybe they had circled by his apartment and picked him up, I have no idea. In the Polaroid, shirtless men wearing their t-shirts like surgical masks and capes lean and climb confidently on a police car.¹⁴² One flips off the camera. It looks like a still from Larry Clark's *Kids* (1995) which, incidentally, starred their friend Leo Fitzpatrick. They pose like an album cover, trying to look cooler and tougher than they were. It is arrogant like a gang of teenage boys is arrogant in that everything is a dare, and they weren't so far off from being teenagers themselves. Critic Catherine Wagley called it "the most dickish Ground Zero photo," an unsurprising comment given the reactions to Hoepker's work and how much more ruthless this image is.¹⁴³

Within *Post-9/11*, the Polaroid served as a framing device for the entire exhibition and established the beginning of the era after 9/11, the stage upon which the effects play out. Furthermore, it sets the tone for the art to come, as it evokes a jaded sort of bleakness, but also grit and an unwillingness to obey. Of the rest of the works exhibited, forged out of a decade of collaboration and communication, the gallery called them "defiant, irreverent, destructive...sublime, utopian and emotive."¹⁴⁴ McGinley showed two photographs both bathed in a drippy, gilded light. In *Tom (Golden Tunnel)* (2010) a naked man, backside to the camera, saunters down train tracks towards a glowing orb, the walls crinkle and gleam like foil. The press

¹⁴¹ Press Release for "Post 9-11," OHWOW Gallery, June 30, 2011, <https://moranbondaroff.com/exhibits/post-9-11/>.

¹⁴² The Polaroid is framed by Chase Manhattan Bank and Jean Dubuffet's black-and-white sculpture *Group of Four Trees* (1969-1972) part of Dubuffet's cycle *L'hourloupe* which plays on doodling and fluidity of lines. According to Pace Gallery's press release, the title was meant to evoke a rumble and a threat. *Loup* is French for wolf, and the pronunciation of *l'hourloupe* sounds similar to *hurler* or *hululer* (to roar and to hoot respectively). Read in English, however, with an English pronunciation, *hourloupe* sounds like hour loop, or the ways time can seem never-ending and monstrous.

¹⁴³ Catherine Wagley, "'Post 9/11' Exhibit at OHWOW Gallery: What 21st Century Art of Rebellion Looks Like," *L. A. Weekly*, July 15, 2011, <http://www.laweekly.com/arts/post-9-11-exhibit-at-ohwow-gallery-what-21st-century-art-of-rebellion-looks-like-2372258>.

¹⁴⁴ Press Release for "Post 9-11."

release described it as “transcendent in its ethereal treatment as it is existential in its choreography and open-ended narrative” (fig. 18).¹⁴⁵ His other photograph, *Taylor (Rushing River)* (2011) is suffused in the same pale yellows, a tiny face barely visible amidst the froth (fig. 19). It is a scene which inadvertently echoes the dust clouds, that undulating avalanche, of the twin towers’ collapse. More urban in sensibility were Colen’s tarred and feathered canvas, *Blop!* (2011), an ostensible reference to the “barbaric and archaic act of social punishment,” and Snow’s *Untitled* (2008), a large photograph of an unidentifiable mess, like splattered food on the pavement, like fireworks’ streaky residue (figs. 20-21).¹⁴⁶ Both seem wet, tactile, something like a squashed pigeon.

In the same exhibition was a bubbly pink neon sign by Canadian artist Terence Koh reading ‘the regeneration’ in looping cursive (fig. 22). Hyper interested in texts of all forms, artist Adam McEwen stamped black letters onto the floor spelling out RATS, MICE, SNAKES, the underground animals swarming New York’s subway. Nearby, were two of photographer and sculptor Hanna Liden’s puffed-up t-shirts printed with ‘New York Fuckin City’ (fig. 23). In addition, actor and gallerist Leo Fitzpatrick (of *Kids* fame) contributed portraits of each exhibiting artist. Taken between 2006 and 2009, the nine black and white images are just snapshots from different days: Colen on vacation, a cropped portrait of neo-pop artist Nate Lowman with a light glare, Snow, shirtless, playing a grand piano (fig. 24).

According to the press release, these artists seemingly “sidestep[ped] categorization into a particular movement or style” yet when taken together speak to a personalized, individual history

¹⁴⁵ Press Release for “Post 9-11.”

¹⁴⁶ Press Release for “Post 9-11.”

and culture that “translates myriad reactions.”¹⁴⁷ Bondaroff said that the show was a reunion of sorts, that this is what New York is always all about, a circle of friends you spend your life with and through whom you experience the city.¹⁴⁸ For the catalogue, he wrote:

As kids we didn’t quite fit in. We weren’t comfortable in our neighbourhoods or in our schools or in the towns that we grew up in. So as soon as we got the chance to run away, we all ran to this ten-block radius of Manhattan called Downtown.¹⁴⁹

That downtown could be a mentality and a psychic space, and capitalised no less, is an intriguing construction, but one the show didn’t fully probe. Furthermore, naming an exhibition *Post 9-11* is a deliberate choice and asks for some sort of engagement, a thesis no matter how thin or runny, so the lack thereof comes across as lazy, as if sidestepping categorization was just another way of saying we weren’t sure how to think about this and didn’t want to spend the time doing so.

Looking back, *Post 9-11* comes across as an almost direct response to the New Museum of Contemporary Art’s exhibition *The Generational Triennial: Younger than Jesus* (2009), which didn’t include any of these artists. When the exhibition opened, the museum itself was still somewhat new to the Bowery. Founded in 1977, its first home was at the Graduate Centre at the New School for Social Research at 65 Fifth Avenue until it relocated to the Astor Building at 583 Broadway in 1983, right at SoHo’s upper bound. Lack of space coupled with a desire for its own designated building led to an architectural competition in 2002, but it wasn’t until 2007 that the new New Museum opened at 235 Bowery, the western border of the Lower East Side. The stacked mesh boxes are striking on a block home mostly to kitchen supply wholesalers. Unlike the Upper East Side’s Museum Mile or the density of galleries in Chelsea, when it opened, the New Museum was the only major arts institution in the area. The move signalled that the Lower East Side was a

¹⁴⁷ Press Release for “Post 9-11.”

¹⁴⁸ Zhong, “The NY Art Scene After 9/11.”

¹⁴⁹ Aaron Bondaroff, “Introduction,” *Post 9-11* (New York: OHWOW Book Club, 2011), 5.

fitting location for a museum dedicated to new art and new ideas that would hopefully (re)turn critics, scenesters, buyers and curators to Lower Manhattan. Of course, this was where Snow and friends had been living and working all along, and where artists like Nan Goldin, Keith Haring, David Wojnarowicz and Jean-Michel Basquiat had lived and worked too.

Younger than Jesus was the first of the New Museum's triennials, and it grouped together fifty international artists born in or after 1976. All were younger than thirty-three, the age at which Jesus died. The exhibition had the modest aim of investigating a generation's visual culture. It was a multi-floor, multimedia assemblage. Most of the exhibition's anointed stars are still stars: Cyprian Gaillard, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Ryan Trecartin. A few overlooked in reviews, such as Cory Arcangel and Tauba Auerbach for example, have become more well-known. In addition to the catalogue, the museum published a directory listing everyone nominated as well as the 150 curators, writers and academics who recommended the artists for selection; it was a refreshing gesture towards transparency.

Across the board critics had similar concerns: that the show was "crowded" (Brian Boucher, *Art in America*), "episodic" (Holland Cotter, *The New York Times*) and, at moments, "frustrating" (Jerry Saltz, *New York*), in part because bringing together an exhibition entirely based on age (like geography) can feel arbitrary and somewhat unsystematic.¹⁵⁰ In his review though, Saltz wrote approvingly, "They're [the *Younger than Jesus* artists] investigating the whole world, not just the art world. Their work is less about how we affect time and people than about how time and people

¹⁵⁰ See: Brian Boucher, "Review: Younger than Jesus," *Art in America*, June 6, 2009, <https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/younger-than-jesus/>; Holland Cotter, "Young Artists, Caught in the Act," *New York Times*, April 9, 2009, C23; and Jerry Saltz, "Jesus' Saves," *New York*, April 9, 2009, <http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/55977/>.

affect us.”¹⁵¹ This seems to have been the (desired) thread unifying the exhibited works, as broad as it may have been. *Younger than Jesus* did not develop a totalizing narrative, but instead presented an informal network, diverse and adaptable. Saltz as well as the show’s curators, Lauren Cornell, Massimiliano Gioni and Laura Hoptman, suggest that, at its best, what *Younger than Jesus* offers is outward-looking and inclusive.

Gioni explained that, for the artists shown, there may have been a return to the use of ‘I’ but that it was “an individual voice...one that is thought of as immediately sharable, interchangeable, highly compatible and, as such, hopelessly compromised, alienated, massified.”¹⁵² This ‘I’ seems to ricochet globally, whereas the ‘I’ advanced by *Post 9-11* was more closed-off. Perhaps, this is because the exhibition lacked the same geographical and ethnic diversity, but also because it proposed a contradictory attitude towards the greater world after September 11th by artists of the same age. Wagley wrote in her review of *Post-9/11*, “If their art is a fair gauge, they held out little hope for the world at large, but they had unwavering faith in their own ability to persist and bend their worlds to their will.”¹⁵³ Faith, it seemed, came from within.

On a cloudless Tuesday morning, two airplanes crashed into what were once, for a moment, the world’s tallest buildings. When the twin towers were completed in 1971, they dwarfed the Empire State Building only to be surpassed two years later by Chicago’s Sears Tower. 2,615 people were killed at the World Trade Center site, a figure that comprises those inside the two

¹⁵¹ Jerry Saltz, “‘Jesus’ Saves.” *New York*, 9 April 2009, <http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/55977/>.

¹⁵² Massimiliano Gioni, “We are Too Many,” in *Younger Than Jesus: The Generation Book* ed. Lauren Cornell, Massimiliano Gioni, Laura Hoptman, and Brian Sholis (Steidl Publishers, 2009), 35.

¹⁵³ Catherine Wagley, “Post 9/11’ Exhibit at OHWOW Gallery: What 21st Century Art of Rebellion Looks Like.”

towers as well as first responders, the passengers on American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175, and the terrorists themselves. The day was so perfectly clear that on the tenth anniversary of the attacks, Tina Brown would compare the blue sky to “the last moments of American innocence.”¹⁵⁴

Out of the ashes of that unbelievable explosion emerged thousands of photographs, hours of footage, a collection of images and records taken in time. These photographs have a presentness which makes them poignant and affective but also, they belong to something that has already occurred. Photographs are always fighting time. This happens as soon as the shutter clicks closed, and it is the reason an archive is never fully set as subjects and events are things without closure. It is why so many of these images seem almost too much of a superlative to be real and why there is always a different way to react and to process. Time itself can make even the firmest outlines fuzzy and pliant so that nothing feels appropriate or genuine enough. But I also think that photographs call out for a script and, consequently, become the lens through which we remember.¹⁵⁵ While not exactly fictions, these imperfect documents (and how could there ever be perfect records?) filter the past and, in turn, alter our understanding. They became emblematic for all that September 11th came to signify.

Barthes wrote about the photograph as an object that had been and still is, and the same is true for places. They live on in images and in stories, even as new businesses and people move in: a city

¹⁵⁴ “September 7th, 2011,” Morning Joe, MSNBC, September 7, 2011, https://archive.org/details/TVPROGRAM-Morning_Joe?and%5B%5D=September++2011&sort=&page=2.

¹⁵⁵ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, no. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989), 9.

is fundamentally “cannibalistic and unloving, and can only survive by eating its own children.”¹⁵⁶ We are always pitching stories backwards, using what we know now to explain what happened before, which is why the World Trade Center is remembered fondly and not as a disfigurement of the skyline; like architecture critic Paul Goldberger said, “But the buildings remain an occasion to mourn: they never should have happened, they were never really needed, and if they say anything at all about our city, it is that we retreat into banality when the opportunity comes for greatness.”¹⁵⁷ Which is exactly what *Sex and the City* did, isn’t it? It is also why Colen can now tie parts of his life to September 11, 2001. Looking backwards, he can see the supporting role 9/11 played and the ways it continues to reverberate.

On that day though, the city’s people craned their heads upwards, mirroring in their bodies the verticality of New York City. Because of the nature of the architecture, because of the height of the buildings, life in the city has always taken place at different levels, at different grades. There is of course the underground with its snaking subway tunnels, and the street, but also stoops, fire escapes, elevators, and rooftops. In a city subdivided and soaring skyward, it only makes sense that 9/11 also played out below ground and out of sight, even if these spaces are less visible. While everyone was busy turning their heads to the skyline, in the days and months that followed, Colen, McGinley and Snow, and a whole host of other people, went looking to the basements and the rooftops, to scaffolding and hidden corners, to the places that were unwatched and seemingly hidden.

¹⁵⁶ Helena Fitzgerald, “ghost towns.” *Griefbacon*, email newsletter, April 6, 2018.

¹⁵⁷ Kari Haskell, “Before & After; Talking of the Towers,” *New York Times*, September 16, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/16/weekinreview/before-after-talking-of-the-towers.html> quoting from Paul Goldberger, *The City Observed: New York, A Guide to the Architecture of Manhattan* (New York: Random House, 1979).

In the immediate aftermath, no one knew if there were going to be other attacks. The Empire State Building was evacuated after a false alarm; people were afraid to open their mail in case of Anthrax. In the face of terror, everything was also thrilling, like laughing at the end of an adrenaline rush, only all the time. It was a purposeful denial of fear. McGinley told me, “The WTC mimicked what was happening in the city, I was kind of melting as the city was melting. Are we gonna die? Literally the symbol of NY was destroyed. What does that mean?”¹⁵⁸ New York band The Rapture’s drummer Vito Roccoforte said, “People were like, ‘Fuck it.’ It was wild, it got really fun, and it seemed like there was a lot more drugs everywhere all of the sudden.”¹⁵⁹ That feeling, a frisson, then wove its way through the city. That September 11th, as a day, as a moment, was (not to be cruel) the Big Bang of sorts from which all these ideas, beliefs and deviations exploded. That in the fabric of the city, September 11th was such a decisive moment beyond the national and geopolitical implications, and, as obvious as it is to write, it did something to the people, to the city’s artists and musicians, to the way they were living and acting, to how they felt about New York itself. As journalist Marc Spitz recalled, “If there were going to be attacks...then we New Yorkers were going to drink and smoke and have as much sex as possible before it all went to hell.”¹⁶⁰ Just days after 9/11, he went to see Mariah Carey in *Glitter* and continued to keep all the dates he had previously planned.¹⁶¹ As Agathe Snow remembers, “The year right after, 2002, felt even more real if that’s possible.”¹⁶² It wasn’t a half-

¹⁵⁸ Ryan McGinley interviewed on the phone by the author, May 16, 2017.

¹⁵⁹ Lizzy Goodman, *Meet Me in The Bathroom: Rebirth and Rock and Rock in New York City 2001-2001* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017), 206.

¹⁶⁰ Marc Spitz, *Poseur: A Memoir of Downtown New York City in the ‘90s* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2013), 295.

¹⁶¹ Spitz, *Poseur*, 295.

¹⁶² Agathe Snow, “Agathe Snow,” in *The Kids Were Alright*, ed. Nora Burnett Abrams. (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2017), 57.

hearted attempt to recreate Tina Brown's or Marc Jacobs' or *Sex and the City*'s ideas of decadence; this had nothing to do with decadence.

The gallerist Aaron Bondaroff called it their 'Downtown', but he acknowledged that such a mentality only emerged after 9/11. This is why he capitalized Downtown, to name it was to make it extraordinary and exact, and within its defined boundaries, figurative and capacious. Maybe because the edges seemed that much more concrete once downtown Manhattan was cordoned off from the rest of the city; south of 14th street was only open to emergency personnel and vehicles. Certain subway stops were bypassed. Many Battery Park City and Tribeca residents fled their apartments, and, for a while, you needed to show identification just to get home. Manhattan though, unlike the other boroughs, has always had an uptown and a downtown, a designation as relied upon as north and south. Pre-Bloomberg and pre-Giuliani, the differences between the two, their supposed personalities, were easier to identify. Uptown was cleaner, elegant, safer, stuffier. Downtown was cheaper, artistic, grungier, young. Like Bondaroff wrote, "Downtown is a place where you owe the landlord rent so you sneak into your apartment to sleep. You're paranoid so you tip toe with your pigeon feet, hawk-eyed and with a monkey on your back. Your apartment is infested with roaches and rats the size of cats... Downtown is a place where all you do is complain about Downtown."¹⁶³

Even as New York City becomes wealthier and more homogenous, Downtown, as both an outlook and an ethos, persisted and persists. To an extent, this is because September 11th remade New York's topography. In a matter of minutes, Lower Manhattan became a disaster zone, a gaping

¹⁶³ Aaron Bondaroff, "Introduction," *Post 9-11*, 5.

hole blanketed in debris and dust. As Manhattan was forced to a standstill, it ultimately delayed and modified whatever destiny the city had been hurtling towards. And that 14.6-acre chasm, that oversized and unfathomable void? It would become the physical site onto which all sorts of ideas and policies could be projected, enacted and justified. All anyone had to do was flash a photograph of the burning towers and that was enough of a reason for almost anything. It would serve as the rationalization for a series of political decisions: the Patriot Act, the Iraq War, Guantanamo Bay Prison, and the expectation that Americans would conform and coalesce according to one definition of patriotism.

At the same time, alternatives were springing forth, alternative answers to the question of living with Ground Zero. That to absorb what happened you had to do it within your own individual landscape. That there was no such thing as one grand narrative, or one national culture. That 9/11 was a personal attack on New York City, its people and their way of being, and therefore could only be responded to personally. Indeed, this is the central idea of this chapter, and central to the photographs taken by McGinley and Snow. For them, September 11th happened, and it made their city precarious and electrifying, which would inform how these artists approached both their practices and the city itself, key ideas for the subsequent chapters. Mourning meant sucking the marrow out of New York and, consequently, McGinley, Colen and Snow linked themselves even more firmly to the evolving and explicit identity of being New Yorkers. This would characterize and saturate their practices and later affect how the media and critics understood their work and their lives. In thinking that everything might disappear, they held on ever more tightly so that their world and art became a network of blocks and buildings, a series of gestures, uninhibited and exaggerated, brash, indulgent and potent.

CHAPTER TWO

Living Arrangements

106 East 7th Street is a four-storey, red brick building with rounded window pediments and a door crowned by a robust entablature. The building sits right at the edge of Alphabet City, in the heart of the East Village, on a shrinking strip long known as Little Ukraine. Farther east is Political Row, formerly home to some of the city's most prominent politicians and judges, which speaks to the short-lived grandeur the neighbourhood once possessed. Nearby is Tompkins Square Park, several former squats, and a whole host of 24-hour diners. 106 is a typical former tenement building, constructed at the end of the 19th century. Just around a hundred years later it was converted into apartment units, and for a while one of those was home to Ryan McGinley and Dan Colen. In a way that their friends don't quite remember, the 7th street apartment became the centre of everything; McGinley fondly calls it a "flophouse."¹⁶⁴ Their friend, the actor turned gallerist, Leo Fitzpatrick reminisced:

For me, the moments I miss the most are moments where everybody would get together at Ryan's apartment, get drunk or fucked up. And even though we were partying and being fuck ups, we were also really productive, and we were always plotting what our next attack is going to be. So, I miss that! I miss all of us being together.¹⁶⁵

The apartment was close to all the bars where they used to drink: The Hole, Lit Lounge, The Cock, and Max Fish. And then there were art openings, house parties and graffiti adventures... It was the middle of a world entirely contained within and consumed by Canal Street and Union Square.

¹⁶⁴ Miss Rosen, "Ryan McGinley Talks Coming Full Circle," *Dazed*, April 24, 2017, <http://www.dazeddigital.com/photography/article/35650/1/ryan-mcginley-talks-coming-full-circle-early-works-new-york>.

¹⁶⁵ Katja Horvat, "Ryan McGinley: The Kids Were Alright," *Interview*, n. date, text provided by Team Gallery.

For a while, and entirely coincidentally, I spent a lot of time at 106 East 7th when a friend from California sublet a unit in the building. I remember barely anything about her apartment, except there was a cat named Cupcake and, in typical East Village fashion, you walked right into the tiny hallway that real estate agents will forever claim is a living room.

“Living with [Colen],” said McGinley, “is like living with three people because he’s so gargantuan and you can hear him lumbering around for miles.”¹⁶⁶ And in a tiny walk-up that can feel like a lot. Space and privacy are almost non-existent, and the transition from outside to inside can be bewildering. The darkness of these buildings, with hallways illuminated solely by low-wattage bulbs or, if you’re lucky, a very narrow light shaft, can make their inside spaces feel entirely alien to the street, even though there are always other people and other dramas to interact with, even though sometimes it feels like the streets come inside too. If the home is the ultimate expression of the domestic and private, then these apartments have a specific sense of interiority. With limited square footage and thin walls, you are never truly alone, and any feelings around exposure and disclosure, the communal and the individual, develop accordingly.

Overcrowded apartments are nothing new, not to New York City anyway, but for these guys, the lack of real estate also meant a lack of a studio space, and so the studio became an extension of the home, and by making it so, there was a collapse between the two, between the public and the private, and the artist and the group. There was a period in the 1960s and 1970s when space was

¹⁶⁶ “Ryan Inc.: Behind the Scenes of the McGinley Machine,” *Vice*, March 1, 2009, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/fashion-ryan-inc-715-v16n3.

abundant, and artists could afford to buy large lofts in SoHo.¹⁶⁷ But by the time Colen and McGinley were living in New York City, this was no longer the case, and whatever properties had yet to be scooped up were expensive. Prices for both co-ops and condominiums quadrupled between 1996 and 2000, and the average rent for a studio apartment was above \$1,000.¹⁶⁸ Accordingly, Colen and McGinley lived and, at times, also worked atop each other, so not only was there no place to be alone, but there was also no distinction between work and play. “The moment, the synergy,” McGinley told me, “all we talked about was art.”¹⁶⁹

Such a dynamic necessarily spilled into their art practices as leisure was co-opted by work and the following chapter will consider this mutuality.¹⁷⁰ This occurred most explicitly in Dash Snow’s and McGinley’s photographs, but also in Colen’s paintings, specifically his monumental painted sculpture *Secrets and Cymbals, Smoke and Scissors (My Friend Dash’s Wall in the Future)* (2004), which will be the focus of the chapter. Painted on Styrofoam with metal supports, *Secrets and Cymbals* is a three-dimensional and life-size recreation of Snow’s studio wall from his apartment on Avenue C (fig. 25). This work will anchor the discussion herein, and I will use *Secrets and Cymbals* to engage with questions of self-presentation within a community of individuals whose identities were contingent upon the greater group. A close visual analysis of the work will then be extended into a larger discussion around how identity can be presented within the context of an

¹⁶⁷ For a history of the period, see Aaron Shkuda, *Lofts of SoHo: Gentrification, Art, and Industry in New York, 1950–1980* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016) and Richard Kostelanetz’s memoir *Soho: the rise and fall of an artists’ colony* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁶⁸ Maggie Garb, “If You’re Thinking of Living In The East Village; From Mean Streets to Cutting-Edge,” *New York Times*, December 17, 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/12/17/realestate/if-you-re-thinking-living-east-village-mean-streets-cutting-edge.html>.

¹⁶⁹ Ryan McGinley, interviewed on the phone by the author, May 16, 2017.

¹⁷⁰ Although work/life balance was nowhere near as buzzworthy as it is now, the crossover between leisure and work was percolating at this period. The effects of this can be seen especially in tech culture and the ways in which start-ups try to seduce their employees through on-site meals, gym memberships and other perks.

artist's biography. I look to various forms of staging including teenage bedrooms, installation practices, and historical dioramas to consider the idea of the artist's studio.

Secrets and Cymbals is a true trompe-l'oeil, or the illusion of physical forms on a flattened surface, but it can also be viewed in the round. On the wall, layers of paper both appear to be substantive and, occasionally, also jut out. It is a scrapbook, an accumulation, strata to sieve through and classify, and one of Colen's earliest forays into sculpture, inspired by Alex Katz and Donald Baechler.¹⁷¹ There is always something else to see, something else you would want to take down, read and thumb through. Colen's interest in illusionism is tied to paint's power of always representing something else other than itself.¹⁷² Since the beginning, he has focused on the derivative gesture as a means of connection to "all of painting's history."¹⁷³

At the *Kids Were Alright*, McGinley's 2017 mid-career retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver, *Secrets and Cymbals* was placed in the middle of a gallery surrounded by McGinley's photographs and a few of Snow's Polaroids. Tiny stanchions kept me from getting too close. Colen didn't want those, but security is security; I was told to keep it a secret and to never tell him. In person, *Secrets and Cymbals* is just short of the height of a room. The back is composed of a series of painted faux-wooden slats with scratches spelling out 'Rasta was here' (fig. 26). It is Colen's "fantasy" of what might have been hidden on the reverse of the wall, a bit of the building he of course never was able to see.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ "Ali Subotnick in conversation with Dan Colen," *Sweet Liberty* (London: Other Criteria Books, 2017), 21

¹⁷² Molly Beauchemin, "Artist Dan Colen Gets Fast and Furry-ous," *PAPER*, November 6, 2018, <http://www.papermag.com/dan-colen-high-noon-show-2618324899.html?rebelltitem=2#rebelltitem2>.

¹⁷³ "In Conversation Dan Colen and Ali Subotnick," *Gagosian Quarterly*, November 13, 2017, <https://gagosian.com/quarterly/2017/11/13/dan-colen-and-ali-subotnick/>.

¹⁷⁴ Email conversation with Dan Colen, June 9, 2017.

Tacked up in the bottom left corner of *Secrets and Cymbals* is a *Daily News*' front page with the headline 'Thug Stole My Wheelchair' (fig. 27). Pasted on the paper (and pasted over in real life, as this would later become one of Snow's collages) is McGinley's photograph *Drinking & Peeing* (1999) (fig. 28). In the picture, Kunle Martins, a member of the IRAK graffiti crew, stands in front of a garage door chugging a Budweiser and casually peeing, his penis poking through his fly. Shot from below, McGinley probably lay out on the sidewalk to take the photograph. It is a picture of something the *Daily News* would definitely brand thuggish behaviour, but it also outright mocks that label as Martins pees almost directly onto the paper's headline. Reproducing McGinley's photograph is a gesture reminiscent of Elaine Sturtevant's practice, who was known for her repetitions of other artists' works. She reproduced Andy Warhol's *Flowers* prints, Jasper John's flags, Roy Lichtenstein's comic women, always the work of her contemporaries. In her appropriations she explored questions of authenticity, celebrity and the market. Sturtevant's practice argues for the importance of replication: that it is not, in fact, antithetical to novelty or authority. By quoting one of McGinley's photographs, Colen reminds us that *Secrets and Cymbals* is art about the making of art; the photograph is a built-in device pointing out that this is a painting and not an illusion.¹⁷⁵ At MCA Denver, an actual print of *Drinking & Peeing* hung in the same gallery as *Secrets and Cymbals*. It was a large room, and from most vantage points, both were visible at the same time. Colen's reproduction winks at the original print, and *Secrets and Cymbals* becomes a sculpture about the process of painting.

¹⁷⁵ Leo Sternberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontation with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 74.

When I first saw the wall, some fragments were instantly familiar because I had seen them before in photographs: the outlines of Snow's sugar skull tattoo; the replica of a shirt reading 'I'd fly 84,000 miles' which Snow was wearing in one of McGinley's early Polaroids; the invitation for the launch party celebrating the publication of McGinley's photography book for *Index*. Pictures of photographs hang amongst the magazine cut-outs and cartoon scribbles. Snow, naked, shouldering a backpack, stands over a woman (also naked) splayed out on a bed. Even in vague painterly grey the blurs of his tattoos are identifiable. In *Secrets and Cymbals*, there is a post-it with a 646-phone number scribbled on it; a ripped-out photo of a cowboy; the cover of an old *National Geographic* magazine. A Winston matchbook is stapled to a missing dog poster. IRAK CREW is painted over a cartoon of Jesus. There is a box of Super Colour 400 film and a browning contact sheet; a sketch of disembodied legs in high heels, and another of a multi-armed Hindu goddess; a bottle of Bacardi Gold; a rubber glove; the packaging for a POTOMAC emergency escape mask; a knife stabbed into the drywall with a trickle of red paint (fig. 29). In the centre hangs a portrait of a little boy wearing a red and black polo shirt. The frame is draped in orange Mardi Gras beads, and stuck on the kid's forehead is one of those generic Hello My Name Is stickers. In thick black pen and graffiti script someone has scribbled 'Joe Crack' and 'Call me I have a secret to tell you 917-844-1750.' I called but that number is no longer in service, which is funny since New York area codes have cachet, and people are willing to pay for the prestige of an obsolete one just to prove how New York they are.

A painted facsimile of the *New York Post* reads 'WHO-SEIN' and shows five faces of Saddam Hussein. A flyer spells out who to call if you suspect someone of terrorist sympathies. There is

another *Daily News* this time with Hussein's face caught in the crosshairs underneath the headline 'Fair Game'. These front pages are meant to be sensationalist but when defaced with marker and splashed up next to everything else, there is a numbing effect. Snow was always into tabloids and always intrigued by Hussein. "I've always been a big fan of the *Post*," he explained, "and I remember in 1992, or whenever the fuck it was, Desert Storm, the Gulf War? Remember? I'd always read the *Post*, and there'd be really rad headlines about it?"¹⁷⁶

Secrets, in abstract as well as the word itself, are something Snow returned to again and again, and he and his partner Jade Berreau named their daughter Secret (b. 2007). After her birth, Snow made *Secret Conception* (2007) an assemblage sculpture within a bell jar composed of fabric and a studded, black leather glove (fig. 30). As well, there was his untitled collage of newspaper cut-outs which reads, from top to bottom: 'Secret Secret of Secrets miracle baby Secret'. This whole wall is a series of secrets, some just more obvious than others.

I could go on listing the papers and pictures, and listing is really the only way to begin to convey what everything looks like, what actually makes up *Secrets and Cymbals*. Listing the details and the tacked-up bits exemplifies the impenetrability of the wall. It is just a blend of pigments, and despite the appearance of depth, a superficial depth, there is no real way to enter this painting. Reciting the elements one by one builds up the surface of what is, in reality, a flat image, a picture of pictures. You can't pull a page of the *Post* off the wall, or flip over one of the Polaroids. The endless listing makes it difficult to know where to look, replicating the way the eye moves rapidly and continuously around. Looking is a constant push-pull between wanting to see every detail and

¹⁷⁶ Ariel Levy, "Chasing Dash Snow," *New York*, November 25, 2007, <http://nymag.com/arts/art/profiles/26288/index3.html>.

wanting to take in the whole wall. The eye, my eye, constantly darts to different nooks and corners and then pulls back to see how a certain scrap fits into the completed painting. Looking is both simultaneous and sequential, holistic and piecemeal.

Listing also points to and compounds the aggression worked into the wall. It is a near constant affront. A ripped-up poster of a young girl and boy has been drawn over in black. Each has been given jagged stitches; the little boy has an eyepatch and the girl fangs. Over their heads ‘GANG BANG AT GROUND ZERO’ has been written probably in Sharpie. That black, rubber glove? It is pierced by a knife stuck into an upside-down duct tape cross. It is a bloody crucifix, a crude sword. Duct tape with its many fast fixes and multiple uses has more menacing associations too, as a gag for kidnappers, as a sealant against a chemical attack, as something to bind and restrain. As for the sugar skulls, there are skulls all over the wall. One is coloured in red, and another makes a leering dollar sign, while a third, sporting a pirate-like bandana, decorates the back of what looks to be a leather jacket. Skulls so often signify the rush of time and the insignificance and insubstantiality of life, and given Snow’s death, reading mortality into the painting is an almost unavoidable, if unfortunate, side effect.¹⁷⁷

The images may be violent, both in content and in quantity, but they are also gross, and there is an emphasis on, or fascination with all things grotesque, though what exactly that means is so hard to

¹⁷⁷ In 2014, critic David Romanelli described *Secrets and Cymbals* as “a work of melancholia...emptied of representational meaning, but embodying, in retrospect, that strange convergence of grief and vicarious identification that the passing of heroic figures inspires for those who must remain” (Romanelli quoted on “Dan Colen – Help!” *The Brant Foundation Art Study Center*, May 1, 2014. <https://brantfoundation.org/exhibitions/dan-colen-help/>). To transform *Secrets and Cymbals* into a monument is to give it a life it wasn’t meant to have; the sculpture was only meant to be a single frozen moment in the continuum of a life. The problem with retrospect is that choices and occurrence can always take on double and triple meanings when you look backwards.

determine.¹⁷⁸ The grotesque can be funny, horrifying, unpredictable and against convention. *Secrets and Cymbals* as a total sum of distinct, incongruent parts adds up to one grotesque whole: blood, sex, exaggeration, laughing toothy grins, disembodied animal legs, a decapitated troll with a ludicrously long swirl of green hair, Saddam Hussein's face next to the dustjacket for J. P Wood's *Aircraft Nose Art: 80 Years of Aviation Art* (1992). (And Snow would have found a lot of the violence funny too.) The whole wall is cacophonous, an exercise in the obscene and discordant. It suggests a life that is driven by chaos, and Mikhail Bakhtin termed this frenzied, almost anarchic world the carnivalesque.¹⁷⁹ In Bakhtin's understanding, the festive period of carnival destabilized social hierarchies by producing a space governed not by social norms (in his example, those of Medieval Europe) but instead through comic ritual and spectacle. For a short, contained period, the week before Lent, the world was inverted, the bawdy and bodily celebrated, and ridicule demanded. In writing about the scholar François Rabelais, Bakhtin was certainly removed from Snow and Colen, although this wall and their world too were governed by "the laws of its own freedom."¹⁸⁰ They created and inhabited an environment, both physical and figurative, that called for all things *anti*, including the grotesque, hyperbole and a sense of lawlessness. For Colen and Snow, and McGinley as well, theirs was an internal and inward-looking carnival, ecstatic and earthbound.

As a medium, collage has elements of the grotesque, the way it joins together pieces from separate worlds, how it finds humour in absurd juxtapositions, and uses disorder to fashion a new

¹⁷⁸ In addition to Mikhail Bahktin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helene Jawalsky (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), see Valeriano Bozal et al, *The Grotesque Factor: Essays* (Malaga: Museo Picasso, 2012) and *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, ed. Frances S. Connelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) for a discussion and overview of the Grotesque.

¹⁷⁹ Mikhail Bahktin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helene Jawalsky (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), 6-7.

¹⁸⁰ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 7.

narrative.¹⁸¹ So, it isn't simply that Snow was attracted to grotesque images and text, but that ripping out a photograph itself is a violent and grotesque act. It is aggressive to forcefully remove an image or a word from its context and then paste it down somewhere new. Collage is intertwined with trauma and violation, but also it pieces itself together to become whole again. It is no wonder that collage's emergence is seen as tied to Modernism and the First World War, and specifically to Dada.¹⁸² To paraphrase Dada artist Kurt Schwitters, the war so fragmented the world that the only way forward was to make something out of the fragments, to rip them up, and then re-glue and remake.¹⁸³ Hannah Höch's *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die letzte weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands* (*Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch*) (1919), for example, comically critiques Weimar Germany through fused images taken from magazines and newspapers (fig. 31).¹⁸⁴ The photomontage shows Kaiser Wilhelm with a moustache made of two wrestlers, a man in a woman's bathing costume, and infantilized portraits of politicians. Dada's turbulence is manifested in the form of the collage itself, which criticizes power and gender dynamics both in content and construction.

The idea of a collage aesthetic also owes much to the development of film, which had gained global popularity in the leadup to World War I; film is essentially a moving collage, fragments of

¹⁸¹ Maria Makela, "Grotesque Bodies: Weimar-Era Medicine and the Photomontages of Hannah Höch," in *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, ed. Frances S. Connelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 195.

¹⁸² Collage was not a Dada development, but it was certainly exploited by the Dadaists. For a brief discussion on collage and Cubism, see Clement Greenberg, "Collage," in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 70-83. For more on collage's development as related to Dada, see *Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art*, ed. by Blanche Craig (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008) and Sam Rhodie, *Montage*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

¹⁸³ "Construction/Abstraction," in *Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art*, ed. Blanche Craig (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008), 47.

¹⁸⁴ For an overview of Hannah Höch's collages, see Daniel F. Herrmann, "The Rebellious Collages of Hannah Höch," in *Hannah Höch: Works on Paper*, eds. Dawn Ades, Emily Butler, and Daniel F. Herrmann (London: Prestel, 2014). For a discussion situating Höch's early work within feminist discourse see, Maria Makela, "By Design: The Early Work of Hannah Höch in Context," in *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, ed. Janet Jenkins (Minneapolis: Walker Arts Center, 1996), 49-79.

scenes that have been sutured and spliced together to produce a new whole, to produce new ways of seeing the world.¹⁸⁵ Moreover, analogue film itself, the physical reel and celluloid, can be easily transposed to new settings and conditions. As Walter Benjamin taught us in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), film and photography are always thieving: they are able to “place the copy of the original in situations beyond the reach of the original itself.”¹⁸⁶ This is the collage aesthetic at work, the collapse of different worlds and spaces both internally and outwardly, as well. It is a sort of vandalism isn’t it, to deface and spoil someone else’s property, removing something from its home only to insert it somewhere new. The mechanical image changed the rules of possession; ownership, Benjamin explained, could fluctuate to include copies made and taken.¹⁸⁷

And so, Benjamin believed that photography would liberate art from history and obliterate its aura.¹⁸⁸ But if there can be endless reproductions, what is the “here and now of the work of art,” its uniqueness in time and space?¹⁸⁹ Benjamin was writing much closer to the invention of film and the beginnings of mass photography; this frame is key. He saw the new technology as a potentially radical tool for social upheaval, though time has proved its outcomes and uses to be somewhat different. Snow and Colen, like me, grew up with photography, with slide lectures in art classes and beautifully reproduced monographs, so the aura of *Secrets and Cymbals* is tricky to pinpoint and pin down. For Colen, Snow’s wall had its own aura; it was a holy place, his Mecca and Western Wall.¹⁹⁰ Thinking like that, consecrating the physical wall, infuses it with an

¹⁸⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 14.

¹⁸⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 6.

¹⁸⁷ Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 5.

¹⁸⁸ Benjamin, 10.

¹⁸⁹ Benjamin, 5.

¹⁹⁰ Dan Colen interviewed by the author, New York, September 6, 2016.

otherworldly magic. It is hard to tell how much this is just a function of time, or the result of Snow's death and the way that memory and sentiment function. But as with Sturtevant's work, *Secrets and Cymbals*' aura comes not from an authenticity borne out of a supposed uniqueness of vision and execution, but rather from expansive and elastic spatial and temporal circumstances. By painting Snow's wall, Colen gave it a context, both physical and within the history of installation and oil painting practices—and the history of their lives.

In shattering and rebuilding representations of the world, collage encourages the exploration of revolution, desire and “dark desire,” themes Snow was keen to probe.¹⁹¹ He had a lifelong interest in fanzines and zine culture and would make little booklets he then gifted to people with elaborate inscriptions.¹⁹² (These he printed in small batches on gallerist Jeffrey Deitch's account, and maybe Deitch saw the bills and didn't care, or maybe he never found out.¹⁹³) This, alongside a love of “found poetry” and language informed so many of Snow's future collages.¹⁹⁴ He made hundreds of them and like so much of his work, they are most often untitled and undated. The compositions vary with their isolated body parts, genderbending chimeras and cut-out wordplays stuck onto brown rolling paper; they evince what critic Holland Cotter called “extreme Dada.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Massimiliano Gioni, “It's Not the Glue that Makes the Collage,” in *Collage: The Unmonumental Picture* ed. Richard Flood (London: Merrell, 2007), 12.

¹⁹² Email conversation with Kathy Grayson, July 13, 2018.

¹⁹³ Email conversation with Kathy Grayson, July 13, 2018.

¹⁹⁴ Nate Lowman, “Dash Snow,” *Interview*, December 11, 2015, <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/dash-snow-2>.

¹⁹⁵ Holland Cotter, “Dash Snow,” *New York Times*, October 13, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/13/arts/art-in-review-dash-snow.html>.

Colen has described Snow's apartment as a "cauldron" of material and imagery he was just waiting to glue down.¹⁹⁶ In an undated self-portrait, Snow photographed himself perched on a table covered in paint bottles, overturned Polaroids, wood panels, piles of papers, a birdcage. Behind him, the wall is collaged in clippings, illustrations and words, emptier though than the wall Colen reproduced for *Secrets and Cymbals*. You can see fragments of newsprint-thin collages, indecipherable portraits Snow has painted over and added to, unnameable shapes he cut out. Snow amassed a vast archive of old *Post* and *Daily News* issues, but also magazines, ten-cent novels, vintage papers and other print media. From these, he would find fragments for his collages, combinations he pasted onto different papers and other supports.

That so many of the images were pulled from vintage printed materials makes many of Snow's collages feel heavily material. *Because I am Real and You are Only Imaginary* (2006-2007) is two saintly stone faces, chopped into strips and fused back together (fig. 32). The two sets of eyes have been filled in with red and brown patterns, like the End of Days. Pasted on a pale blue background, it feels like being caught in a cathedral's shadows in the middle of the night, haunting and expressive. Or, *Untitled (Tired of Suffering?)* (2004): a face, comprised of many faces, sits on a green psychedelic background which has been pasted or painted onto a small book cover (fig. 33). In the gap between his lips are eyes and blue sky-like clouds. From his brain grows an orange mass. Red text reads 'Are you tired of suffering?' It looks painful to vomit out another body, to be like Cronus.

¹⁹⁶ Brant Foundation Art Study Center, "A Discussion of the Work of Dash Snow," filmed May 2, 2016 at Hunter College, New York, NY, video, 1:10:41.

In a way, this is the whole effect of collage, the lack of monumentality, the impermanence, the way the glue crackles and dries up, how the images become dated almost immediately. Yet *Secrets and Cymbals* stops Snow's wall from aging. It is stuck at the exact time of the tabloid headlines. Saddam Hussein is still alive. Phone numbers have yet to be disconnected. Looking at it now is like going home and realizing your bedroom hasn't changed since you were seventeen leaving for university. I used to stick up photos on my bedroom walls, shove drawings into the side of my mirror, dangle bracelets from my bedposts. But nothing has been added since I graduated, and the most recent photographs show me at senior prom in the spring of 2007. This pasting and accumulating, fragmenting only to make a composite whole: collage seems bent on working out a feeling, which is perhaps why so many teenagers treat their rooms like giant bulletin boards. The slapdash of posters and images has come to signify an essential sort of teenageness. This décor is all over television and the cinema, in the bedrooms of films like "Ten Things I Hate About You" (1999) and "Juno" (2007), or Seth Cohen's in the television show "The O.C" (2003-2007) (fig. 34). There is an expectation that being fifteen means sorting yourself out on the walls of your room, even if very few people I know did that.

Before the internet, before Pinterest let everyone publicly catalogue and share their tastes and fandoms, bedroom decoration was one of the first ways a teenager could create a (semi) public-facing persona. The irony, however, is that bedrooms, unlike the internet, are fundamentally private spaces; any publicness is by choice. Still, they can provide a glance at someone's interior self, and walls are a way of performing a certain kind of persona. In high school, I was shy and didn't want to broadcast my allegiances, so I was deliberate about what I hung up. A friend told

me she pinned up concert tickets so her friends would know she was cool and did things and had a life. Both are ways of delimiting an identity, and both are somewhat artificial and premeditated. In a way, it is like keeping a diary: it may only be for an audience of one, but there is the hope of an audience, nonetheless.

Snow's wall presents a seemingly darker, more twisted vision, far removed from prom pictures and movie posters. Perhaps a more apt parallel can be found in the comedy film "Summer School" (1987), which tells of high schoolers who need to take classes over the summer vacation. One of the underachievers, Chainsaw, has papered his bedroom in posters from "Friday the 13th" and "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre", props of severed body parts, pictures of heavy metal bands (fig. 35). Chainsaw is obsessed with horror films, but even still, this would be a claustrophobic space to be stuck inside. And Snow, who ran away from home at fifteen, was barely beyond his teenage years himself when he finally settled into his apartment on Avenue C and began to tack things up to his walls. It is unsettling to be in a place that feels so bleak and sharp; this is not a mind in which I want to dwell. There is an inherent, inescapable tension between what seems to be a kind of self-performance and the actual self, so much so that, in a work like this, the two can be confused for one another to the point that we believe *Secrets and Cymbals* has cemented Snow's manias and paranoias in oil paint. Snow's studio wall, like his collages, like a lot of his practice overall, like any of these rooms and 'rooms', gives off the sensation of an internal commentary, an avalanche of the mind.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ In his essay "Method, Madness, and Montage" and its various subsequent permutations as a lecture, W. J. T. Mitchell discusses the arrangement of images within art history as an operational process and a complex interconnected network. He suggests that images can either be oriented rationally in a grid or in a feverish vortex, like, for example Snow's wall, and both provide different methods for contending with and making sense of image (and information) overload. He discusses how to make sense of such visual excess and what this excess can say about a specific moment in history.

Secrets and Cymbals is both a personal reflection and a “matrix of information” for understanding the world at a precise moment.¹⁹⁸ Leo Steinberg argued that mid-20th century painting, specifically works by Robert Rauschenberg, reoriented the picture plane so that it was “no longer the analogue of a visual experience but of operational processes.”¹⁹⁹ That is, Rauschenberg’s paintings do not “evoke a prior optical event.”²⁰⁰ Steinberg called this the flatbed picture plane, and here he was thinking about things like bulletin boards, maps, charts and diagrams, anything onto which objects and ephemera could be placed and scattered. This reorientation signified a shift in the role of painting, from a window on the world towards a representation of culture.²⁰¹ Just before Colen completed *Secrets and Cymbals*, the online platform MySpace launched in 2003. The website allowed for endless customization and reinvention. Users could add special backgrounds, soundtracks, and shout-outs to their top eight friends of the week. It was a digital bedroom complete with privacy settings to block snooping parents, but a more open version than anything before. MySpace inaugurated the age of oversharing by developing a platform accessible across a million computer screens, simultaneously intangible and insubstantial. If the flatbed picture plane embraced two-dimensionality, the internet suggests a whirlwind of information that envelopes the viewer. The eye doesn’t know where to land.

To make *Secrets and Cymbals*, Colen photographed Snow’s wall with a medium format camera and then projected sections to sketch out drawings. He told me it was all a process of “tracing and

¹⁹⁸ Sternberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontation with Twentieth-Century Art*, 74.

¹⁹⁹ Sternberg, *Other Criteria*, 84.

²⁰⁰ Sternberg, *Other Criteria*, 86.

²⁰¹ Sternberg, *Other Criteria*, 85.

retracing and retracing” again.²⁰² Illusion, as a technique, is central to Colen’s work. Before *Secrets and Cymbals*, he worked on a series of graffiti sculptures and paintings; he made faux rocks and plaster walls and would spend months crafting something to look like he had just stumbled over it in the street.²⁰³ For *Holy Shit* (2003) he scrawled ‘holy shit’ across a large, white panel. The dripping and loose red text, the diffusion halo and inky line between the i and its dot, look like spray paint but are really enamel (fig. 36). What might take thirty seconds with a can of spray paint was instead painstakingly painted. Even the wall’s title plays at these double meanings. We might expect secrets to be paired with symbols and not cymbals. The latter, garish and clanging, alerts us to the layers of the painting, its false fronts hidden behind smoke and mirrors: what you see is what you get—almost.

Photorealism is often seen as a “guilty pleasure,” and while Colen isn’t a photorealist, there is a similar guilt in his hyperrealism.²⁰⁴ This is clever art that winks at the viewer, a meta-reference hidden in the sheen of the oil paint. *Secrets and Cymbals* knows it is a painting pretending to be a wall. It is self-conscious and self-aware. But it also demands a particular and highly developed skillset entirely based on reproduction and replication, which is sometimes seen as a form of cheating. Roberta Smith called Colen’s surface-oriented painting a “vacuous skill.”²⁰⁵ Jerry Saltz

²⁰² Dan Colen interviewed by the author, New York, September 6, 2016.

²⁰³ This is the technique behind *Untitled* (2004) which was shown at the Whitney Biennial.

²⁰⁴ Dieter Roelstrate, “Modernism, Postmodernism and Gleam: On the Photorealist Work Ethic,” *Afterall*, no. 24, (Summer 2010),

<https://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.24/modernismpostmodernism.and.gleamon.the.photorealist.work.ethic>.

Photorealism emerged in the United States around the same moment as Pop and Conceptual art practices. Photorealist painters, including Chuck Close and Richard Estes, paint directly from photographs to produce canvases that appear as accurate as photography. Yet, these works often incorporate multiple perspectives to make visible what neither the eye nor the lens can see.

²⁰⁵ Roberta Smith, “Dan Colen: Miracle Painting,” *New York Times*, September 25, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/26/arts/design/dan-colen-miracle-paintings.html>.

referred to it as “ersatz art.”²⁰⁶ And Howard Halle described it as “rather wan and puerile.”²⁰⁷ The guilt is in both the making and the enjoyment of this type of painting, and in the bravado and swagger in showing off like this, of being so confident that you make a painting that is also architecture and sculpture. Anything another medium can do, a painter can do too, and will do it better.²⁰⁸

It is the “sheer pleasure” Colen receives from “presentation and representation,” explained artist Dike Blair, Colen’s professor at the Rhode Island School of Design, the “stupid yet sublime pleasure” of a really, really good copy, that mastery and magic.²⁰⁹ Blair makes gouaches that are also really good copies. At first, he worked from memory, but soon found he couldn’t remember enough and started relying on snapshots, drawing and redrawing.²¹⁰ In these paintings Blair isolates the everyday: a pack of cigarettes, a gin and tonic sweating on a bar, a window frame (fig. 37). The compositions are all a bit lonely in their emptiness and quietness; the painter Joe Bradley described them as “weirdly earnest.”²¹¹ At RISD, Blair became Colen’s mentor and essentially kept him from dropping out of school. RISD holds an eminent position in the hierarchy of American art schools, and despite the weight an acceptance carries, Colen was a self-described “horrible” student and completely detached from his department. He ended up taking a few of Blair’s classes, including a painting course, and then, during the spring term of his senior year,

²⁰⁶ Jerry Saltz, “The Great Regression,” *New York*, September 19, 2010, <http://nymag.com/news/intelligencer/68379/>.

²⁰⁷ Howard Halle, “Dan Colen, ‘Poetry’: The Artist’s Efforts Reflect the Diminishing Returns of Bad-Boy,” *TimeOut*, October 1, 2010, <https://www.timeout.com/newyork/art/dan-colen-poetry-galleries>.

²⁰⁸ Sternberg, *Other Criteria*, 77.

²⁰⁹ Dike Blair, “Dan Colen,” *purple*, Issue 9, (Spring/Summer 2008), <http://purple.fr/magazine/ss-2008-issue-9/dan-colen/>.

²¹⁰ Jeff Rian, “Interview – Dike Blair,” *purple*, Issue 15, (Fall/Winter 2015), <http://purple.fr/magazine/fw-2015-issue-24/dike-blair/>.

²¹¹ “Dike Blair and Joe Bradly in conversation,” *Bomb*, no. 108, (Summer 2009), <http://bombmagazine.org/article/3299/dike-blair-and-joe-bradley>.

Experiments in Drawing. And Colen remembers how instrumental Blair had been in introducing his work during the public degree showcase.

McGinley has referred to Blair as an “academic artist,” and both he and Colen agree that their group of friends was devoid of academics, even though McGinley holds a BFA from Parsons the New School of Design.²¹² Attending art school means that while they may not be academics their practices have an academic shadow. Theirs was an education entirely different to that of Snow, who dropped out of high school and never returned; Colen’s and Snow’s practices were, in this sense, almost at odds with each other. Colen is so rooted in mark making, in layering meaning through gesture, in dissecting the artist’s hand, while Snow looked more to the randomness of interaction and association. This distinction is apparent in *Secrets and Cymbals*, and Snow’s wall in real life was the complete opposite to Colen’s paintings: it radiates haphazard juxtapositions and spontaneous couplings. But by rendering it in paint, Snow’s wall is made monumental through an exercise in and testament to technical ability.

Choosing to paint a trompe-l’oeil is a choice to show off one’s skill and prowess. Trompe-l’oeil (literally, deceive the eye) creates a life-size optical illusion of a three-dimensional object by making the canvas bend and buckle with a falsified depth. It is a prank in paint, the artist’s stunt to mask his work so convincingly that it almost entirely disappears. Trompe-l’oeil, as such, is entirely about surface, about creating a surface so dynamic and detailed that the difference between

²¹² “Dan Colen and Ryan McGinley in Conversation,” in *Ryan McGinley: The Kids Were Alright*, ed. Nora Burnett Abrams (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2017), 35.

reality and simulation is unfathomable. Artifice is inherent to painting, but trompe-l'oeil as we think of it today, in all its glossy glory and perspectival illusion, dates more recently to the 17th century and the development of the still-life. As illusionism in painting evolved, trompe-l'oeil moved beyond meticulously representing the world to proving its “mastery over reality.”²¹³

While there are countless comparisons to consider, I would like to look at two paintings by the American still-life painter John Haberle, in part because his work is decidedly secular, but also because it is witty and would, I think, earn a chuckle from Snow and Colen. His oil painting *A Bachelor's Drawer* (1890-94) faithfully depicts an assortment of printed material: playing cards, pinup girls, naked girls, ticket stubs, and cash laid out on a varnished wood panel (fig. 38). It is a drawer without handles or knobs and, most likely, he excluded these to avoid the problem of their depth and dimensionality. Haberle's bachelor is a man about town, seeing shows, and being a bit of a cad. He represents the specific type of masculine posturing that Colen and Snow are often accused of: boastful, audacious, confident. Haberle gained recognition for his almost impossibly believable paintings of dollar bills. At one point, he was accused of working as a counterfeiter and in *A Bachelor's Drawer*, Haberle has included the newspaper clippings which reference this charge.²¹⁴ Gestures to and tokens from his other paintings have also been reproduced here including the penknife from *The Palette* (1882) and playing cards from *Time and Eternity* (1889-1890). *A Bachelor's Drawer* is a humorous painting, the perfect advertisement for his expertise and craft, and again, a painting about painting.²¹⁵

²¹³ M. L. Mastai d'Otrange, *Illusion in Art* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975), 207.

²¹⁴ Gertrude Grace Sill, *John Haberle: American Master of Illusion* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2009), 37.

²¹⁵ Within a modern, American context trompe-l'oeil was tied to the dawn of skeptical looking: as culture became “more visual and spectacular...representations and appearances were exploited to deceive audiences and manipulate public opinion.” For more, see: Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

Trompe-l'oeil creates the impression of space, either by inserting an optical illusion within a physical site or by introducing an artificial visual depth to a flat surface, and Haberle too played with the idea of an expanded architecture in *Japanese Corner* (1898). Inspired by the recent fad for all things Japan, he incorporated several Japanese items including fans, an embroidered shawl, a blue parasol, and a suspended lantern as decoration for a small room (fig. 39).²¹⁶ On the lower left side, he has stuck a ripped white envelope onto which blocky red letters spell out 'DO NOT TOUCH'. The tiniest details animate *Japanese Corner*, the sheen of the bamboo, the fringe on the shawl, a dangling doll's arm. Together they create a "tactile hallucination" and the whole composition seems on the brink of toppling over and invading our space.²¹⁷

It is the decorativeness of the painting, all the patterns and textures, not just its naturalism, that reminds me of *Secrets and Cymbals*, the way this is an entire microcosm full of things you want to touch and hold. Haberle has made a world into which we can almost step. Seemingly, the space between the outside (me, the viewer) and the inside (the painting, this blue and black screen) collapses. But the thing about *Secrets and Cymbals* is that although the surface is flat, the wall is real. Colen said, "I want to present something very real, but I was constructing it—the imitation of reality."²¹⁸ Colen has flattened space onto a three-dimensional wall, which is why the surface is so beguiling. He has skilfully manipulated paint to look like a photograph, an artificiality only

²¹⁶ The shawl is a nod to painted curtains in Renaissance canvases. Curtains as a part of a painting's false frame hint at the illusionistic elements at play. See Victor Stoichita's *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 30-63.

²¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, "The Trompe-L'oeil." In *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France*, ed. Norman Bryson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 56.

²¹⁸ Dan Colen interviewed by the author, New York, September 6, 2016.

apparent up close. To make *Secrets and Cymbals* believable, the wall, what should be solid plaster, had to seem as genuine as any of its decorations.

Nevertheless, despite trying to mirror our world, so much of the experience of painting is primarily two-dimensional, soundless and compressed. Yet Modernism, argues curator Catherine Wood, moved painting off the easel, through the double frame of photographic documentation.²¹⁹ Contemporary painters, she suggests, are indebted to this turn and have become invested in questions of performativity and not passivity.²²⁰ Photography means we can no longer think about painting as just pigment on a canvas, and Wood specifically mentions Hans Namuth's photographs of Jackson Pollock at work to propose a shift towards the performance of painting itself, whereby painting becomes both act and theatre.²²¹ Responding to this shifting status, artists have encouraged the picture to further protrude into the viewer's space, which allows for the fabrication of reality.²²²

But painting has long been attentive to its representational function and ability to tipoff the viewer that it acts as a setting for invention. Art historian Victor Stoichita has attended to the various clues and methods artists have used, including frames, curtains, inset paintings, and depictions of studios and *wunderkammer*, which allows a painting to take on the "theme of painting."²²³ *Secrets and Cymbals* is what Stoichita would call a "catalogue-painting," or a painting of a collector's paintings, only in this case, it is a collection of scraps and photographs, and not a room of marble

²¹⁹ Catherine Wood, "Painting in the shape of a House," in *A Bigger Splash: Painting After Performance*, ed. Catherine Wood (London: Tate Publishing, 2013), 12.

²²⁰ Wood. "Painting in the shape of a House," 10.

²²¹ Wood, 13.

²²² Wood, 22.

²²³ Victor I. Stoichita. *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

busts and Rubens' oils.²²⁴ In such images, and in *Secrets and Cymbals*, the frame or edge of the canvas both “segregates” the collection within and separates them from the actual space in which it is displayed.²²⁵

Over the years, Colen has become more invested in theatre and performance and the ways in which his work can be enlivened; when I visited his studio, he showed me maquettes of sculptures he planned to produce to accompany a script he had written. For Colen, narrative has always played an important role, and he sees sculptures and paintings as “psychic backdrops for people to explore their own fantasies,” but such stories can be lost in the motionless of the art itself.²²⁶ *Secrets and Cymbals* demands dynamic audience participation and when viewed, like a theatrical backdrop, it produces an imaginary space in which people can become characters within a larger narrative.

Like theatre, the gallery too creates a liminal space, disconnected and out of time, and objects within are simultaneously real and unreal. But unlike a play, *Secrets and Cymbals* can also be activated by its surrounding images; at the Denver exhibition, McGinley's and Snow's photographs and *Secrets and Cymbals* were all shown in the same gallery, and these images projected their own stories onto Colen's wall. “Compared to other types of contextual relationships familiar to the history of art,” Stoichita wrote, “what is so peculiar to the

²²⁴ Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*, 109.

²²⁵ Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*, 104.

²²⁶ Dan Colen interviewed by the author, New York, September 6, 2016.

relationships established inside a gallery is that each image...has as a 'background' the body of the other works of art and can in its turn become a 'figure' so that it can later fall back into the 'background'."²²⁷ Recall McGinley's *Drinking & Peeing*, the small photograph that Colen so carefully duplicated. On display in Denver, *Drinking and Peeing* both engages with and figures into *Secrets and Cymbals* to form a mutuality.

While I have been thinking about theatre within the script and stage sense, Michael Fried's model of theatricality is also worth briefly acknowledging. Theatricality according to Fried is when a work of art looks outwards towards the audience and therefore is consciously performative. He believes this to be counter to what he calls absorptive works whose figures are engrossed in the narrative of the image without any consideration or need for an audience. For Fried, the recognition of the "existence of a beholder" is the problem with which painting is forced to reconcile. *Secrets and Cymbals* has no principal figure or figural grouping, so on the one hand, it is a composite image that is entirely inward looking. But on the other hand, as a work of trompe-l'oeil, it is begging to prove itself through touch and as a result, almost pleads for a beholder.

While not exactly antithetical to theatre in any sense, *Secrets and Cymbals* does seem to break the fourth wall, a performance convention in which actors violate the illusion they have established by purposefully acknowledging, and thus implicating, the audience. By existing in a real and inhabitable space, *Secrets and Cymbals* encourages visitors to fill its fictional stage with their own interpretations and plotlines; this is a work open to "intrusion."²²⁸ In this sense, it is

²²⁷ Stoichita. *The Self-Aware Image*, 93.

²²⁸ Petersen, *Installation*, 147.

comparable to British artist Tracy Emin's installation *My Bed* (1998), for which Emin transported her actual bed to the 1999 Turner Prize exhibition at Tate Britain (fig. 40). Her stained and rumpled sheets were strewn with empty vodka bottles, cigarette butts, dirty underpants, receipts and used tissues. The bed is forensic, like a crime scene but without the body, and when it was first shown, reactions were polarising. Adrian Searle described the work as Emin's "endlessly solipsistic, self-regarding homage to [herself]," whereas critic Matthew Collings defended her "punkish quality" and willingness to be unconventional.²²⁹ Perhaps the reason *My Bed* was so divisive was because it demanded such a brutal encounter. It is a work in which the personal is almost inescapable, and this interaction makes it difficult to speak about *My Bed* critically. It is too easy to identify with, too easy to have an emotional response, too easy to become the protagonist of someone else's personal drama.

As Emin is thought to mine her own memories for material, her practice serves as an interesting comparison, but equally useful is her connection to the Young British Artists. The YBAs, a group which included Damien Hirst and Sarah Lucas among others, emerged in London in the early 1990s. By using the body, violence and sexual imagery, they were purposefully shocking and knew how to court publicity. The YBAs were quickly and spectacularly successful, and the resulting media uproar anticipated what would come to envelop Colen, McGinley and Snow. The YBAs' art remains difficult to pin down as it both engaged with mass culture as an anti-elitist strategy and simultaneously made jokes that were directed at a small group of art world

²²⁹ Adrian Searle, "Tracey's pants but McQueen's the real pyjamas," *The Guardian*, October 20, 1999, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/1999/oct/20/20yearsoftheturnerprize.turnerprize1>; and Fiachra Gibbons, "Scandal Sheets envelop Turner Prize," *The Guardian*, October 20, 1999, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/1999/oct/20/fiachragibbons>.

insiders.²³⁰ Julian Stallabrass argued that the YBAs were fundamentally cynical but that they also used this awareness to reveal “the web” that ensnares all of the art world.²³¹ If Emin sold her life as art, she did so willingly and to engage viewers, understanding that such subjectivity could operate both as entertainment and as mode of inquiry.

The difference between *Secrets and Cymbals* and *My Bed*, and theatrical performance is that theatre needs actors while a work of art does not. Obviously, *Secrets and Cymbals* has no script and no director, and despite its three-dimensionality, the work does not require performers to “activate” the space as a play would.²³² *Secrets and Cymbals* instead occupies the amorphous space located somewhere amongst painting, sculpture and installation, a position that is affected by the curatorial decisions made when it is exhibited. Yet, both *Secrets and Cymbals* and *My Bed* are nevertheless contingent upon many of the same circumstances that govern performance. Theatre, like art, and unlike television or film is both “local and located.”²³³ That is to say, each performance exists in one place at one specific time. It, however, can be transported through photography, which has become one of the principal ways in which we encounter and understand performance.²³⁴

Emin, as well as *My Bed*, is now two decades older and worth quite a bit more money, and her life is so different from what it was in 1998; although *My Bed* may be a confessional, what exactly is it admitting now and to whom? While repeated exhibition may make it seem as if *My*

²³⁰ Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite* (London: Verso, 1999), 62.

²³¹ Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, 282.

²³² Guy McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in Theatre* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1999) 91.

²³³ McAuley, *Space in Performance*, 11.

²³⁴ See Rebecca Schneider, “Performance Remains,” *Performance Research*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2001): 100-108.

Bed is still current, it instead hews closer to a historical relic and has a tangled relationship to aging. The sheets and mattress have yellowed, the tissues crusty and brittle, and the Orangina juice has been transformed from bright neon to murky brown, which art critic Jonathan Jones likened to “diseased piss.”²³⁵ While Colen’s wall can be retouched and glossed up, *My Bed* is a total conservation nightmare. How do you faithfully preserve a used condom?

Time within all art, but especially installation art, has a particular, peculiar function as it can be received but also represented. There is the viewer’s time, his or her engagement with the work and own sense of progression, as well as the time of the exhibition. Context informs understandings of a work which, of course, may also shift in time. Then there is the time of and contained within a work itself, how it narrates and projects a supposed timeframe. In both *My Bed* and *Secrets and Cymbals*, biography itself is the timescale, the display of a life on a bed or a wall, and neither the materials themselves nor the artists’ lives are static. Instead, two existences are strewn about, hectic and at times unpleasant, and looking makes us see the simultaneousness of a life.²³⁶

Looking at biography means identifying a collapse between work and life, and in the example of *Secrets and Cymbals*, this is noticeable in how Snow’s actual wall figured into their everyday lives. Much of the lower portion of *Secrets and Cymbals* is relatively empty save for a few pale grey scuffmarks; for ages, in real life, the studio wall was blocked by a black leather couch, where

²³⁵ Jonathan Jones, “The meaning of 9/11’s most controversial photo,” *The Guardian*, September 2, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/sep/02/911-photo-thomas-hoepker-meaning>.

²³⁶ Anne Ring Peterson, *Installation Art: Between Image and Stage* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2015), 196.

Colen, Snow and McGinley spent hours talking about art and being artists. They would sit on the couch and let “ideas germinate.”²³⁷ Life happened in front of that wall, and it was a place to be together. It is like what Blair told Colen, that to be an artist requires, at least at first, artist friends: “It’s not necessarily about the work, but about this collective energy, and whose attention you can draw on, and from there you can show people your work.”²³⁸ So sitting around on the couch was a form of work, just as important as the making of art itself. Andy Warhol knew this, and his couch became as famous as any of the Factory’s Superstars, helping to construct the idea of a Warholian celebrity.²³⁹ It was even the subject of its own film, “Couch” (1964). At the Factory, leisure was labour, so lolling around, getting stoned, talking, being looked at, and having sex, were all forms of work.²⁴⁰

Snow’s couch itself was a housewarming gift from McGinley, from before McGinley lived with Colen.²⁴¹ It was rumoured to have a missing bag of cocaine hidden somewhere in its cushions. “One night,” recalls McGinley, “we tore it up like archaeologists looking for a precious artefact. We never found it.”²⁴² The couch, like the wall, became both prop and protagonist and popular at that, which is why it shows up again and again in Snow’s Polaroids. In one, a guy has passed out on the couch, shirt off, boxers peeking out of his jeans, his torso entirely covered in scribbles; the black leather takes up most of the frame. Another shows Snow and Kunle Martins entwined posing for the camera (fig. 41). It appears in McGinley’s photographs too, for example, *Agathe & Dash*

²³⁷ Dan Colen interviewed by the author, New York, September 6, 2016.

²³⁸ “Dan Colen and Ryan McGinley in Conversation,” in *The Kids Were Alright*, ed. by Nora Burnet Adams (New York: Skira, 2017), 33.

²³⁹ Ara Osterweil, “On (and off) the *Couch*,” in *Warhol in Ten Takes*, eds. Glyn Davis and Gary Needham (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 49.

²⁴⁰ Osterweil, “On (and off) the *Couch*,” 49.

²⁴¹ “The Kids Were Alright,” *Vice: The History Issue*, May 8, 2008, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/the-kids-were-alright-v15n5.

²⁴² “The Kids Were Alright,” *Vice: The History Issue*, May 8, 2008.

(*Black Leather Couch*) (2001) in which Snow and Agathe Snow, his ex-wife, fervently make out on the couch (fig. 42). As in Warhol's film where people mill about and walk around, both the witnessed act and its photographic permanency make this a doubly public display.

Later, Snow took the couch, planted a palm tree in one of the dug-up holes, and turned it into the sculpture *This Was Your Life* (2005) because everything in his studio became source material for future work (fig. 43). His inspiration came from Daniel Rakowitz, the 1980s East Village resident and confessed cannibal and murderer known as the 'Butcher of Tompkins Square.' The couch is shrine-like, and more of Snow's newspaper clippings, here about Rakowitz's trial, sit in a pile alongside snakeskin boots, a satanic medal, and rosary beads dangling a transparent cross. The palm fronds resemble a wild head of hair: a literal pot-head. The installation is frightening but also funny. Sticking a tree into a cushion that you tore up on a bender while searching, destroying and laughing is juvenile and exactly what a leather couch evokes to me: first apartments, stale beer, Craigslist furniture.

This preservationist sensibility, which extends to Colen as well, is perhaps why Blair saw *Secrets and Cymbals* not as theatre, but instead as a diorama.²⁴³ Dioramas, at least those invented by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, with their rotating stages and flashing lights, were closer to proto-cinema than any installation of taxidermied animals. But Blair probably was thinking about natural history museums and the ways they try to communicate a whole ecosystem in texture and paint. With their deliberate organization, dioramas still time, making stuffed animals appear on the verge

²⁴³ Dike Blair, "Dan Colen." *purple*, vol 9 (Spring/Summer 2008), <http://purple.fr/article/dan-colen/>.

of motion. But they also box in supposedly exotic creatures and, in the service of ethnographic and scientific research, people too. By virtue of the vitrine, these mannequins are familiar objects.²⁴⁴

By solidifying a people behind glass, there is an ambiguous sense of morality in dioramas, in the “doubled humans.”²⁴⁵ To look is to be aware of one’s own humanness, but it also means identifying what is different.²⁴⁶ Why put something behind a barrier or a screen if it isn’t worth gawping at and scrutinising? Looking can also ensnare and entrance. There is an eerie sense of recognition brought about by the physical barrier that divides the two worlds. For photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto, the fascination with dioramas comes from this space of the “interval.”²⁴⁷ An interval is defined as a physical gap, the glass in this case, but also as a temporal gap, the time between two parts, between life and death. Dioramas, like trompe-l’oeil compositions, are made to appear so tactile, so richly real. We rely on both the haptic and the optic to verify if something is genuine; it is not enough just to trust the eye. A glass divider, or *Secrets and Cymbals*’ stanchions, creates an interval that keeps us from corroborating what we see through touch. These divisions keep confirmation at bay and preserve the fantasy. Playing with time, Colen has quite similarly brought Snow’s wall into the future through an elaborate preservation ritual, an embalming in oil, but also in the sub-title of the work itself: *My friend Dash’s wall in the future*. The future sounds energized and full of possibility, but fundamentally, dioramas are tied up with death; the lions and penguins may be posed dynamically, but these are stuffed corpses.

²⁴⁴ Allison Griffiths, “Les Scènes de Group et le Spectateur du Musée Moderne,” in *Dioramas*, eds. Katharina Dohm, Claire Garmen, Laurent le Bon and Florence Ostendo (Paris: Flammarion, 2017), 183. All quotations from the exhibition catalogue *Dioramas* have been translated from French by the author.

²⁴⁵ Griffiths, “Les Scènes de Group et le Spectateur du Musée Moderne,” 183.

²⁴⁶ Diorama figures are inanimate and obviously inhuman, but nonetheless we identify. This sympathy (and sense of the uncanny) is central to debates around artificial intelligence, and a key plot point for shows like HBO’s “Westworld” in which robots look and act unnervingly like humans. Dioramas are a less insistent version.

²⁴⁷ Hiroshi Sugimoto, “Nature Peu Naturelle,” in *Dioramas*, eds. Katharina Dohm, Claire Garmen, Laurent le Bon and Florence Ostendo (Paris: Flammarion, 2017), 104.

Still, there is no reason the artist himself shouldn't be something to study: Charles Matton's micro-dioramas, for instance, introduce viewers to the studios of yore. His *Atelier de Giacometti* (1987) recreates Giacometti's studio in miniature (fig. 44). Matton's box, part Joseph Cornell assemblage and part obsessive student, is an homage to the artist, a sort of fandom, but also a model to learn from, a built world. Colen's wall does that too, introducing us to a different and distinct reality we might not otherwise have been able to see. But peering into this world only seems a possibility once the studio is no longer in use. Consider, for example, the painter Francis Bacon's studio at 7 Reece Mews, London, which was moved to the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane after his death in 1992 (fig. 45). A team of conservators made survey and elevation drawings of the studio, and methodically catalogued more than 7,000 objects, entering each into a database. Although the contents were painstakingly relocated, there is nevertheless a gulf between 'Bacon's studio' and 'Bacon's studio at The Hugh Lane'. Encased in a gallery and absent an artist, this is an unchangeable and lifeless space.

Depictions of the 'studio' often either show the artist at work or show a snapshot of the space, the latter often feel so anthropological. Like a diorama, such images encapsulate an environment we may not otherwise be able to access. Similarly to a performance, the studio too needs an actor (the artist); Stoichita suggests that in paintings of studios that are absent an artist, the studio is merely a still life.²⁴⁸ Yet in images that show an artist at work, the simultaneous representation of the

²⁴⁸ Stoichita. *The Self-Aware Image*, 235.

artist, his studio and his canvas means that one part will almost always be somewhat obscured. Or else, all three seem to lack detail. Even photography, which allows for all different angles, can only reveal so much: we may think the photographer Arnold Newman showed us Pollock splattering paint and what became of it, but only one angle is shown. *Secrets and Cymbals* presents a tricky hybrid of the two. While it is concerned with painting and the artistic process, who exactly is its maker? It is a painted sculpture by Colen but also by Snow and sprinkled throughout are portraits of both. Snow's studio has been transformed into a life-size still life, and it is easy to imagine both him and Colen at work on their walls.

What is so interesting with Colen, McGinley and Snow, what is so effectively conveyed and condensed in *Secrets and Cymbals*, is the way in which the individual and the shared can be easily breached and bridged. By bringing the private space of a studio wall into the public gallery, Colen has taken what Stoichita would consider a still life and made it a living image. But he has also connected the gallery, the place of observation and admiration, back to the process of making. Artist studios, those hallowed, "privileged" sites of creating and dreaming, are often represented as discrete and disconnected from the outside world.²⁴⁹ They are, somehow, entirely cut off and completely connected, occupying somewhere in-between and variable. And making art in bedrooms like Colen was doing for a period, and McGinley and Snow continued to do for longer, suggests an understanding of the studio that is at odds with how we may imagine artist spaces function. Holy these bedrooms were not. Nor were they isolated or revered, or even private.

²⁴⁹ Introduction to *The Studio*, ed. Jens Hoffmann (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2012), 4.

Of course, the studio in lived practice has never entirely conformed to a single image or definition, and the way they are visualized has been regularly reinterpreted. Still though, we rely on artists to define the way the studio operates. We critics and art historians are foreign interlopers, and entry is by invitation only. Perhaps this trespassing sensation is one of the reasons that the artist Daniel Buren's essay "The Function of the Studio" (1979) is still taught and still resonates. The text announced Buren's commitment to working outside of and expanding upon the traditional studio model; in it, he argues against the restricting nature of studio-based practices which he believes produce portable, context-free works that ultimately benefit the market.²⁵⁰ The model has expanded, in part because performance-based and digital practices further "subordinate" the traditional studio.²⁵¹ Lane Relyea argues that the conception of the studio as a retreat has shifted in favour of extensive, interlocking matrices that allow for more open and mutable environments.²⁵² Studios can be both mobile and autonomous, and the arrival of the internet only grew the network. If your laptop is your workspace and the digital your medium, you can be everywhere all at once.

Traditional brick-and-mortar studios however remain in use and often are necessary, as was the case for Colen, McGinley and Snow. Snow worked out of his apartment which was on the Bowery. McGinley eventually found affordable studio space on Canal Street, which he has stayed in since. There is room for his staff and for his enormous photographic archive to be arranged neatly in hundreds of binders. Colen's current studio, in Red Hook, Brooklyn, is a former warehouse with high ceilings and incredible light. It is a real estate agent's dream; I would be happy just to live in

²⁵⁰ Daniel Buren, "The Function of the Studio," *October*, vol. 10 (Autumn 1979): 51-58.

²⁵¹ Lane Relyea, "Studio Unbound," in *The Studio*, ed. Jens Hoffman (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2012), 345.

²⁵² Relyea, "Studio Unbound," 345.

the bathroom. In fact, Colen has had studios all over New York City. Sometime in 2013 or 2014, he moved into Red Hook. His memory for dates can be a bit fuzzy.²⁵³ Before though, there was the space in Tribeca on Franklin Street that he shared with artist Nate Lowman. The two moved there in 2007 and have collaborated on a few different projects and many more exhibitions. (Lowman even lived in the 7th street apartment for a brief stint.²⁵⁴) In 2010, Colen moved to a studio a few blocks away on Laight Street. In-between Laight and Red Hook, he built a workshop in Colombia County in upstate New York where most of his larger sculptures are made. Part of the impetus behind the sculpture studio was that Colen wanted to fabricate his own work instead of sending his ideas off-site.

McGinley was already living at 106 East 7th Street with Teddy Liouliakis, a friend from New Jersey, when Colen first moved to New York after graduating from RISD. But even before that he had been spending most of his summer vacations and weekends in New York; he kept running away to the city to be with “his people.”²⁵⁵ So, by the time he actually, officially moved in 2001, he had basically been living at 106 for the past two years.²⁵⁶ Colen and McGinley stayed for three years before moving into an apartment on Canal street, where, for a while, they also worked too.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ Email conversation with Dan Colen, 4 June 2017.

²⁵⁴ Fan Zhong, “The NY Art Scene After 9/11: A (Very) Condensed Oral History by Dan Colen and Aaron Bondaroff,” *W*, July 7, 2011, <https://www.wmagazine.com/story/dan-colen-aaron-bondaroff-ohwow>.

²⁵⁵ “Dan Colen and Ryan McGinley in Conversation,” 33.

²⁵⁶ Email conversation with Dan Colen, June 4, 2017.

²⁵⁷ Colen moved out in 2009 when he went to rehab.

Colen's first designated workspace entirely his own was the back room of his grandfather's antique store on Coney Island Avenue, an hour's subway ride away on the B and F lines; it was only possible because it was rent-free. Colen is influenced by a whole variety of artists from Warhol to Jean-Honoré Fragonard, and his work is consciously derivative; he roots through art's history in the same way someone might search for the perfect mid-century dining table. It was a good studio for a starting artist. The room was small, barely allowing for more than one painting, but rent was non-existent, and it was far from the daily rhythms of the neighbourhood, of friends and of life: "I had to go out there, and nobody would visit. And if anyone did, it was so exciting... Those [early] paintings were about solitariness. I was living amongst them in that store."²⁵⁸ And yet, he and his friends always found one another, swooping each other up in the middle of the night to go out, to get drunk, to have an adventure, to go to sleep.

Perhaps that is just the experience of becoming an artist. It isn't a unique description, and certainly seemed to have been the case for Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe. Smith moved to New York in 1967 and met and began a relationship with Mapplethorpe shortly thereafter: "I felt disconnected from all that was outside the world that Robert and I had created between us."²⁵⁹ They first lived together in Brooklyn but *Just Kids* (2010), her memoir of their friendship, traces their lives together through various apartments, the Chelsea Hotel and downtown lofts. Always they were working towards the goal of becoming artists, a collective and blended aspiration. Smith became one of Mapplethorpe's first photographic subjects, but even before that, bits of their shared lives—totems, blue stars, tarot card readings, scraps of fabric—found their way into his sculptures, and *Just Kids* recalls this public private ebb and flow.

²⁵⁸ Ryan McGinley, "Dan Colen," *Interview*, September 7, 2010, <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/dan-colen>.

²⁵⁹ Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2010), 65.

There is something that feels so particularly New York about this kind of studio practice, the idea of splitting and coming together, a concurrent opening up to the world and desperation to shut it out. Maybe this is the response to having no space and no money. Certainly, by the time Colen graduated, real estate in the East Village wasn't exactly cheap. But it is the idea of a New York studio that is so electric. I think the author Albert Goldman said it best: "That word 'studio' was enormously charged, it was much more charged than 'sex' or 'fuck,' because it implied this whole life."²⁶⁰ That you can be so hungry and ambitious you're willing to rent a closet or sleep with your paints in order to make it. (Snow, Jade Berreau and Secret lived in his studio until they decided it was too perilous for both the baby and the art: "Before, we were living in my studio with the baby, and it was by no means up to par, cleanliness wise. You know, like, razor blades, rats, and God knows what else all over the floor. She wasn't crawling yet, but I would work on things at night, and somehow she'd manage to destroy them by the time I'd wake up—rolling around on collages that weren't glued down or knocking things over."²⁶¹)

And so, Colen worked out of a small room in the back of an antique shop and in his bedroom. This type of studio is both exposed and shut off. It is cramped with little storage and little light, and yet people walk about in the middle of everything, constantly and at all hours. By making your living room your workplace, then your home and your office blur together and extend into your neighbourhood. Doing so means you're always on, and you're always selling; you are always performing as yourself. This fusion isn't specific to New York, but there are ways that New York's

²⁶⁰ Victor Bockris, *Warhol* (New York: Da Capo, 1997), 78.

²⁶¹ Christopher Bollen, "Dash Snow," *Interview*, November 19, 2008, <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/dash-snow-1>.

density plays a unique role in this messy, tangled, cluttered type of art practice. It is a symbiotic yet somewhat warped relationship, and probably unsustainable.

The New York studio or 'studio' does imply a whole life. An aesthetic and a practice are not the same thing, but if the studio informs what kind of art is made, then it becomes something more than just a physical structure. And if your studio practice is shared with other people, is wholly reliant on other people, then those people, their desires and idiosyncrasies, become embedded into the art too. Indeed, the fundamental relationship expressed in *Secrets and Cymbals* is how Colen processed Snow's art and life which, in turn, is the guiding thread of the above chapter. *Secrets and Cymbals* acts as a screen through which various personalities and lives can become a part of a work of art. Using Emin's *My Bed* as a contextualising example reveals the various ways Colen's painted sculpture can be incorporated as both a work of art and a living backdrop. The relationship between the Snow and Colen was porous, reinforced in the way these artists interacted with each other at home and professionally. Onto the walls of these rooms, whole visions of one's dreams were pinned up and painted upon and mixed with other people's dreams and hopes and paint, as well. The studio can't remain just a physical space, isolated and in retreat any more than Warhol's couch could remain simply a couch; New York's space constraints bleed the two together. The supposedly private and individual, genius act of making art becomes public and communal, and walls or couches can be appropriated and sucked in at will. In this sense, meaning, or at least history and anecdote, gets layered into everything. And so, Colen made a wall that isn't a wall and it wasn't even his in the first place.

CHAPTER THREE

Little Monuments Everywhere

The day we had arranged to meet, Ryan McGinley was late. It wasn't his fault; New York was pummelled with so much rain there were flash flood warnings, tiny missives sent out via text. It was the kind of rain that made umbrellas unworkable. My sneakers leaked water with every step. McGinley's studio is located in a non-descript building on Canal Street next door to a Chinese bakery where he suggested I wait. I ordered a cup of tea and shared a table with a man holding a pile of scratchers. Eventually, McGinley strode in wearing a blue and white striped shirt and small purple-tinted glasses like *The Matrix*. He was taller than I had imagined. In his earliest photographs, McGinley often made his body his subject, and I was expecting someone wide-eyed and gossamer-like, even though those images are more than a decade old.

McGinley's building is filled with architects and clothing designers, the exact place you would expect to find an artist's studio, where all the doors are painted industrial blue, and the bathrooms are located down the hallway. McGinley's studio, however, was being renovated, so we went upstairs to his boyfriend, the musician Marc Armitano Domingo's practice space. Domingo's room was warmly used, with a faded rug, groups of potted plants, and a mini fridge overflowing with cans of La Croix soda. Domingo loves the Baroque and plays the viola da gamba, a ten-string instrument that superficially resembles a cello and lives in a massive coffin-like box. McGinley marvelled at how anyone could love anything so intensely specific as the Baroque, but he tenderly released the clamps to show off the instrument; Domingo's was crowned with the bust of St. Cecilia, patroness of musicians.

Domingo arrived with a bag of food and Dickie, the dog. He had a gracious smile; we spoke about San Francisco where we both grew up, and shopping for antique sheet music in London. He soon headed uptown to practice and throw pots, wheeling his viola out behind him. Domingo makes delicate plates decorated with the outlines of a tiger, tiny ladybugs, a slug and its trail, and his company, Botticelli Ceramics, was written up in *T Magazine* just weeks after we met. Dickie stayed behind with us. The dog was a rescue, found by a woman named Jane who used to date Dan Colen and who collects all sorts of animals. McGinley fell in love with the dog and would ask to borrow him all the time for weekends and walks, so at some point, he just became his. Dickie's name is an ode to the *Dick and Jane* book series, which were used in the 1930s to teach children to read, but McGinley said that everyone assumes he named the dog Dick because he is gay.²⁶²

In-between scoops of an acai bowl, McGinley talked about podcasts and interviews. He listens while editing and loves series like “WTF with Mark Maron” and “Fresh Air” with Teri Gross. (He photographed Gross once, but she was uneasy sitter, unfamiliar with the role of ‘subject’.) He is an auditory learner and used my name a lot while we spoke, which was only a little disarming. We talked a bit about his photography, but mostly about photography as a category, the “bastard child” of art, infinitely replicable and un-fetishized.²⁶³ So much of the popular understanding of art is still predicated on uniqueness, even though it has been a century since the Readymade questioned the idea of the singular object. But the art market can sell a unique work as a one of a kind masterpiece, and it cannot do the same for a reproduceable image.

²⁶² Ryan McGinley interviewed by the author, New York, April 16, 2018.

²⁶³ Ryan McGinley, interviewed by the author, New York, April 16, 2018.

McGinley rattled off artists who have influenced his career, a list which included Nan Goldin, Marilyn Minter, Robert Mapplethorpe, Jack Walls, and the monograph *Raised by Wolves* by Jim Goldberg. Walls was Mapplethorpe's boyfriend and was central to, and one of the few survivors of, the 1980s art scene of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring. Although Walls works across a variety of mediums, he sees himself predominantly as a writer.²⁶⁴ As a "veteran of the downtown art scene," he possesses an "inside outsider" status; McGinley has long called Walls his mentor.²⁶⁵ McGinley is interested in artists who defiantly look to the extremes, and this is manifested in his practice through a fascination with youth cultures often found at the intersection of fashion and fringe. But he is equally as excited by his iPhone photographs and every year compiles an album of prints for Domingo. McGinley's influences are a mix of vernacular imagery and fine art, which speaks to the casualness he possesses when it comes to combining highly technical images of supposedly low art subject matter. He also self-defines as a "voracious" collector of photography books, but he is just a voracious looker overall.²⁶⁶ He comes across as a generous observer, taken in as much by his selected and commissioned subjects as by any stranger walking down the street, anyone's body moving through space.

Indeed, the representation of bodies and bodily vulnerability is the central theme of this chapter. Anchoring this discussion are a series of snapshot images created by both McGinley and Dash Snow which I use to think about how both approached images of the human body, the prevailing subject of McGinley and Snow's photographs. I compare their practices to consider how intimacy is imaged. Questions of voyeurism and vulnerability reverberate in related ways to affect how

²⁶⁴ See the About page of Jack Walls' personal website, www.jackwalls.com.

²⁶⁵ This is from the About page of Walls' website, which was written by Mary Nittolo, president of the STUDIO, a visual communications company. I accessed Walls' About page on March 2, 2019, www.jackwalls.com/about.

²⁶⁶ "Dan Colen and Ryan Conversation," *The Kids Were Alright*, 36.

these photographs are viewed and how those meanings might shift depending on location and in time. I also place their practices in dialogue with other snapshot photographers, chiefly the work of Nan Goldin.

The first time I was struck by one of McGinley's photographs, I didn't even know it was his. I didn't then know who McGinley was, but I ripped it out anyway and stuck the page in a file folder on my desk. I found *Fireworks Hysteria* (2007-2008) in *The New Yorker*, where the print was used to illustrate Italo Calvino's short story "The Daughters of the Moon" which tells of a waning moon thrown out for being too old, ragged and ugly: "It wandered through the sky naked, corroded, and gay, more and more alien to the world down here, a hangover from a way of being that was now outdated."²⁶⁷ In the end, the lunar daughters, the many Dianas, raise up the moon and return it to the night sky.

In *Fireworks Hysteria*, a girl, euphoric and naked save for white tennis shoes, leaps amongst golden fireworks, her arms outstretched for protection. Her mouth is open, in terror or in laughter (fig. 46). It is a dance in outer space; liquid gold combusting. Fireworks in any shape are enchanting, but gold sparkles have always seemed to be especially majestic and extravagant as they streak through the darkness. We are taught that fire scalds the skin, that it burns through forests and destroys home, and yet, here she is darting fearlessly amongst the flames, immune to her environs. McGinley was raised Catholic, and *Fireworks Hysteria* has a bit of the devotional in it, the way

²⁶⁷ Italo Calvino, "The Daughters of the Moon," trans. *The New Yorker*, February 23, 2009, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/02/23/the-daughters-of-the-moon>

the smoke swells like incense, the way that tiny villages so often celebrate Saints with massive firework displays—if the Church were to allow naked processions that is. Alongside the Catholicism, she conjures up Danaë, who in Greek mythology was imprisoned by her father in a sepulchral chamber with only a skylight for air. In the story, Zeus, spotting her through the window, immediately falls in love, in lust, and transforms himself into a shower of gold and rains down upon her. In paintings, by Titian, or Boucher, or Rembrandt, she is often depicted lying on a bed, naked and docile, but McGinley's Danaë is fiery and refuses to be engulfed by the flames.

This is a classicizing frame and one that marks *Fireworks Hysteria* in a specific way, especially when viewed in relation to Calvino's story: a nymph amongst the embers. But the title, *Fireworks Hysteria*, implies madness, the ecstatic and the unruly. Though the idea of hysteria has been around for over a thousand years, by the 19th century the malady and its treatment wholly obsessed and wholly flummoxed doctors and their (mostly) female patients. It was a shameful diagnosis, a disease without a cause. Symptoms were varied and wide-ranging: uncontrollable emotion, lying, arguing, lust, seduction—"the expression of passions."²⁶⁸ Photography, almost from its invention, was used to document hysteria in its many forms. Psychiatric treatment in the mid-to-late 19th century was supplemented and reinforced by images, and doctors used photographic plates to help 'identify' symptoms that they would then photograph, and so on and so forth.²⁶⁹ Both madmen and madwomen were "*obliged to pose*" for portraits like those taken by Jean-Martin Charcot at Paris's Salpêtrière hospital.²⁷⁰ As a result, they became part of the encyclopaedia of madness itself.

²⁶⁸ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, trans. Alisa Hartz (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), 34.

²⁶⁹ Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, 44.

²⁷⁰ Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, 39, emphasis in the original.

Fireworks Hysteria is the visual representation of how hysteria can transmogrify, reminiscent of the Surrealists' belief in photography's power to image not just the world but the experience of being in the world.²⁷¹ Rosalind Krauss argues that Surrealist photography endeavoured to depict the sorts of bodily transformations that occur from both internal and external onslaughts as visualized, for example, in photographs by Raoul Ubac.²⁷² Ubac developed *brûlage*, a technique for which he burned the film's emulsion until it melted and disfigured the image. In *La Nébluleuse* (1939), a nude woman appears to be dissolving from both without and within, shapeshifting into some immortal being, underwater or aflame (fig. 47). The Surrealist image results from the spark, *l'étincelle*, of the random encounter. This can be seen in the liquifying of emulsion for example, or a flutter of fabric, as in Man Ray's black and white photograph *Explosante-Fixe Prou del Pilar* (1934), where a woman spins, arms raised, her pleated dress billowing as she twirls (fig. 48). Her body is almost entirely formless, enshrouded in a mess of fabric folds, curling like a flame. Man Ray clicked the shutter and that was the moment that ended up fixed in film. And McGinley, who believes that the fireworks would thrust his models into a dream world, that explosions would make them forget the camera.²⁷³ Who wouldn't be distracted running around naked amongst flames? And yet, the entire scenario is staged all for the sake of the model's body and for the sake of a bacchanalia. There is a spark of randomness, but also the actual spark as well.

²⁷¹ Michel Poivert, "Images de la Pensée," in *La Subversion des Images : Surréalisme, Photographie, Film* (Paris : Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2009), 310.

²⁷² Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," in *L'Amour Fou: Photography & Surrealism* (London: Abbeville Press, 1985), 70.

²⁷³ Aaron Schuman, "Interview – Thirty and Dirty, A Conversation with Ryan McGinley, 2007," *Seesaw*, September 18, 2017, <http://www.seesawmagazine.com/mcginleypages/mcginleyinterview.html>.

In 1998, McGinley moved to New York City to attend Parsons the New School of Design. Parsons is the most well-known fashion design school in the United States, not least for its role in the popular television show *Project Runway*, but McGinley registered with the hope of becoming a painter. There he was steeped in fashion and surrounded by people thinking about posing and the articulation of bodies in somewhat premeditated ways. At Parsons, McGinley was strongly impacted by the class, ‘Nudity, Sexuality and Beauty in Photography’ taught by photographer George Pitts. McGinley first switched his major to poetry after falling in love with Beatnik poems, and then changed again to enrol in the graphic design programme. For one assignment, he was supposed to draw a church’s interior, but McGinley was never very good at drawing, so instead he bought a drugstore camera, took some photographs of the church, and traced the prints; he received an A+. Afterwards, he decided to shoot his own photographs for his coursework and purchased a negative scanner and a Yashica T4, a 35mm point-and-shoot camera with autofocussing capability.

McGinley told me that his gravitation towards photography was also partially inspired by his friend, Ellen.²⁷⁴ One day, she snapped a photo of McGinley, and the portrait was printed in *zingmagazine*; later, she decorated her apartment with poster-sized images of the same prints. Their scale and unframed monumentality transfixed McGinley, who was seduced by the luxury of it all: how a life, in this case his life, could be made mythic.²⁷⁵ While still at Parsons, McGinley began taking Polaroids of everyone who visited his 7th Street apartment, always in front of the same blank backdrop, and on the backside of each, he recorded the date and time the photograph was taken (figs. 49-50). There are hundreds of pictures of Colen and Snow, friends like Jack Walls and photo

²⁷⁴ Ryan McGinley, “Parsons Commencement Speech,” Parsons School of Design, May 22, 2014, <http://ryanmcginley.com/parsons-commencement-speech/>.

²⁷⁵ Ryan McGinley, interviewed by the author, New York, April 16, 2018.

editor Amy Kellner, and McGinley's own self-portrait. His friends-as-subjects smile at, mug, and pose for the camera. They are coy, shy, awkward, self-assured, ridiculous, goofy, proud, resigned. Only once before 2017 did McGinley show these publicly in a one-night exhibition at *Vice's* office, however, as some of the Polaroids were stolen, this was never repeated.²⁷⁶ Towards the end of this extensive four-year project, McGinley began bringing the screen on nights out, to neighbourhood bars like Lit Lounge and The Hole and *Polaroid Studio (The Hole)* (2002) exposes his set up: a screen taped up to a brightly coloured striped wall, in front of which two couples kiss. *Polaroid Studio (The Hole)* documents process, but it also reveals evidence of production and direction, the wizard behind the curtain (fig. 51).

To be a legible portrait, the genre requires conventional poses and by relying on these accepted and normalised gestures, the Polaroids facilitate cross-comparisons within an observed population, a demographic that also included McGinley. Across the Polaroids, the sense of compositional sameness allows us to identify changes in facial hair, the emergence of new tattoos, which t-shirts are beloved. Taken together, they form an ambitious visitor's log of McGinley's earliest years in New York City as well as a loosely developed typology of an East Village community in the early aughts. Certainly, four years is long enough to track the transforming faces and aesthetics, and you want to keep looking just to see how people grew up. But observing these changes is not the same as knowing someone's life, and the Polaroids produce a false intimacy, like that found in Nicholas Nixon's annual portrait of the Brown sisters. Nixon has been photographing the four Brown women every year since 1975, always arranged in the same order. (He is married to Bebe Brown, the eldest sister.) On the occasion of the publication of the fortieth photograph, author Susan Minot

²⁷⁶ "Tim Berber," in *Ryan McGinley: The Kids Were Alright*, ed. Nora Burnett Abrams (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2017), 107.

wrote, “To watch a person change over time can trick us into thinking we share an intimacy, and yet somehow we don’t believe that these poses and expressions are the final reflection of the Brown sisters.”²⁷⁷ Like McGinley’s, Nixon’s portraits do not disclose anything beyond the surface changes.

In the beginning, McGinley lined his bedroom with orderly grids of Polaroids, and these can be seen in the photograph *Having Sex (Polaroids)* (1999) (fig. 52). On the bed two men have sex, but the actual focus is the hundreds of watching faces—it is photographic kudzu. McGinley took over 10,000 Polaroids, and when he ran out of wall space, he began to pack them neatly into binders. These photographs replaced the magazine cut outs that had long covered his bedroom walls; he particularly loved pictures of Kate Moss.²⁷⁸ Moss epitomised a new look, fresh-faced with a youthful, lithe body, part of a trend of models cast directly from the street and sometimes shot wearing their own clothing. Her break came at sixteen when she was photographed by Corinne Day, herself young, self-taught and hoping to “instil some reality into a world of fantasy.”²⁷⁹ Day shot the teenager for *The Face*, the influential British fashion magazine, and the black and white beachside photographs are scruffy, vigorous and unaffected. Across the series, Moss looks effervescent. In one photograph, she sits against a wall, knees hugged to her chest; in another, her face wrinkles in laughter (fig. 53). She appears approachable and blasé, as easy-going as the girl next door, only more beautiful, more unreal. Later, McGinley would photograph Moss for *W*

²⁷⁷ Susan Minot, “Forty Portraits in Forty Years,” *New York Times Magazine*, October 3, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/10/03/magazine/01-brown-sisters-forty-years.html>.

²⁷⁸ “Ryan McGinley,” in *Interviews, Volume 2*, eds. Gerald Matt and Lida Abdul (Vienna: Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008), 200. McGinley’s love of magazines and zines dates to his teenage years. Whereas fashion magazines prefigure and prop up mainstream aesthetics, zines exist within an outsider circuit and often critique more conventional cultural values. This tension in addition to a broader preoccupation with print media is indicative of many of the defining themes of McGinley’s career.

²⁷⁹ “Autobiography”, Corinne Day, accessed on October 1, 2018, <https://www.corinneyday.co.uk/autobiography/>.

magazine in 2007. Staged the same year as *Fireworks Hysteric*, McGinley's photoshoot with Moss also uses fireworks and billows of colourful smoke.

Through their physical format, magazines help to construct fame. They make celebrities into both subjects and consumable objects, and McGinley has long been fascinated by the "glamour" contained within their pages.²⁸⁰ Lizzy McChesney, a friend from Parsons, recalled: "I remember seeing all of these magazines that he liked on his shelves in chronological order, perfectly arranged. [...] He had the foresight to understand that these things would matter later on."²⁸¹ Hanging up photographs is a testament to an image's materiality, as they can be held, touched, kissed and torn up. Photography is rarely just an optical experience. Handling provides an encounter that otherwise would be unavailable through looking alone. This intimacy is doubled within the confines of a bedroom, and McGinley's Polaroids, his celebrity stand-ins, are privy to the most private and domestic of scenes. In *Having Sex (Polaroids)*, the whole wall of faces watches over McGinley have sex, and the title reinforces their centrality to the scene.

Moreover, by pinning up his own Polaroids, McGinley places his friends and himself on par with Moss; he has performed a version of self-mythologizing. Indeed, although they served different goals, McGinley's images operate similarly to Andy Warhol's Polaroids, which featured sitters such as Debbie Harry, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Maria Shriver. The allure of these photographs lay in the hope of future fame, of being equated to Warhol's other sitters, or even to Warhol

²⁸⁰ Ryan McGinley, interviewed by the author, New York, April 16, 2018.

²⁸¹ "Lizzy McChesney," in *Ryan McGinley: The Kids Were Alright*, ed. by Nora Burnett Abrams (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2017), 83.

himself. But as Warhol, like McGinley, also turned the camera onto himself, his person too was inscribed within and contingent upon this dynamic.²⁸²

At the same time as the Polaroids, McGinley was also taking snapshots of his friends and life. As personal manifestos, these snapshots were the photographs that made him famous and they evince a buoyant and reckless aesthetic. His beloved magazines were some of the earliest champions of this work, and his photographs appeared in *The Face* as well as in *Butt Magazine*, which aimed to be “the contemporary home” for gay men.²⁸³ *Butt* launched in 2001, concurrent to McGinley’s developing practice. For the magazine, McGinley photographed the director John Waters as well as the electronic duo Matmos, and occasionally he also modelled. Art historian Lucy Soutter has argued that McGinley’s photographs “embody the upbeat, uncomplicated version of the authentic favoured by advertising,” and the divide between his art photography and commercial practice is hazy at best.²⁸⁴ And I agree that, when McGinley is commissioned, for magazines including the *New York Times Magazine* and *GQ*, he is hired to replicate this aesthetic.

It was *Vice*, however, that would be his photographic home for many years, and McGinley even served as the magazine’s first photo editor. Launched in 1994, *Vice*’s purview was, initially, pop culture, subculture and street culture—“an excuse to party, an entrée into a world of cocaine,

²⁸² Jonathan Flatley, *Like Andy Warhol* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 64.

²⁸³ James Anderson, “forever butt: discussing the revolutionary gay magazine with founder gert jonkers,” *i-D*, November 26, 2014, https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/kz8bam/talking-forever-butt-magazine-with-founder-gert-jonkers.

²⁸⁴ Lucy Souter, *Why Art Photography?* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 87.

booze, horny women, piss, and absurd street fashion.”²⁸⁵ The magazine wanted images that, as co-founder Suroosh Alvi explained, “were authentic, [and] captured the moment.”²⁸⁶ To promote this culture, *Vice* maintained an anticensorship policy and therefore was willing to run anything.²⁸⁷ Co-founder Gavin McInnes recounted the history of *Vice*’s infamous photos:

We didn’t know it back then, but rifling through whore’s boxes was about to become a crucial part of the *Vice* aesthetic. If you can’t afford sets and studios and Hasselblad’s, why not grab a box of pictures from your subject and start digging? We soon became addicted to the throwaway look of friends shooting friends on the fly. The idea of staging photos and setting up photo shoots drifted farther and farther into the realm of ‘ah’ until it was totally forgotten.²⁸⁸

At *Vice*, provocation is essential and “ugliness itself is the defining aesthetic.”²⁸⁹ Critic Sean O’Hagan has suggested that this initial alignment may have also contaminated people’s opinions of McGinley’s work since the *Vice* aesthetic is so specific: attractive people doing unattractive things, a twist of the *jolie-laide*.²⁹⁰ Still, his contributions were varied: party pictures, friends at the beach, an interview with Jack Walls, Snow in the woods (fig. 54). Once, he made a collage of tiny cut out faces pulled from thousands of contact sheets. Resembling a senior’s yearbook page, the collage is emblematic of the material traditions that counter the monumentalizing gesture of contemporary art photography (fig. 55).²⁹¹ Vernacular images offer insight into the social customs of domestic photography, which is why most images are ultimately taken. Magazines, however, operate within a fluctuating space, privately read but publicly sold, requiring a personal interaction yet widespread circulation.

²⁸⁵ Shane Smith, “The Magazine: All Hail the Glorious Leader,” in *The Vice Photo Book* (London: Vice Publishing, 2008), 7.

²⁸⁶ Suroosh Alvi, “From Blobs of Shit to a Sliver of Gold,” in *The Vice Photo Book* (London: Vice Publishing, 2008), 8.

²⁸⁷ Alvi, “From Blobs of Shit to a Sliver of Gold,” 8.

²⁸⁸ Gavin McInnes, “The History of Vice Photos,” in *The Vice Photo Book* (London: Vice Publishing, 2008), 11

²⁸⁹ Sean O’Hagan, “Dash’s Snow’s Polaroids: Life or Art?” *The Guardian*, January 25, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/jan/25/dash-snow-polaroids>.

²⁹⁰ O’Hagan, “Dash’s Snow’s Polaroids: Life or Art?”

²⁹¹ See, Julian Stallabrass, “Museum Photography and Museum Prose,” *New Left Review*, vol. 65 (September-October 2010): 93-125.

In McGinley's early photographs, from which these little heads were culled, we can see him moving away from candid photography towards photographs that manifest a snapshot aesthetic. *BMX, New York* (2001), for example, is an aerial view of a bicycle's front wheel. While riding on the back of a friend's bicycle, McGinley took the first iteration of this photograph but was dissatisfied with the final composition. There was a pothole in the image, and his friend was wearing long-sleeves which covered his arms. In the reshoot, McGinley dressed his friend in jeans, black converse and short sleeves, because he found the arms to be the most compelling focal point.²⁹² In the final version, two hands grip the handlebars and frame a spinning, blurry front tyre. Shot from above, the arms become my arms and zip me along the gravelly road. It is impossible to depict speed in stillness, but *BMX, New York* communicates the same stomach-dropping feeling of moving quickly (fig. 56). To achieve the compositions he wants, McGinley shoots hundreds of photographs, all the while refining and retooling, until he gets his perfect image. This method has informed all his work. For *Puke* (2002), he repeatedly drank ipecac to make himself throw up onto his camera lens until the orangey-brown stream of vomit looked correct (fig. 57). Even as he choreographed his photographs, McGinley saw little distinction between his life and art, his bedroom was his studio and his friends were willing collaborators.²⁹³ He was the one puking after all, and he became the paparazzo of his own life; Kunle Martins remembered how annoying it was to have the action of his day routinely interrupted by the snapping of the shutter.²⁹⁴ The paparazzo's role is to "disrupt the stable image of the celebrity as promoted by the publicist," but in McGinley's

²⁹² "Ryan McGinley," *Interviews, Volume 2*, 202.

²⁹³ Ryan McGinley," *Interviews, Volume 2*, 195.

²⁹⁴ "Kunle Martins," in *Ryan McGinley: The Kids Were Alright*, ed. Nora Burnett Abrams (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2017), 73.

world, there is no stable image.²⁹⁵ Rather, each photograph contributes to a more holistic and thus consistent narrative arc.

Many of these first photographs show men taking drugs, performing daredevil stunts, hanging out and getting beaten up. There is also a lot of sex had by both men and women, in the shower, on couches, on beds. The photographs present a fraternity redolent with an adolescent notion of masculinity and yet, everyone appears to be on equal footing. No one is hazed, and no one seems uncomfortable; the photographs are devoid of hierarchy. In his photographs of women, the treatment is equal, and they are welcomed into this world and are just as willing to experiment and get dirty. In *Lizzy* (2001), McGinley photographed his friend Lizzy McChesney jumping on a mini-trampoline he brought into the bathroom of The Cock, a gay bar in the East Village (fig. 58). Chesney is naked, floating effortlessly in front of outer space wallpaper, the trampoline unseen in the final image. Graffiti creeps up the celestial print and on the wall near her knees is SACER, Snow's tag, in black. The wallpaper is humorously juvenile, and in a way, *Lizzy* appears that way, too; there isn't anything sexy or erotic about her nakedness. *Lizzy* is one of McGinley's most collected photographs, and his gallerist José Freire has called the image a "beautifully optimistic thing."²⁹⁶ It is a vibrant and hopeful photograph, but it also was shot at The Cock, notorious for public sex and a regular squad of go-go boys, dancers who were hired to entertain crowds often at gay clubs, and once you know that, it is difficult to read *Lizzy* as anything but tongue in cheek.

²⁹⁵ Kim McNamara, "The paparazzi industry and new media: The evolving production and consumption of celebrity news and gossip websites," *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 14, no. 5 (September 2011): 522.

²⁹⁶ Alice Gregory, "Ryan McGinley: Naked and Famous," *GQ*, April 10, 2014, <https://www.gq.com/story/ryan-mcginley-photographer>.

McGinley's breakthrough came from his 2003 exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art; he was the youngest artist to be offered a solo presentation at the museum. Legend has it that Sylvia Woolf, then the museum's Head of Photography, saw one of his self-published zines and offered him an exhibition. While this story is true, it is a condensed version that fails to acknowledge McGinley's ambition. In reality, he made hundreds of these books, one of which he gave to the artist Jack Walls, who then showed it to LenArt de Knecht. De Knecht's father owned 420 West Broadway, once home to Sonnabend Gallery and Leo Castelli Gallery, the former epicentre of the SoHo art scene where artists such as Jasper Johns, Joan Jonas, Cy Twombly and Robert Rauschenberg exhibited. McGinley remembers:

Jack knew the owner of this building and they were going to tear down the bottom floor to become a DKNY store. [...] I did this do-it-yourself show. It was a really, really big space and I went to the colour darkroom and asked some people how to make photographs and I just thought, OK, it's such a big space, I have to make really big, large-scale photographs. I made sixty of them, poster-size photographs.²⁹⁷

The Kids Are Alright opened in 2002 and all of McGinley's photographs were hung frameless, a snake of images that wound around the gallery space; the show was a "sensation."²⁹⁸ Around forty booklets were sold, and the rest McGinley sent to artists he admired such as Nan Goldin and Wolfgang Tillmans; to magazines like *Index* (who got in touch quickly and sent him to a photoshoot Berlin); and to curators including Woolf, which is how, in 2003, *The Kids Are Alright* opened at the Whitney, part of the First Exposure curatorial program, a series which provides a monographic exhibition to an emerging photographer.

Twenty photographs hung in the Whitney's small, fifth floor Sondra Gilman Gallery, in the Breuer building on Madison Avenue. The show opened with *Dash Bombing* (2000), a photo of Snow

²⁹⁷ "Ryan McGinley." Interviewed by Dana Spiotta, *The Believer*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2008): 49.

²⁹⁸ Nate Freeman, "Ryan McGinley, the Pied Piper of Downtown," *New York Times*, November 21, 2013, E1.

tagging the side of a building illuminated against the night sky (fig. 59). The colours and outlines blur thickly together, a muddle of browns and yellows. In fact, many of the photographs exhibited contain bright blocks of colour printed against granular browns. *Dash Bombing* was hung next to the wall text, and the succeeding photographs are evidence of a multifaced life, at once epic and ordinary, that brought urban subcultures often treated as incidental or criminal into the gallery without marking them as different or peripheral. McGinley's *Root Canal* (2000) and the Coney Island ocean splashing of *Tim and Dakota* (2002) seem as if they could be of any life. *Lizzy*, which became the signature image of the exhibition, was hung next to *Cum* (1999), a close-up shot of Eric Cumming's crotch covered in semen. It is a hang choice that gave *Lizzy* a sheepishly sexualized undertone that is absent when the photograph is seen alone. The exhibition concluded with *Dan and Eric Sleeping* (2002), an image of Colen and Cummings asleep, bodies slightly curled towards each other (figs. 60-63). Reviewing the show, Holland Cotter wrote, "the tone is relaxed and playful, as if the world were on recess."²⁹⁹

Halfway through *The Kids Are Alright*, right at the corner, was *Sam (Ground Zero)* (2001), a jolt in the middle of an otherwise apolitical, a-temporal viewing experience. Over the years, McGinley has said repeatedly that he isn't interested in making "depressing images" and that he chooses not to make political art.³⁰⁰ Cotter closed his review of *The Kids Are Alright* by writing:

What those politics might be, exactly, is hard to say, though the question arises in light of the apparently carefree spirit of Mr. McGinley's pictures. The artist seems to understand this: his inclusion of a shot of a friend, speeding away from Ground Zero on a bike, his mouth covered by his shirt, carries a jolt of reality-check surprise.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Holland Cotter, "ART IN REVIEW; 'The Kids Are Alright' – 'Photographs by Ryan McGinley,'" *New York Times*, February 14, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/14/arts/art-in-review-the-kids-are-alright-photographs-by-ryan-mcginley.html>.

³⁰⁰ Alice Jones, "Ryan McGinley: Pictures of Youth," *The Independent*, May 18, 2012, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/ryan-mcginley-pictures-of-youth-7765874.html>.

³⁰¹ Cotter, "ART IN REVIEW; 'The Kids Are Alright' – 'Photographs by Ryan McGinley.'"

The Kids Are Alright opened just a month before the United States invaded Iraq. Thousands of adult men were about to be deployed to the Middle East, men who were the same age as McGinley, men who really weren't more than kids themselves. Conscription ended in 1973, so it wasn't as if McGinley and his friends were draft dodging. Nevertheless, there exists a tension in the way that indulgence can breed obliviousness, and that both are a choice and a privilege, and referring to adults as kids suggests that nothing has consequences.

McGinley traces this relentless optimism, as revealed in both his photographs and in the exhibition's title, to the death of his older brother Michael from an AIDS-related illness: "My work is a response to that [his brother's death], like about really embracing life and going wild and creating photographs in which there's so much energy and so much life being lived. For me it's an escape."³⁰² In its own way, all of McGinley's work has been about depicting families and perhaps this is because he became famous at twenty-five, at the age when you are expected to be an adult and have found a constellation of people. For this reason, McGinley is often discussed as the heir apparent to Nan Goldin, who became famous for her photographs of her friends, a group she often describes as her "tribe."³⁰³ Goldin's signature work is *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1980-1986), a visual diary presented in the form of a 45-minute slideshow set to music by artists such as Nina Simone, The Velvet Underground and Charles Aznavour. The title references a song in

³⁰² "A conversation between Ryan McGinley and Catherine Opie," accessed on January 17, 2019, www.ryanmcginley.com/catherine-opie-2017/.

³⁰³ Chloe Coleman, "Devastating photos show what abusive relationships look like," *Washington Post*, July 14, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-sight/wp/2016/07/14/nan-goldin-used-photography-to-survive-and-remember-trauma/?utm_term=.2b4077db25dd.

Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera*, and Goldin's *Ballad* is operatic. These are photographs of intimacy in all its permutations. Composed of nearly 700 photographs, the work is a chronicle of Goldin's and her friends' lives in the 1970s and 1980s (figs. 64-65). They carouse in clubs; they take drugs; they sleep, love and weep. It is, above all, a portrait of mortality as we watch her friends grow up, age and, in many cases, die. Critics have described McGinley's work as bearing "hints of...Nan Goldin's seamy snapshots of Bowery nightlife," and this link is often made because their photographs are thematically similar: drugs, nudity and youth rendered with remarkable candour in vivid intoxicating colour often against night's darkness.³⁰⁴ And McGinley, too, has cited Goldin as a key inspiration saying,

When I started making photos in the late nineties I was very influenced by Nan [Goldin]. I remember looking at her book *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* in 1997 and thinking, who are these people? Where are these places and where can I sign up? The world she created through her photographs mesmerized me and inspired me to make photographs of my own friends.³⁰⁵

However, the presentation of both bodies of work is strikingly different. Before the *Ballad* was exhibited at the 7th Whitney Biennial in 1985, Goldin showed her slideshow in cafes and clubs. It required a physical set-up, so the location where the images could be seen was always determined ahead of time. McGinley's photographs, on the other hand, were distributed through casual networks. *Vice* then did not command the same reach, and although McGinley sent off his booklets to curators and critics, they were predominantly circulated amongst friends. Furthermore, reading a magazine is primarily a solitary activity; at most, a few people could crowd around the pages. This type of looking is portable and not contingent on any one location.

³⁰⁴ Jones, "Ryan McGinley: Pictures of Youth."

³⁰⁵ "Ryan McGinley," *Interviews, Volume 2*, 195.

Goldin's Boston School contemporaries, specifically Jack Pierson and David Armstrong, provide an alternative and underexplored comparison, especially Pierson, who took as his starting point "autobiographical sincerity" even though his 'self-portraits' often depicted other people.³⁰⁶ In the 1980s and 1990s, he regularly travelled to California and the images evoke a West Coast optimism, sun-drenched and slow, reflected in his textured, almost hallucinogenic compositions. It is as if these are the dreamworlds of McGinley's kids. In Pierson's portraits, young men are centrally framed and stare longingly at the camera. *Ocean Drive* (1985/1995), for example, depicts a man in swimming trunks sitting on a bed, his body still damp from the dip (fig. 66). Behind him, curtains decorated with roses frame a window blind. Everything is slightly blurry, bathed in late afternoon light. This is a private world, and consequently, the line between art practice and life feels ill-defined. Armstrong's portraits, on the other hand, are much more rigorously staged, and his subjects stare directly at the camera. We know there is no possibility that these are candid shots. His series *615 Jefferson Avenue* (2011) has some parallels with McGinley's Polaroids. Shot at his Bedford-Stuyvesant brownstone, the photographs feature boys posed in front of walls, lying atop messy beds, half-dressed and often draped in gauzy fabrics. Many of the subjects were aspiring models who roomed with Armstrong (fig. 67). In a way, this is also a visitor's log, though the *615 Jefferson Avenue*'s photographs are more erotic than either McGinley's or Pierson's portraits.

McGinley first met Armstrong in 2008, and that year, along with Pierson, they collaborated on a short film. Shot at Armstrong's house in Bovina, NY, the film is improvisatory and almost absurd, featuring McGinley, Armstrong and Pierson drinking tea, wandering through the snow, sketching, chatting. There are focused, still shots of lamps and trinkets. McGinley poses in the snow wearing

³⁰⁶ Olivier Zahm, "There Is Some Sexuality Here, But What Sort? (after-Foucault)," trans. Gila Walker, in *Jack Pierson: Angel Youth*, ed. Rachel Thomas (Dublin: Irish Museum of Art, 2008), n. pag.

a pink tutu. Erik Satie's "Gymnopédie", wistful and tinkling, plays in the background. Sylvia Wolfe said, "This awareness of and homage to a previous generation is characteristic of McGinley. While he asserts the individuality of his own generation, he does so with an appreciation of the past."³⁰⁷

It was during these initial years in New York that McGinley first met Snow, and they bonded over a shared love of photography. McGinley easily embedded himself into Snow's graffiti crew IRAK, and Snow became one of McGinley's main photographic subjects: "He was one of my first muses. He embodied everything that I wanted to photograph and everything that I wanted to be. Irresponsible, reckless, carefree, wild, rich. We were just kids doing drugs and being bad. Out at bars every night. I don't think we ever saw each other in daylight. We were like vampires."³⁰⁸ This is a romantic narrative that counteracts the choreography of the photographs and instead suggests an idealized spontaneity reinforced through McGinley's use of 'muse'. But Snow is everywhere in these first photographs and in hundreds of the McGinley's Polaroids. In *Sace* (2000), Snow is shirtless, his arms extended as he sprays puffy text onto a brick wall lit by a flash of light (fig. 68). The perspective is slightly skewed, as if the wall is tilting backwards and Snow could puncture its façade. And *Dash (Supermarket)* (2000) is a close-up of Snow's angelic expression, eyes gazing calmly, almost reverently upwards (fig. 69). He wears a camouflage hood and a fur-lined leather jacket as all sorts of patterns encircle his face.

³⁰⁷ "Photographs by Ryan McGinley on View at WMAA," *Artdaily.org*, n. date, <http://artdaily.com/news/3944/Photographs-by-Ryan-McGinley-on-View-at-WMAA#.WykqXKdKg2w>.

³⁰⁸ Ryan McGinley, "Remembering Dash Snow," *Vice*, August 2, 2009, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/4w4v3n/remembering-dash-snow-980-v16n8.

Together, they used to pour over photography books, and Snow began to shoot his own life and surroundings aggressively as well.³⁰⁹ It is hard to know much about Snow's early interest in art except that, as the great-grandson of John and Dominique de Menil, he grew up surrounded by it. The de Menils assembled one of America's great collections of Modern art, including works by Duchamp, Picasso and Matisse, the basis of what is now the De Menil Collection in Houston. Even so, Snow is often described as having "stumbled" into art, that he was unaware he was making art, and that Colen and McGinley gently encouraged him to continue.³¹⁰ Despite his upbringing, Snow, his gallerist Javier Peres said, "had a sensibility that he had honed as his own...without any formal training."³¹¹ Snow is portrayed as a reluctant artist averse to the drama of art world wealth that he witnessed growing up. To be able to stumble into art suggests a degree of economic and social privilege, which McGinley and Colen have obliquely acknowledged:

McGinley: I think he was just so perplexed that we were so into it. Our situations were very different because of our backgrounds. I really had to take it seriously, make a career happen because if I didn't succeed I'd have to go back to New Jersey with my tail between my legs and work at Starbucks.

Colen: You and I had to go to college. My parents worked their asses off their whole lives to make sure all their kids went to college. There were no vacations, there was no extra cars, everything was very basic. Every cent was saved for our college tuitions. Dash dropped out of school, we couldn't do that.³¹²

[Later in the same conversation]

Colen: You don't make the stuff that Dash made as obsessively as Dash did if you don't want it to become a part of art history. You don't make that shit. He was in turmoil about it, and he died because of that turmoil, but he wants us talking about his art, he wants his art to live forever.³¹³

³⁰⁹ "Dan Colen and Ryan Conversation," *The Kids Were Alright*, 36.

³¹⁰ Ariel Levy, "Chasing Dash Snow," *New York*, November 25, 2007, <http://nymag.com/arts/art/profiles/26288/>.

³¹¹ O'Hagan, "The Last Days of Dash Snow."

³¹² "Dan Colen and Ryan Conversation," *The Kids Were Alright*, 37.

³¹³ "Dan Colen and Ryan Conversation," *The Kids Were Alright*, 43.

I agree that Snow's compulsive need to create and exhibit points to someone who wanted to be an artist. But I can also understand the reluctance to be swept up in the world his family represented and the reluctance to self-define as an artist, due to a desire to distance himself from this background. This doesn't mean he was unknown, however, and Snow was well-known; as his art was rooted in his life, the possibility of it being exhibited without acknowledging that he was a de Menil was unlikely. For Colen and McGinley to showcase their lives does not have the same implications; they were not weighted in the same way. And yet, for an amount of time, they all pulled from life as if the playing field was equal.

Snow is primarily known for the more than 8,000 Polaroid photographs he took. These images act as a diary and a time capsule, showing friends and lovers, strangers, benders, storefronts, rooftops, the ordinary and the bizarre: a portrait of New York (mostly) after 9/11, and Snow's quest to author his own biography. As critic Thomas Micchelli wrote, "They smack of life on the run—unmediated, flash-lit moments without an instant of forethought."³¹⁴ Within the published images, what is immediately noticeable are all the bodies, naked, bloody, feverish, exhausted and destroyed, but also goofy, hungry, flamboyant, extravagant and joyous.

Polaroids themselves deny formal analysis since they cannot seem to exist in isolation; the best way to talk about one image is to talk about many others at the same time. Severed from a whole, these photographs as individual objects are abrupt; to discuss them, then, must mirror the experience of looking. I have selected just ten to consider here, but first a few notes. Most of

³¹⁴ Tomas Micchelli, "Dash Snow. Review: *Silence Is The Only True Friend That Shall Never Betray You*, Rivington Arms September 7–October 15, 2006," *The Brooklyn Rail*, October 2006, <http://brooklynrail.org/2006/10/artseen/dash-snow>.

Snow's work was neither titled nor dated; this is the case for the Polaroids, but also his sculptures and collages. When there is a title, often it was added posthumously. As such, referencing any group of works can be syntactically complicated. Second, during Snow's lifetime only a small portion of the Polaroids were exhibited. When shown, they were enlarged to a 20x20-inch format, which he had printed at Pochron in Red Hook, Brooklyn, where McGinley also prints as well. He was "adamant" that none of his actual Polaroids were to be sold, but, occasionally, he gave away the originals.³¹⁵ Finally, since Snow's death, a substantially larger selection of Polaroids has been published. Of the ten images I have chosen to write about here, only three were from the posthumous publication. I have decided to include these three photographs because they exemplify the themes I understand as essential to Snow's practice, and as they were published before I began my research, I couldn't pretend not to have seen them.

One: Two people are naked and faceless on a bed, as one grabs the other's ass which is positioned at almost the exact centre of the frame (fig. 70). This is a grainy image probably because the room was dark, and there are only a few colours: flesh like adobe brick and off-white sheets. If you were to just glance at the picture in passing, as you might do if you were flicking through a whole stack of Polaroids, then the two bodies look like one solid mass, albeit with too many limbs. It is somewhat endearing that one man is still wearing his socks. There is some hedging on how constructed Snow's Polaroids were, and his friends talk about his ability to "seduce" a group, that he could "direct people in a very fluid way."³¹⁶ Snow's friend the curator Blair Hansen wrote, "These are no simply 'accidental snapshots' that provide a window into Snow's ecstatic or troubled

³¹⁵ Email conversation with Kathy Grayson, July 8, 2018.

³¹⁶ Dan Colen and then Hanna Liden quoted in Brant Foundation Art Study Center, "A Discussion of the Work of Dash Snow," filmed May 2, 2016 at Hunter College, New York, NY, video, 1:10:41.

soul, they are assembled compositions that Snow willed into being for reasons we may never understand.”³¹⁷ The notion of an unconscious charisma, however, is different from technical prowess; Hansen suggests that Snow made life happen around him instead of performing darkroom magic. Regardless, he was able to make his friends feel at ease in his presence.

Using a Polaroid camera was meant to be intuitive and fun: point, click and a photograph emerges. Even a child can do it, and I remember clicking away when I was little and the satisfying sound of unfurling photographic paper. This immediate and addictive gratification was marketed to the public; a campaign from the 1960s, for example, read, “Snap it. And 60 seconds later, you see it.” To develop a Polaroid, dyes are pushed through a thick white pigment, which is why the colours are heavily saturated, yet slightly soft and nebulous. They are distinctive and exhilarating in ways that makes this film feel so “powerfully analogue.”³¹⁸ (The blues are particularly hypnotic.) As obvious as it may be to point out, Polaroid film has no negatives; each image is singular and seemingly temperamental. This uniqueness makes us believe that Polaroid film is “ephemeral or fragile,” which has engendered a set of related rituals.³¹⁹ The shaking we do, for example, is unnecessary. But while we may call this instant film, the actual process is far from instantaneous. As photographic technologies developed, the “light-time” of an image gained speed.³²⁰ To be instantaneous, Polaroid film must work in the reverse, and the development of a single photograph can take around ten minutes in total; this slowness has its own appeal, as a nostalgic glance to another time, as a reminder of process and materiality. This in combination with their indexicality

³¹⁷ Mary Blair Hansen, “I Love You Stupid,” *Dash Snow: I Love You, Stupid*, ed. Mary Blair Hanson (New York: DAP, 2013), 425.

³¹⁸ Christopher Bonanos, *Instant: The Story of Polaroid Film* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012), 101.

³¹⁹ Bonanos, *Instant: The Story of Polaroid Film*, 50.

³²⁰ Jai McKenzie, *Light + Photography: A New History and Future of the Photographic Image* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 32.

is why Polaroids seem honest, even if we know that to not necessarily be the case. Snow, for example, regularly took multiple shots of the same moment; the final product is but one truthful translation of the scene at hand.

Two: Three men hang out on a rooftop. Downtown New York is spread out in the background, with a skyline punctuated by the distinct architecture of the Baruch Housing Project (fig. 71). One guy lounges with arms outstretched, staring at the sky or maybe napping, while the others sit at the edge chatting. The day is soft with a pale blue sky of early spring, and denuded branches make a web in front of the cityscape. Snow's reputation as "rebellious" is somewhat a result of the photographic self he presented to the world, but much of what he documented was so completely regular.³²¹ Often, snapshots are dull photographs that can be individually moving, images of graduations, birthday parties, major moments in minor, quotidian narratives. Accordingly, the genre refuses excitement as the photographs are connected by shared values and aspirations.³²² Snapshots are only significant insofar as they remain linked to the maker. Once separated from those who "inscribe" and preserve their history, a photograph's meaning is lost.³²³ As Catherine Zuromskis wrote, snapshots' "legibility depends not only on understanding social and visual conventions of the day, but also on the basic narrative progression of images in an album and often the owner's literal inscription of an image through handwritten captions."³²⁴ Snow simultaneously took snapshots and manipulated the snapshot rhetoric, so the photographs he created were both dependent upon one another but could also be viewed in isolation. Accordingly, they can be read

³²¹ "Dash Snow: Obituary," *The Telegraph*, July 15, 2009, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/art-obituaries/5837056/Dash-Snow.html>.

³²² Gregory Batchen, "Snapshots: Art History and the Ethnographic Turn," *photographies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2008), 133.

³²³ Catherine Zuromskis, "Outside Art: Exhibiting Snapshot Photography," *American Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 2 (June 2008): 426.

³²⁴ Zuromskis, "Outside Art," 426.

in aesthetic terms, but also seem to refuse such a reading as they still belong to his life. We can unravel the formal qualities of Snow's rooftop scene, but in many ways, this is irrelevant, as the Polaroid seems less invested in aestheticization than in memory and time.

Three: Three people are naked on top of a bed, and the man's feet dangle off the edge (fig. 72). He holds a blonde woman while a second woman, a brunette, gives him a hand job as she smokes. She is unruffled, like Mrs. Robinson or Mia Wallace. This Polaroid was taken in a hamster nest, where Snow and Colen would get really, really high and roll around in burrows of rubbish: "But [Agave] was foaming at the mouth and rolling her eyes in all directions, not right in the mind, possessed by the Bacchic god."³²⁵ The sex here looks more absurd than desirable, because Snow relied on harsh interior lighting which transforms skin into ashy slabs. Instead of excitement, the photo repels fantasy.

Polaroid cameras made it possible to photograph sex and nudity without a lab technician seeing the results, hugely significant in the era before digital photography or sexting. Certainly, the Polaroid Corporation was aware of the camera's manifold uses but could only ever indirectly if mischievously allude to them. In 1965, the Polaroid Corporation introduced a camera called The Swinger, for example, but it was with the SX-70 launch in 1972 that Polaroid established its reputation for "do-it-yourself erotica."³²⁶ Even its name is a bit of a titillating joke. Still, the fragmentary nature of the photographs, their fuzzy colours and small size, only hint at exposure and visibility. Nothing can ever be fully seen and embedded in the technology is the potential for

³²⁵ Euripides, *Bacchae*, trans. David Franklin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 71.

³²⁶ Peter Buse, "40,000 Roses- Or, the Perversity of Polaroid," in *The Polaroid Years: Instant Photography and Experimentation*, ed. Mary-Kay Lombino (London: Delmonico Books, 2013), 46.

the private to be at the fore, especially as there is no zooming or focus on a Polaroid; anyone who has ever taken a Polaroid knows the dance, the back-and-forth shuffle used to manually align the shot. To photograph anything at close range obligates the photographer to include himself, and Snow had to be in on the action.

Consequently, we are privy to scenes of extraordinary intimacy, the sort of vulnerability that is rarely displayed publicly. Indeed, the white border acts as an “armour” that protects the image within.³²⁷ There is a precariousness in the content as well as in the process, what performance scholar Peter Buse called a “special kind of sensuality about the image itself, which was...a tactile thing, an object as well as an image, and one whose charge was increased by appearing in the very scene in which it was made.”³²⁸ In many ways, pornography and paparazzi photography are photographic siblings, and they both have a shelf-life dependent on time and circumstance. To take a Polaroid means to shove a camera in someone else’s face in the same way that a paparazzo might aggressively hunt for a shot of George Clooney.

Four: This photograph is almost entirely covered in masking tape and all that can be seen is the small face of an older woman (fig. 73). Snow made sure to preserve the borders of his Polaroids, despite any damage or modifications he inflicted. Buse has observed that those working with Polaroids tend to also “work *on*” their images in ways that other photographers often do not.³²⁹ Like Raoul Ubac, Lucas Samaras also manipulated his photograph’s emulsion to blur colours and forms. Bruce Charlesworth replaced entire sections of emulsion with paint and collaged elements.

³²⁷ Buse, “40,000 Roses- Or, the Perversity of Polaroid,” 46.

³²⁸ Buse, “40,000 Roses- Or, the Perversity of Polaroid,” 45.

³²⁹ Buse, “40,000 Roses- Or, the Perversity of Polaroid,” 38, emphasis in the original.

And Snow defaced so many of his Polaroids by burning, embellishing and tearing them. Some are covered in fingerprints, scratch marks and even blood. Buse suggests that Polaroids' "refusal of the basic photographic possibility of reproducibility...demands a tribute from the artist in the form of a supplementary, and of course experimental, labour."³³⁰ Polaroids may be the image-as-object par excellence, and more so than other photographic methods, they are inexorably linked to their process of making. Their physicality results as much from how the image is taken as to what the final image feels like. A direct intervention, as such, may extend the surface, but it can also alter the image itself.

Five: Colen is naked and asleep, the sheets creased from his body (fig. 74). His limbs look endless and tied around his neck is a paisley patterned kerchief. It is a Polaroid suffused in affection, and is an example of Snow "slinking himself into impossible moments with his camera at the ready."³³¹ Henri Cartier-Bresson understood snapshot photography to rely on what he called the *instant décisif*: "the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of the precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression."³³² Cartier-Bresson recognized a reciprocity between the subject and the photographer who was "searching for [the] identity of his sitter, and also trying to fulfil an expression of himself."³³³ His faith in the *instant décisif* and in a mutuality suggests that an exchange that occurs within photography and that this recognition is manifested in the physical photograph.

³³⁰ Buse, "40,000 Roses- Or, the Perversity of Polaroid," 38.

³³¹ Hansen, "I Love You, Stupid!" 425.

³³² Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (Paris: Verve, 1952; reprint Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2014), n. pag.

³³³ Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, n. pag.

Six: A man sits in front of a television injecting heroin (fig. 75). This is the moment between sobriety and intoxication, an in-between and almost imperceptible shift frozen in film. There is a reason Snow is often mentioned in relation to Larry Clark and compositionally, this Polaroid resembles photographs from Clark's collection *Tulsa* (1971), which documented drug use and teenage life in the Oklahoma city where he was born. From that collection, *Untitled* (1971) is a black and white photograph of a shirtless man hunched over his arm; we cannot see the syringe or even his face (fig. 76). The shadows are inky and rich: calligraphic lines outline his body while his face remains entirely obscured. Clark's intent was to show "the stuff going on" that no one talked about: "I'm like a child of the Eisenhower era where everything was hidden, everything was secret, there were all these things that weren't talked about. Drugs weren't talked about...Nothing was talked about. I mean, it was a perfect America. There were no problems."³³⁴ By the time Snow took his photographs, this pretend had ended for a variety of reasons, but also, life in New York is always glamorous in a way that semi-rural Oklahoma can never be. Life is thrilling when illuminated by the city's lights.

Clark is more widely known for his film *Kids* (1995), which is shot like a documentary and presents a fictionalized account of teenage life in the city. The film takes place over the course of one day during which teenagers have sex, hang out and smoke weed. The crux of the plot revolves around an HIV-positive test. In *Kids*, all the actors were untrained and played by the future-famous including Chloë Sevigny and Rosario Dawson. The film was scripted by Harmony Korine, who,

³³⁴ "Conversations on Art at the Whitney Museum of American Art with Larry Clark, Ryan McGinley, and Sylvia Wolf," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, March 25, 2003, <http://ryanmcginley.com/larry-clark-sylvia-wolf-ryan-mcginley-2003/>.

like the artists discussed in this these, was making fiction of his community; the characters were based on people like Snow and McGinley and all their friends—New York’s graffiti writers, skateboarders and club kids. In fact, *Kids* starred Leo Fitzpatrick, who would become Snow, Colen and McGinley’s actual friend. Janet Maslin’s review for the *New York Times* called Clark’s vision “so bleak and legitimately shocking that it makes almost any other portrait of American adolescence look like the picture of Dorian Gray.”³³⁵ During the press-push in advance of the film’s debut, one of the movie’s producers said *Kids* was made because “we felt America is asleep. We hope to wake everyone up.”³³⁶ In a conversation reflecting on the legacy of *Kids*, Clark said he was just trying to show real life: “You wouldn’t know about the secret life of adolescents that adults aren’t allowed in. When *Kids* came out, people said it was just some old man’s fantasy: ‘That is not the way our kids are.’ Then all you had to do was read the newspaper for a few years and you saw that everything in *Kids* was happening in America.”³³⁷

For his images of rebellious and unrefined youth, Clark’s work has been put in dialogue with that of McGinley, and they had met each other early on, after one of McGinley’s early, self-made gallery shows. Clark also participated in a public program at the Whitney organised in conjunction with *The Kids Are Alright*. While their photographs are often discussed alongside one another, Clark understands his earliest documentary practice as more “innocent” than McGinley’s: “We didn’t know the ramifications of the photographs...I mean they [photographers] photograph all their lives, they photograph everything that’s going on in their lives, but at the same time they’re

³³⁵ Janet Maslin, “FILM REVIEW: KIDS; Growing up Troubled, In Terrifying Ways,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1995, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/07/21/movies/film-review-kids-growing-up-troubled-in-terrifying-ways.html>.

³³⁶ Anonymous producer quoted in Kenneth Turan, “MOVIE REVIEWS: ‘Kids’: Grossing Out the Old Squares,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 1995, http://articles.latimes.com/1995-07-28/entertainment/ca-28836_1_underage-kids.

³³⁷ Eric Hynes, “‘Kids’: The Oral History of the Most Controversial Film of the Nineties,” *Rolling Stone*, July 16, 2015, <http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/news/kids-the-oral-history-of-the-most-controversial-film-of-the-nineties-20150716>.

aware of what they're doing, and the people that they're photographing are aware of it, and so they're constantly making evidence."³³⁸ Perhaps *Kids* is an accurate mirror, even if it is fictional. Artifice doesn't have to equal fiction, and an image can be simultaneously constructed and authentic: "For what Clark is really after is the perfect picture of himself, and his gaze through the camera is an act of voodoo identification, a conjuring of the ghost of his youthful self, which he wants to summon from the spirit of his subjects. It never entirely works, of course, but he tries again and again, until the trying amounts to more than its aim."³³⁹ Similarly, far from being an exact translation of life, McGinley's and Snow's photographs instead should be thought of as a vehicle for imaging the sensation of youth.

Seven: Hands pointing at lines of cocaine that are doubled in a mirror (fig. 77). Everyone wears black, so they appear disembodied, like the Surrealist candle-holding arms of Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) (fig. 78). Snow's Polaroid too seems to image the unlocked unconscious of a drugged reality, of "worlds on top of each other, intermingling, and having no idea of each other."³⁴⁰ Being high makes time tick curiously, an exhilarating tear and a thick drip, exaggerated in different respects. It is one of the few ways to really feel the minutes move, and Snow's Polaroids often show both. Here, time feels sharp, electric and on the precipice. Yet, despite the drug-induced realities, Snow had a knack for picking out what he thought was the best individual image. As the curator Kathy Grayson remembers, "he always could pick out the best one, often tossing or crumpling the B or C team photos."³⁴¹

³³⁸ "Conversations on Art at the Whitney Museum of American Art with Larry Clark, Ryan McGinley, and Sylvia Wolf," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, March 25, 2003.

³³⁹ Jim Lewis, "Wrong," *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document* (New York: DAP, 1994), 22.

³⁴⁰ Jean Cocteau, *Opium: The Diary of an Addict*, trans. Ernest Boyd (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1932), 98.

³⁴¹ Email conversation with Kathy Grayson, July 8, 2018.

Eight: A man is collapsed onto a bed and the tattoos identify him as Snow who, on his chest, had the outlines of Día de los Muertos sugar skulls (fig. 79). His face and body are covered in a blood so red it almost like paint. It is obnoxiously and vividly red against his pale skin. Sugar skulls are used to honour the return of spirits during the Mexican holiday of Día de los Muertos, but I am not sure if Snow meant to acknowledge this history or if he just liked the look of them. In Mexico, as well as elsewhere in Latin America, photographs are placed on altars to intercede with the spiritual world, so Snow's Polaroid acts as a double intervention, an offering both in the skulls and the image-object. The debate over Polaroids' status as art objects owes much to the fact that the photographs can fulfil non-aesthetic roles.³⁴² Polaroids are regularly party souvenirs, used as headshots, and made to line a restaurant's walls. Their objectness mediates between the world of art and the world of the everyday.

Nine: Snow's face is refracted across the frame and bathed in a red light, head and body thrust backward like the figurehead of a boat (fig. 80). Five orbiting faces appear sick and otherworldly. It is the dizzying and distorted sensation of seeing yourself. Pale, scrawny and reptilian, Snow is a spectre. He is *sanpaku*, the Japanese term which translates as 'the three whites,' or when the white part of the eye, the sclera, is visible on three sides of the iris. Japanese superstition says that the irises rise when a man approaches death; *sanpaku* warns of a threatened life.³⁴³ That Snow would

³⁴² For a short history tracing the Polaroid Corporations efforts at legitimacy see Peter Buse, "Surely Fades Away: Polaroid Photography and the Contradictions of Cultural Value," *photographies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2008): 221-238. Legitimacy today is also intertwined with price, and at present, the cost of film is prohibitive.

³⁴³ Sakurazawa Nyoti, *You Are All Sanpaku* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1965). 70.

die young and of a heroin overdose makes it difficult to view some of these photographs, and by imaging excess, the Polaroid captures his future unspooling.³⁴⁴

Ten: In this darkened urban landscape, a brightly lit gas station emits a greenish glow fluorescent like the aurora borealis (fig. 81). The S of Shell has burnt out instead spelling out ‘hell’ in electrified red. The subject itself is rather banal, and unlike so many of the Polaroids, the gas station resists a subjective reading and an authorial identification. And yet Snow’s treatment and framing are far from disinterested. This is not one of Ed Ruscha’s photographs for his *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963), in which he represented ordinariness as iconic; rather, Snow’s gas station is distinctive and strange. If Ruscha made banality a motif, Snow instead sought out the extraordinary in the everyday.

This is one of Snow’s more popular Polaroids, and the one that I have most often seen reproduced and blown up. He felt the 20x20 inch format better allowed the details of the photograph to be seen, though he didn’t particularly like how they looked when framed. That these are the versions most often exhibited underscores the recent bias for permanency and the large-scale in art photography. Once a secondary concern for museums, photography in the 1980s and 1990s began to be a serious curatorial consideration as larger compositions, by artists such as Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer and Jeff Wall could be more easily “set against” and differentiated from mass-media images.³⁴⁵ At the scale of paintings, such photographs can be situated within the context of art history, and it is now standard for “museum photographers” to reference painterly traditions as

³⁴⁴ The photograph as death-in-life is central to Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*.

³⁴⁵ Julian Stallabrass, “Museum Photography and Museum Prose,” *New Left Review*, vol. 65, (September-October 2010): 101.

a means of placing “their mechanical products firmly within the ambit of high art.”³⁴⁶ In the commercial art sector, monumentality sells better. While major auction houses such as Christie’s and Sotheby’s have photography departments, these ‘museum’ photographs are sold under the purview of the post-war and contemporary departments.

Like all photography, Polaroids only ever reveal a fragment of the world, but the feeling of an isolated image is further emphasised by the white border which acts as a barricade. And although these images memorialise, they also require a loss as each is an amputation from the larger whole. Because no image exists outside of time, photography of all forms suggests a filmic arc, which is also evident in the Polaroids. Yet their inherent physicality also complicates this sensation of continuity. Although the white border acts as a frame, it also highlights what is lacking, what cannot be seen, and Polaroids produce an insatiable, ravenous hunger that obsesses photographers and viewers alike.³⁴⁷ Think of McGinley’s wall of visitors: how could that project ever truly be complete? When he moves? When he dies? That the Polaroid is a seemingly autonomous image belies its need for a context predicated on closeness.

As I have mentioned, Snow and McGinley were in close physical proximity to their subjects and this nearness is what gives the viewer permission to look. Indeed, the Polaroids emphasize the consensual relationship between photographer and subject. Catherine Zuromskis argues that “the intimacy of the snapshot act reaches its peak in those exceptional moments when the photographer

³⁴⁶ Stallabrass, “Museum Photography and Museum Prose,” 102.

³⁴⁷ Peter Buse, “40,000 Roses- Or, the Perversity of Polaroid,” 40.

does not require the subject's active complicity at all, when the closeness between the photographer and subject is so much understood that it does not need to be spoken."³⁴⁸ Goldin's claim that her photographs aren't voyeuristic requires a belief that insider status eliminates voyeurism. If you are *in* the group, that is, then you couldn't possibly gain pleasure from looking *at* the group. But voyeurism can take on different and competing motivations, and it is possible to be both outside and within. As Abigail Solomon-Godeau made clear, insider/outsider is but one of many relationships contained within a photograph.³⁴⁹

In the example of Goldin, her photographs were taken of what was then a marginalized and underground community whereas McGinley and Snow began their practices over a decade later, when politics had shifted. McGinley has described the intermingling of New York's "subcultures" by saying, "Even 10 years ago, if you had mentioned the word 'gay' or 'homosexual' in the terms of skateboarding or graffiti, people would look at you like you were fucking crazy. But nowadays, everyone's hanging out together, and I think that maybe my photography helps that out a little bit."³⁵⁰ McGinley's photographs of a shared community, and his own queerness, present a sex-filled world absent of politics and radically different from that of Goldin. Indeed, as the bulk of the 700 photographs that make up her *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* were taken during the 1970s and 1980s, the work acts as a chronicle of the AIDS epidemic. Accordingly, Goldin often positions herself as the memory-keeper, because she survived while many of her friends did not: "When people talk about the immediacy in the work, that's what it was about: this need to remember and

³⁴⁸ Catherine Zuromskis, *Snapshot Photography: The Lives of Images* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013), 53.

³⁴⁹ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Inside/Out," in *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document* (New York: DAP, 1994), 51-61.

³⁵⁰ "Conversations on Art at the Whitney Museum of American Art with Larry Clark, Ryan McGinley, and Sylvia Wolf," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, March 25, 2003.

record every single thing.”³⁵¹ The consensual dynamic necessarily evolves over time, but the “credibility” born out of these earliest images is repeatedly invoked within her new bodies of work, even as the subjects and settings change.³⁵² In Goldin’s evolving photographic practice, her personal involvement lessened as her life ceased to be the subject, yet as viewers we are expected to find the same affecting empathy and understanding. Furthermore, by exhibiting *The Ballad*, Goldin moved her snapshots out of the private realm and into the public, the same translation that occurs whenever Snow’s or McGinley’s photographs are shown. There is always a risk in any exhibition that the artist’s intentions will be misunderstood or overlooked, because a public presentation necessarily produces an outsider audience.

Although McGinley’s and Snow’s photographs memorialize a compassionate contemporary, to look is to be complicit or at the very least to be involved. There is no way to briefly scan the images, and perfunctory engagement seems difficult especially as, in these snapshots, you can sense the photographers overwhelming, almost compulsive, need to look. This sensation is reflected in the experience of viewing, and as I am neither the photographer nor one of their friends, this can feel like a violation. Yet in viewing these photographs and the immediacy and intimacy of the exposure, I feel close to them and begin to think that I can understand their lives. Zuromskis writes that the feeling of seeing something “uncomposed, vulnerable and exposed” is the essence of voyeurism.³⁵³ This is the point of these photographs, however; they are asking us to stare and scrutinize.

³⁵¹ Stephen Westfall, “Nan Goldin,” *Bomb*, October 1, 1991, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/nan-goldin/>.

³⁵² Soutter, *Why Art Photography?*, 79.

³⁵³ Zuromskis, *Snapshot Photography*, 286.

By composing photographs that look like the world, that very much present reality in certain ways, these images are overlain with a narrative that is both accurate and fictionalized. The photographs may be truthful, but they are not the truth. Although theorised in relation to writing, Paul John Eakin's understanding of the autobiographical self as a "fictive structure" seems apt here.³⁵⁴ Autobiography is always composed of and contains fictitious elements, no matter how uneasy that might make a reader. It is never unmediated and consequently, memory and imagination are "complimentary" and at times unconscious, gestures.³⁵⁵ These artists weren't simply hoping for an *instant décisif* but made the *instant décisif* happen. Indeed, these photographs are semi-constructed versions of life only better; in this work, the autobiographical becomes both the argument and the site of creation. Part of this subject matter is voyeurism itself, which encourages a more sympathetic reading. To believe that the people in the photographs couldn't be both McGinley's and Snow's friends and their artistic subjects not only negates the interpersonal relationships suggested by the camera, but also buys into an idea that the photographer is automatically external to the scene and thus objective.³⁵⁶ Zuromoskis wrote that Goldin's heavy reliance on the logic of the snapshot works to "disavow" the problems her photographs pose in relation to both voyeurism and her own self-interest.³⁵⁷ But perhaps accepting that voyeurism is inherent to the photographs, to many photographs, sidesteps this concern. The problem isn't the spectacle, but in pretending that it doesn't exist.

³⁵⁴ Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 3.

³⁵⁵ Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography*, 6.

³⁵⁶ Solomon-Godeau, "Inside/Out," 51.

³⁵⁷ Zuromskis, *Snapshot Photography*, 287.

McGinley's and Snow's photographs present their world as so "tantalizingly close, so near and yet so far."³⁵⁸ To look at these images is akin to reading someone else's journal. Sanctioned or not, reading a diary is to assess the life lived, an invitation to "judge and criticise, to sneer and snigger, to giggle and to gasp."³⁵⁹ But reading a diary is so unlike reading a painting or a photograph, even when the works are diaristic in subject matter. Art history, at least recently, asks us to look beyond the artist's life, to flay biography from object, but the reality of this is less than straightforward or even possible.³⁶⁰

By making his life and countless others so very public, McGinley opened his world to dissection. In the wake of *The Kids Are Alright*, his entire life changed: "Yeah, it was a whirlwind. Everything happened very fast- interviews, books, magazines, galleries, museums. Suddenly, my life was very public."³⁶¹ The publicity effectively ended his career as a snapshot photographer, and while he remained, and remains, interested in youth, his practice fundamentally changed as a result of the exhibition:

Everyone sort of knew who I was and up until that point nobody really knew me. So then when I was making photographs out and about, it didn't seem real anymore. I felt like people were too aware and I wasn't this anonymous person with a camera anymore.³⁶²

³⁵⁸ Sarah Bayley, *The Private Life of the Diary: From Pepys to Tweets* (London: Unbound, 2016), xv.

³⁵⁹ Bayley, *The Private Life of the Diary*, xv.

³⁶⁰ See: *The Life and the Work: Art and Biography*, ed. Charles G. Salas. (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2007): "Despite claims by theorists that an unbridgeable gulf exists between artist and artwork, bridges continue to be built, though how much weight they can bear is an open question," 2.

³⁶¹ "Barn Crash: Gus Van Sant and Ryan McGinley in Conversation," in Ryan McGinley, *Whistle for the Wind* (New York: Rizzoli, 2012), 22.

³⁶² "Ryan McGinley: 'I am just so fascinated by the body,'" *The Talks*, December 14, 2011, <http://the-talks.com/interview/ryan-mcginley/>.

Building off his earliest experiments with ipecac and trampolines, he reoriented his practice towards a theory of controlled chaos, whereby he produced the circumstances of a situation and then lets his models discover and play: “If I want something to happen I’ll make it happen or if something I didn’t expect happens and I like it I’ll go with it.”³⁶³

After *The Kids Are Alright*, a narrative emerged around McGinley’s practice, that he was a post-AIDS, post-9/11 photographer who captured an “underground lifestyle unclouded by imminent doom.”³⁶⁴ That his was a hedonistic wonderland, a “druggy downtown bohemia” free from politics, economics, the mess of trying to get by in a city as expensive as New York.³⁶⁵ It was unruly and chaotic, yes, but also fun and fantastical, and fantasy is recurrent in McGinley’s ensuing images: “I think that my photographs are a window to freedom and when people look at my images they connect with them because they show the life people are dreaming about.”³⁶⁶

Looking at these snapshot-like photographs now, however, produces a more cautionary reaction, particularly when viewed en masse. In the 2017 Museum of Contemporary Art show in Denver, curator Nora Burnett Abrams presented a selection of McGinley’s photographs taken between 1998 and 2003, including many that were not shown at the Whitney (fig. 82). It was also the first display of his Polaroids and 1,500 wrapped the galleries in framed grids. The exhibition was, as the museum noted, a rare opportunity for an artist to publicly revisit his earliest work. If the curatorial choices made at the Whitney evoked an optimism buoyed by the invincibility of youth,

³⁶³ “Ryan McGinley,” *Interviews, Volume 2*, 197.

³⁶⁴ Chris Kraus, “Pseudo-Fiction, Myth, and Contingency,” in Ryan McGinley, *Whistle for the Wind* (New York: Rizzoli, 2012), 23.

³⁶⁵ Emma Pearce, “Nudie Pics,” *New York*, June 18, 2007, 24.

³⁶⁶ Alessia Glaviano, “Interview: Ryan McGinley,” *Vogue Italia*, March 18, 2016, <https://www.vogue.it/en/photography/interviews/2016/03/18/ryan-mcginley-q-a/>.

then those at Denver were more muted. McGinley's more explicit photographs, including *Having Sex (Polaroids)*, were hung in an interior gallery, which was curated around the idea of a bedroom studio, or studio bedroom. The small room was preceded by a sign warning of graphic content, and while cordoning off such imagery is a sensible and necessary precaution in a public institution, doing so also suggests that decisions have ramifications, be they bodily or emotional. In this retrospective glance, McGinley's kids did get hurt and sometimes they needed to be protected too, an understanding reinforced by the few Polaroids taken by Snow that were also included in the exhibition. Lizzy McChesney recalled, "That's [the carefree attitude] is a pretty big exaggeration, too, especially now being able to see in hindsight just how damaged we actually were, and how we've paid for it in one way or another, some of us more so than others."³⁶⁷ Branding McGinley's earliest photographs as untroubled and light-hearted disregards the actual content of the images themselves and ignores the privilege afforded to most of his subjects.

Downstairs at the museum was the exhibition *Basquiat Before Basquiat: East 12th St. 1979-1980*, which presented a series of works made by Basquiat during the year he lived in the East Village. Abrams conceived of these exhibitions as companion pieces. Like Basquiat, McGinley's career began in the East Village and Lower East Side, and both artists evince a related and persuasive sense of place in their work. The pairing also positions McGinley as Basquiat's heir, tying their careers to a specifically New York aesthetic, even if it is only evident in McGinley's earliest photographs. Abrams isn't the first to suggest this pairing. For his website, the artist Jack Walls has published a series of short texts about Basquiat, Mapplethorpe and McGinley, the artists he has identified as central to his life. This explicit link was hammered home by *Wall Writers: Graffiti*

³⁶⁷ "Lizzy McChesney," *Ryan McGinley: The Kids Were Alright*, 99.

in Its Innocence, the third exhibition then on view at MCA Denver. Although McGinley himself was never a graffiti writer, so many of his photographs feature IRAK members and their colourful tags. *The Kids Are Alright* opened with *Dash Bombing* and at Denver, this felt like an homage.

It is a funny thing to look at the now- and the just-passed time of a photograph. As a photograph outlives its initial context, its significance as an object grows. That is why a family photo album has such power as it holds all the history within a single book and carries it into the now. Part of *The Kids Were Alright* is about relocating the past into the present, a process that McGinley describes as not as painless but “cathartic.”³⁶⁸ He explained: “I’m very in touch with my vulnerability and I’m proud of those photos where it’s really raw. It really was my life at the time.”³⁶⁹ The exhibition’s catalogue contained a series of reminiscences from many of the people he photographed, including McChesney, Kunle Martins, Leo Fitzpatrick, and Agathe Snow. The language is casual and meandering, and though speaking about McGinley, they also share their own stories and convictions. *The Kids Were Alright* reads like a yearbook in the way that everyone’s memories are woven together. It may be McGinley’s exhibition, but it is clear that there were many people with him.

“Art,” writes Olivia Laing, “does have extraordinary functions, some odd negotiating ability between people, including people who never meet and yet who infiltrate and enrich each other’s lives. It does have a capacity to create intimacy.”³⁷⁰ There is an intimacy in showing what is private

³⁶⁸ Kin Woo, “Almost Two Decades Later, Ryan McGinley Revisits His Youth,” *T Magazine*, February 6, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/06/t-magazine/art/ryan-mcginley-kids-were-alright-museum-contemporary-art-denver.html>.

³⁶⁹ Woo, “Almost Two Decades Later, Ryan McGinley Revisits His Youth.”

³⁷⁰ Olivia Laing, *The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone* (Picador: London, 2016): 282.

and revealing, but there is also intimacy in identification and communion, and *The Kids Were Alright* functioned as a time capsule to a former self. Perhaps their perpetual nostalgia, this overflowing backwards time, is why snapshots seem like portraits of youth. They are photography's teenager, unmonumental in content, dashed off, haphazard, rambunctious, spontaneous—forever in the process of becoming. Snapshots are the “missed encounters” of a moment, a sensation heightened in Snow's Polaroids, for which the act of making can appear so fast and sudden.³⁷¹ They exist in a liminal space, the turn and you just missed it kind of time. As such, they don't necessarily invite deep and prolonged looking. The fragmentation and their out-of-timeness is what make the looking difficult.³⁷² McGinley's and Snow's earliest photographs are images of and tributes to growing up, and the mess and awkwardness of it all.

As discussed above, these photographs are underpinned by a romanticised youth. In his images, McGinley presents the body as idealised and eternally young, caught forever within the choreographed situations he creates. Snow's depictions are grittier and dirtier, yet they too glamorise his existence as one of non-stop parties, sex and total abandonment. By representing the body as both spectacular and vulnerable, these artists brand their world as one steeped in eternal youth. This attitude is buttressed by the images of graffiti culture and the emphasis on fashion, spheres which perpetuate likeminded fantasies. These artists understood the importance of a voyeuristic lens: by supposedly opening their lives to the public, their own mythologies become the dominant narrative.

³⁷¹ Margaret Iverson, “Analogue: On Zoe Leonard and Tacita Dean,” *Critical Inquiry* vol. 38, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 801.

³⁷² For more on snapshots and time, see Thierry de Duve, “Time Exposure and Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox,” in *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins (London: Routledge, 2007), 109-124.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bohemia: for kids who think it still exists

Deitch Projects was the sort of gallery that prided itself on an ‘anything goes’ attitude. He has been described as a “PR-savvy showman” (*Vulture*); a “chameleon” (*New York Times*); and well-aware that he “helped to create...this fusion of art and entertainment” (*The New Yorker*).³⁷³ After receiving an MBA from Harvard Business School, he founded his own art advisory firm, and later worked for Citibank. Deitch learned quickly that art making can never be extricated from the art market. He said, “One of the biggest misunderstandings of this is that somehow there’s the art market and then there’s, let’s say, the ‘good’ part of the art world.”³⁷⁴

In January 1996, he opened his own gallery, Deitch Projects, with an inaugural performance by Vanessa Beecroft, just days after a nor’easter dumped 51 centimetres of snow on New York City. Deitch Projects soon became known for its “audacious programming,” and for championing emerging artists who were seen to be affiliated with “street culture.”³⁷⁵ The gallery’s financial structure allowed for and encouraged wild, unreserved programming, as each exhibition received \$25,000 which provided the artist a large enough budget to realize a grand project. If the show

³⁷³ Carl Swanson, “Jeffrey Deitch Curates Jeffrey Deitch: The Return of the Art World’s Most Essential Zelig,” *Vulture*, January 12, 2014, <http://www.vulture.com/2014/01/jeffrey-deitch-returns-to-the-art-world.html>; Guy Trebay, “The Lives of Jeffrey Deitch,” *New York Times*, October 19, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/21/fashion/jeffrey-deitch-faces-critics-at-moca.html?pagewanted=4&_r=1&smid=tw-share&pagewanted=all; Calvin Tomkins, “A Fool For Art,” *The New Yorker*, November 12, 2007, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/11/12/a-fool-for-art>. In the course of my research, I repeatedly tried to set up an interview with Deitch but was unfortunately unsuccessful.

³⁷⁴ Anna Louie Sussman, “How Jeffrey Deitch, Citibank, and Christo Created the Art Market as We Know It,” *Artsy*, July 30, 2017, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-jeffrey-deitch-citibank-christo-created-art-market>.

³⁷⁵ Deitch Projects, “History of Deitch Projects,” accessed on November 1, 2018, <http://www.deitch.com/history>.

sold, the artist and Deitch would split the profits. If it didn't, Deitch would add the work to his collection.³⁷⁶

Dan Colen showed *Secrets and Cymbals, Smoke and Scissors: My Friend Dash's Wall in the Future* at Deitch Projects in 2006. The year before, he along with Snow and McGinley, had been included in the gallery's anthology exhibition *Live Through This: New York 2005*. Assembling a range of fashion designers, musicians and artists, *Live Through This* celebrated the "interconnected potentials" of the city's downtown scene.³⁷⁷ Young artists in that moment were, the exhibition argued, mining their own lives, and the works produced were beginning to be understood through a "platform for creativity rather than as a narrow discipline focused on art about art."³⁷⁸ This assessment was reinforced by the catalogue in which every exhibitor was represented through a double-page spread of images and text. The endpapers were entirely covered with party pictures and candid snapshots, and the font chosen resembled cartoonish handwriting (fig. 83). Representing interconnectivity as exciting was the aim of *Live Through This*, but the exhibition also positioned its artists as going out of their way to avoid "economies of exploitation."³⁷⁹ These were artists, the exhibition claimed, who made art for art's sake yet were constantly bombarded by both commercial and art world institutions which, in the catalogue, were presented as possessing exploitative aims. *Live Through This's* curator Kathy Grayson referred to their financial sacrifices as "small miracle[s]."³⁸⁰

³⁷⁶ Sussman, "How Jeffrey Deitch, Citibank, and Christo Created the Art Market as We Know It."

³⁷⁷ Kathy Grayson, "Live Through This: New York 2005," *Live Through This: New York 2005*, eds. Kathy Grayson and Jeffrey Deitch. (New York: Deitch Projects, 2005), 79.

³⁷⁸ Jeffrey Deitch, "Live the Art," *Live Through This: New York 2005*, ed. Kathy Grayson and Jeffrey Deitch. (New York: Deitch Projects, 2005), 64.

³⁷⁹ Kathy Grayson, "Live Through This: New York 2005," *Live Through This: New York 2005*, 80.

³⁸⁰ Kathy Grayson, "Live Through This: New York 2005," 79.

Deitch was most intrigued by artists whose works were “indistinguishable” from their lives and in 2007, he asked Colen and Snow to install one of their hamster nests at the gallery, and this installation is the linchpin of the chapter.³⁸¹ The hamster nests were private and secretive rituals that were held in hotel rooms where, fuelled by cocaine, mushrooms and alcohol, Colen and Snow would tear at the curtains and sheets, rip up the phonebooks, and roll around in the wreckage like hamsters. Their first nest was created in 2003. Others followed, on a road trip from New York to Miami; in Los Angeles one New Year’s Eve after which they fled, drove halfway up the coast, and fell asleep on a beach.³⁸² At another motel, they bolted after the bathtub overflowed into the room downstairs. Once, at a stylish hotel near Piccadilly in London, in a room paid for by the dealer Charles Saatchi, the two were forced to sneak out in the middle of the night to avoid arrest.³⁸³ This chapter examines what occurs when a private act is made public. Using the nests, this chapter considers the mechanisms and structures of making art, and the complicity of being an artist working today. First, I will consider the nests and the exhibition at Deitch Projects in relation to several historical examples; second, the chapter opens up to look at other points of contact with the market; finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of self-presentation within a marketable scene.

The nests were archaeological, the wildest parties attended by no one, but they also were laborious. It takes time and effort to shred phonebooks. This is a small, repetitive and dull gesture, a singular fixation on a minor detail.³⁸⁴ Sianne Ngai’s conception of the zany can help us

³⁸¹ Tomkins, “A Fool For Art.”

³⁸² Dan Colen in email to author, October 4, 2018.

³⁸³ “Obituary: Dash Snow,” *The Telegraph*, July 15, 2009, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/art-obituaries/5837056/Dash-Snow.html>.

³⁸⁴ In a discussion about amphetamine usage at Andy Warhol’s Factory, Juan A. Suárez explained that such drugs plunge the user into the rhythms and minutiae of what he refers to as the noise of an enhanced reality, writing “Subject to the onslaught of noise, the speedster becomes in turn a noise machine: a compulsive doodler or tinkerer,

to understand these ungainly installations that were also not-installations. As an aesthetic, the zany is at once ludicrous and stressful, and it embraces its own exhaustion and precarity. The zany, contends Ngai, is built on incessant activity that seems to be playful but really is work.³⁸⁵ In these environments, which Ngai identifies as predominantly performative and filmic, the play is frenzied and “strenuous,” and enjoyment by outsiders or non-participants is predicated upon actual distance.³⁸⁶

The nests were often documented by Snow or McGinley, and in these images, we can see what Ngai means by distance; although intriguing, these are scenes that can only be appreciated from afar, with the safety of knowing you are at a remove. In 2016, McGinley posted a snapshot on his Instagram account that was taken in 2004. In it, Snow, curved like a comma, stands on the arms of a small chair upholstered in an inoffensive fabric (fig. 84). He wears hot pink trousers and has a mane of tinsel hair. He looks feral and leonine. The room has been thoroughly destroyed and is littered with torn phonebooks and cans of Pabst Blue Ribbon beer. (In the early 2000s, P.B.R., as Pabst Blue Ribbon is commonly called, became the beer of choice for hipsters drawn in by the lack of any overt marketing campaign, which seemed to signal an “illusion of autonomy.”³⁸⁷) In McGinley’s photograph, specks of paper and dust glint like disco ball reflections. Behind hang velvety blue curtains, like a Prom gone awry. Snow is doubled in the

a nonstop talker or made typist, whose stories break off constantly or veer off in ever digressive paths.” Juan A. Suárez, “Warhol’s 1960s’ Films, Amphetamine, and Queer Materiality.” *Criticism*, vol. 56, no. 3 (2014): 633.

³⁸⁵ Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 7.

³⁸⁶ Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 9.

³⁸⁷ Rachel Nuwer, “The Rise and Fall of PBR,” *Smithsonian*, August 7, 2014, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/rise-and-fall-pbr-beer-180952273/>. For a longer and more involved history of Pabst Blue Ribbon, see Rob Walker, “The Marketing of No Marketing,” *New York Times*, June 22, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/22/magazine/the-marketing-of-no-marketing.html?src=pm&pagewanted=1>.

mirror, and the neon colours pop delectably in the looking glass world. In both, he has his Polaroid camera aimed back at McGinley, at us, and I wonder where that photo is now.

From a nest in Miami, Snow put together video footage that he shot with filmmaker Naomi Fisher. Later, he sped up the film and added a soundtrack. In “The End is Near” (2005), Colen and Snow run around naked alongside an unidentified woman. They romp playfully in the papers covering the floor and filling the bathtub. On both Deitch Projects’ website and in his memoir *Live The Art: 15 Years of Deitch Projects*—a nostalgic tour through the gallery’s history—Deitch writes of showing the video as part of the presentation of *Live Through This* at Art Basel Miami Beach (2006), a fair pitched as the younger, rowdier sibling of demure Art Basel: “If Venice is about the artists, and discreet Basel about dealers and collectors, brash Miami is about money.”³⁸⁸ It seems unlikely that “The End is Near” could be created in under 24-hours, but Deitch’s claim concerns marketing an edgy and unrefined talent which would have been appealing to Art Basel Miami Beach’s clientele, a mix of ultra-millionaires, like casino-owner Steve Wynn and hip European buyers sporting “asymmetrical haircuts.”³⁸⁹ Both speak to different types of insiders and the ways in which these classifications can so easily mutate.

After a few months of deliberation, Snow and Colen agreed to the nest exhibition at Deitch Projects on the condition that they could completely takeover the gallery. Unlike the ad hoc hotel nests,

³⁸⁸ Rachel Cooke, “My Miami,” *Guardian*, December 11, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2005/dec/11/art1>.

³⁸⁹ Julia Chaplin, “In Miami Beach, Parties, Boldface Names and, Yes, Some Art,” *New York Times*, November 27, 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/27/travel/in-miami-beach-parties-boldface-names-and-yes-some-art.html>.

Nest would be a full-blown production befitting the space. Thirty students from Pratt Institute were hired to help shred over 2,000 phonebooks, and fifteen other artists, including Jack Walls and Aaron Bondaroff, were invited over four consecutive nights to roll around in the papers, shape the mounds, and christen the *Nest* (figs. 85-86). These night-time installations were recorded and shared on Grayson's Myspace page which, sadly, I have been unable to access.

Nest's opening party at Deitch Projects was invite-only and held on July 31, 2007. In attendance were Snow's then-gallerists Mirabelle Marden and Melissa Bent of Rivington Arms, who had also given Colen his first solo exhibition in 2003. Bent met Marden, the daughter of artists Brice and Helen Marden, at Sarah Lawrence College and together they opened the gallery in 2002 on Rivington Street in the Lower East Side, five years before the New Museum's relocation. Marden said, "We love the energy and communal spirit of the neighbourhood, but we also wanted to be near our apartments."³⁹⁰ The gallery had an "Argus-eyed prescience" regarding both its location and its artists, and Bent and Marden innately understood the value of living in the midst of this emerging arts community.³⁹¹

Despite the trash and the stink of *Nest*, critic David Valesco wrote in *Artforum's* Diary column, "It's surprisingly captivating—a rec room for those who make *Vice* and *i-D* magazines vade mecums."³⁹² (Valesco is now *Artforum's* editor in chief.) He describes *Nest* in relatively earnest terms, even while writing sentences like: "Stella Schnabel's leopard-print panties hang like a

³⁹⁰ "Beautiful People 2002: Mirabelle Marden & Melissa Bent," *PAPER*, April 1, 2002, <http://www.papermag.com/beautiful-people-2002-mirabelle-marden-melissa-bent-1425148311.html>.

³⁹¹ Zach Baron, "A Farewell to Arms," *Artforum*, December 17, 2008, <http://rivington.s461.sureserver.com/press/2008/081217ArtForum.html>.

³⁹² David Valesco, "Diary: Trash and Vaudeville," *Artforum*, July 13, 2007, <https://www.artforum.com/diary/id=15591>.

trophy high above the entrance.”³⁹³ Founded in 1962, the ascent of *Artforum* is tied to the formation of the critic-scholar, a pedigree which it takes seriously; the magazine’s vision of itself as both ultra-hip and ultra-smart is underscored in the article’s language, which weaves together references to both Deleuze and Chuck E. Cheese, and includes descriptions such as: “Amid the rolling hills of paper is a salmagundi of feathers, unidentifiable filth, and fluids (mostly piss and liquor, though one hopes for at least a smidgeon of blood and cum).”³⁹⁴ The only reason to hope for blood and cum, however, is because you are in search of a supposedly authentic experience and are eager not to miss it.

Diary (formerly *Scene & Herd*) details art world happenings and gossip accompanied by party pictures of the rich and famous. *Scene & Herd* was launched in 2004 by Jack Bankowsky, who was charged with bringing more traffic to the then-seven-year-old website. Bankowsky wondered: “What would it be like to run a magazine within a magazine, a forum inside *Artforum*, and one whose purview, rather than art itself, would be ‘the art world,’ the 24-7 social whirl the parent publication’s very identity depends on holding at arm’s length?”³⁹⁵ *Diary* is still only published online and at *Artforum*, digital content is run separately to the print publication. Former editor in chief Tim Griffin hated the column: “It risks mirroring the ‘celebrification’ of the art world.”³⁹⁶ *Diary* is consistently the most trafficked section of the website, and this paradox is at the heart of *Artforum*. The magazine remains a place for rigorous criticism but also needs advertisement revenue to remain in business, which it gets from exciting headlines and website traffic. *Artforum* must be both above the scene and simultaneously indebted to it.

³⁹³ Valesco, “Diary: Trash and Vaudeville.”

³⁹⁴ Valesco, “Diary: Trash and Vaudeville.”

³⁹⁵ Jack Bankowsky, “Jack Bankowsky on Scene & Herd,” *Artforum*, vol. 51, no. 1 (September 2012): n. pag.

³⁹⁶ Sarah Thorton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (London: Granta Books, 2008), 155.

Footage from *Artnet*, the auction and news website, showing the *Nest*'s closing party held on August 18, 2007 provides an unvarnished and grubby glimpse into Deitch Projects' full transformation (fig. 87). Shot entirely in black and white, this video lacks locational specificity and feels as if it could be so many places: a warehouse basement, a carpark, a city's ruins. The walls are covered in graffiti, gum and scratches—a canvas onto which people were still adding and inscribing in the show's closing hours, an ever-evolving palimpsest of marks. The video cuts too quickly to read much of the graffiti, just snippets here and there such as 'Locals only,' 'magic snow,' 'I freed who' and 'Gimme head til I'm dead'. The paper bits mashed together to make hills that people sat on and rolled around in, little mountains soaked in beer and urine. And like a band's final performance, the video feels like the last hurrah.

After the exhibition closed, Deitch Projects published a catalogue of images from the exhibition with facsimiles of Snow's hotel room Polaroids. Naked Colen with naked women all illuminated by dingey lighting. Bathtubs filled with beer cans, trash and mucky water. In one photograph from *Nest*'s installation, Snow stands on a ladder, tossing out confetti, one fist held up triumphantly (fig. 88). His position makes him godlike in the same way of a rock star or rebel leader waving the banner of revolution. All around, paper clumps cascade like dust in a sun beam. A few years later, Colen would make a series of confetti paintings which drew inspiration from the nests, from their "wildness and spirit of youth, [and] chasing that brief moment of ecstasy."³⁹⁷ Certainly, the nests

³⁹⁷ Artsy Editors, "Bird Sh*t, Bubble Gum, and Crack Pipes: Dan Colen Reflects on his Decade-Long Career," *Artsy*, May 13, 2014, <https://www.artsy.net/article/marinakcashdan-bird-sh-star-t-bubble-gum-and-crack-pipes>.

owe much to the Be-ins, Love-ins and Happenings of the 1960s, and how these gatherings encouraged a bodily and expressive freedom, and the right to move about unencumbered.³⁹⁸ Spatially, this legacy is clear, in the way that people assembled and acted, even if it skews more Dionysian rite than Summer of Love. What the nests lacked however, was any overt social or political agenda; instead, they were steeped in a personal politics and not a larger narrative.

Still, the publication does evoke the almost ebullient optimism of the hippie years owing in part to the photographs of Snow's partner Jade Berreau, then nine months pregnant, running naked through the galleries, radiant and joyful in the disorder. For the exhibition's poster, Berreau stretched out languidly amongst the paper piles tinted a greenish gold (fig. 89). According to Greek mythology, first there was Chaos who was born from Darkness, and he ruled until Gaia, mother earth, was formed. Berreau is fashioned as a Gaia figure, a mother to all, and she even gave birth during the installation period. Secret, their daughter, was born a day before *Nest* opened and the exhibition was dedicated to her.

Of the other photographs included in the catalogue, many are completely indecipherable, bright splashes of colour and flesh, undulating patterns like the static of analogue television (fig. 90). There are closeup shots of wads of paper, rich purples and blacks like chewed-up bubble gum or spit balls; paint drips; hands and the backs of heads. These zoomed-in distortions transform *Nest* from a participatory event to something visual, recalling Process art of the 1960s and 1970s for

³⁹⁸ Beginning in the 1950s, artist Alan Kaprow's Happenings were a form of performance that embraced dance, music and poetry to blur art and life. Inspired by Dada and the avant-garde, over time Kaprow became equally invested in the nascent Fluxus movement, which rebelled against the art elitism and the market. Countercultural developments in the 1960s, such as the Be-ins and Love-ins, were partially inspired by the Happenings, and became symbols of a growing youth movement. These mass gatherings, however, were decidedly political as crowds gathered together to peacefully protest the Vietnam War and celebrate free love and psychedelic drugs.

which artists such as Robert Morris made visible their processes; in his *Untitled (Scatter Piece)* (1968-1969), for example, chance groupings of industrial elements were splayed across the gallery floor. For Morris, “making itself” had not yet been examined, and in a similar manner, *Nest* resisted aestheticizing form in favour of action and activity.³⁹⁹

Morris saw Process art as phenomenological, describing how it took on the condition of looking itself writing, “Fields of stuff which have no central focus and extend into or beyond the peripheral vision offer a kind of ‘landscape’ mode as opposed to a self-contained type of organization offered by the specific object.”⁴⁰⁰ Unlike a canvas or a sculpture, such works seem to extend beyond what the eye can physically take in. “Wholeness” is only established by the restrictions of the physical space and therefore is but a “secondary” concern.⁴⁰¹ These works instead propose “constant change,” in part because the component parts are not necessarily fused together.⁴⁰² Moreover, because of its inherent instability Process art (and process as a methodological consideration) resists commodification as a singular aesthetic object.⁴⁰³

Despite Snow and Colen’s considerable reflection, to exhibit a hamster nest at Deitch Projects was always going to involve compromise. On the one hand, there was the publicity to be gained from

³⁹⁹ Robert Morris, “Anti Form,” 1968, reprinted in Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 43.

⁴⁰⁰ Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture 4: Beyond Objects,” 1969, reprinted in Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 57.

⁴⁰¹ Morris, “Notes on Sculpture 4: Beyond Objects,” 60.

⁴⁰² Morris, “Notes on Sculpture 4: Beyond Objects,” 61.

⁴⁰³ See, in particular, Kim Grant, *All About Process: The Theory and Discourse of Modern Artistic Labor* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 193-202.

showing in a gallery with impressive reach. It was also a chance for Snow and Colen to collaborate on a show together. On the other, *Nest* would make the personal public by exposing their interior lives and practices. In the *Artnet* video, Colen explained that the installation really had very little to do with what he and Snow had been making all along, what they did in the hotel rooms.⁴⁰⁴ Colen appears awkward and resigned, and both he and Snow saw *Nest* as distinct due to the constraints the gallery space imposed. It was a restricted “aesthetic vision.”⁴⁰⁵

In this sense, the nests seem more aligned with Hélio Oiticica’s *Babylonests* and his *Cosmococas* series (made with filmmaker Neville d’Almeida) than any gallery installation. Brazilian artist Oiticica’s New York years (roughly 1971 to 1978) were an interrogation of experimental and experiential art, marked by his gradual turn towards, what curator Elizabeth Sussman calls, “the private subterranean.”⁴⁰⁶ These are sometimes referred to as his lost years as little of what Oiticica produced was ever exhibited, and some biographical accounts have overlooked this period.

Oiticica’s *Babylonests* were the continuation of his earlier series *Ninhos*, which translates to ‘nests’. These were composed of bunkbed-like wooden enclosures that Oiticica had worked on prior to his move to New York, and were previously exhibited at Whitechapel Gallery, London and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Oiticica hoped the *Ninhos* would keep out the world so that participants could “emerge with a heightened awareness of what it mean[t] to be *in* the

⁴⁰⁴ “Closing party for ‘Nest’ an installation by Dash Snow and Dan Colen for Deitch Projects.” YouTube video, *Artnet TV*, 2:29, September 12, 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PugWkh_gzxw.

⁴⁰⁵ Rihard Cándida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry and Politics in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 456.

⁴⁰⁶ Elizabeth Sussman, “Between the Public and the Private: Subterranea,” in *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*, ed. Elizabeth Sussman et al (Pittsburgh, PA: Prestel, 2017), 132.

world.”⁴⁰⁷ After their exhibition and after his move, he considered new ways to develop the work. The first, and never realized, was to dramatically scale up; the second, was to further develop the series privately, and Oiticica built more *Ninhos* in his East Village apartment at 81 2nd Avenue, renaming the series *Babylonest*. These were total environments for which Oiticica wanted to arrest the “potent, transgressive sensuality” of the East Village.⁴⁰⁸ Each was decorated differently, and he would invite friends over to hang out in the cocoons. Television and music blared. There were drugs and an erotic charge. They functioned like mini communes, creative hubs, whole worlds.⁴⁰⁹

Less improvisatory than *Babylonest* but still rooted in a similar set of aesthetic considerations were the *Cosmococas*. These were a series of immersive rooms, each oriented around a figure that Oiticica and d’Almeida venerated: Luis Buñuel, John Cage, Jimi Hendrix, Marilyn Monroe and Yoko Ono. Outfitted with slide projectors, a soundtrack and short instructions for visitors, they were purposefully low-tech and multi-sensorial. Slideshow projections featured patterns of cocaine traced atop album covers, magazines and other commercially available materials. Oiticica called these ‘quasi cinemas’ and saw the viewer’s behaviour as contingent upon and integrated within the cinematic. In *CC5-Hendrixwar*, for example, viewers lie in hammocks while enlarged slides of Hendrix’s posthumous album *War Heroes* (1972) float across the walls (fig. 91). Oiticica’s detailed journals reveal that he and d’Almeida envisioned the *Cosmococas* to be mobile and reproducible within a variety of venues; accordingly, they suggest a new cinema embodied in

⁴⁰⁷ James Rondeau, “The Cage-Bed of Dreams,” in *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*, ed. Elizabeth Sussman et al (Pittsburgh, PA: Prestel, 2017), 114.

⁴⁰⁸ Rondeau, “The Cage-Bed of Dreams,” 119.

⁴⁰⁹ World making, especially vis-à-vis a utopian impulse, is a common trope in modern and contemporary art. See: James Nisbet, *Ecologies, Environments, and Energy Systems in Art of the 1960s and 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014); and Alastair Gordon, *Spaced Out: Radical Environments of the Psychedelic Sixties* (Rizzoli: New York, 2008).

the audience's physical engagement with the space and slideshow.⁴¹⁰ Within these rooms, the filmic became an immersive experience.

The *Cosmococas* were never exhibited during Oiticica's lifetime and instead were "only available, physically and mentally" if the artists chose to invite someone in.⁴¹¹ In part, this is due to the centrality of cocaine to the *Cosmococas*; it is flaunted in the series' title, and its inclusion implicated both the viewer as well as the artists. D'Almeida described the drug as a "symbol of resistance to imperialism."⁴¹² Its inclusion also guaranteed that the *Cosmococas* could never be shown, even though cocaine in the 1970s was a status symbol; it was the "the champagne of drugs."⁴¹³ There is a reason that coke is associated with Wall Street bankers, Hollywood stars and models: the drug is expensive and being able to purchase it means having money, or access to money at the very least. The *Cosmococas* and the hamster nests propose an idea of the outlaw artist, someone who operates outside of society's norms. This is a Romantic construction and emblematic of a whole attitude, and yet it also has significant class insinuations regarding who gets to be an outlaw figure, and what the difference is between an outlaw and criminal. This double standard is made explicit in Rob Pruitt's *Cocaine Buffet* (1998), an installation for which he stretched a fifty-foot line of cocaine across a track of mirrors; visitors to the gallery were invited to snort at will (fig. 92). The installation was wholly cynical but served as a well-received peace offering to the art world that had summarily ostracised him a few years earlier. Pruitt is the type of artist who could offer up cocaine as a gift and have that gesture be redemptive and bring him

⁴¹⁰ Irene V. Small, "One Thing After Another: How We Spend Time in Hélio Oiticica's Quasi Cinemas," *Spectator: USC Journal of Film and Television Criticism*, vol. 28, no. 2, Fall 2008, <https://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/deliterate-cinema/>.

⁴¹¹ Sussman, "Between the Public and the Private: Subterranea," 140.

⁴¹² D'Almeida quoted in Carlos Basualdo, "Waiting for the Internal Sun: Notes on Hélio Oiticica's Quasi-Cinemas," in *Hélio Oiticica: Quasi-Cinemas*, ed. Carlos Basualdo. (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 52.

⁴¹³ Tim Madge, *White Mischief: A Cultural History of Cocaine* (London; Mainstream Publishing, 2001), 147.

new audiences. This is a slip that is based in economic difference, and the privilege of being able to traverse multiple worlds.

If most scholarship on the *Cosmococas* readily acknowledges the drug's presence, little has dealt directly with its relational significance: "The cocaine is the substance everything else revolves around that seems to contain everything directly."⁴¹⁴ Within the hamster nests, the drugs were also essential, acting as the catalyst from which everything exploded. Insofar as the nests have been written about, the drugs are presented as a thrill and a force, but not a medium worthy of discussion. In exhibitions of the *Cosmococas*, the cocaine, as expected, is absent. Deitch Projects, too, tried to control against drugs, and the public presentation of *Nest* was not about the act of getting high and ripping up phonebooks. The exhibition refers to risk without taking on the potential burden be it legal, financial or bodily, of what might happen if actual jeopardy were introduced.

Instead, *Nest* was risk diluted, a sentiment underscored in Deitch's memories of the exhibition: "Great art is sometimes made by pushing a situation to the point of chaos but knowing when to stop. Dan and Dash pushed things right to the edge but luckily did not step over it."⁴¹⁵ In *Live The Art*, Deitch writes of the "tough street kids" who arrived and spray painted over the graffiti that Snow and Colen had spent hours "subtly orchestrating."⁴¹⁶ "It's a miracle that nothing bad happened," Deitch said, but the exhibition was well-organized and thought-through. Besides controlling the guestlist, the gallery staff also cordoned off a designated smoking section, and had

⁴¹⁴ Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz, "Hélio's COUSIN: Cocaine and the Relations of Production in the Life and Work of Hélio Oiticica," in *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*, ed. Elizabeth Sussman et al (Pittsburgh, PA: Prestel, 2017), 224.

⁴¹⁵ Jeffrey Deitch, *Live The Art: 15 Years of Deitch Projects* (Rizzoli: New York, 2014), 266.

⁴¹⁶ Deitch, *Live the Art*, 266.

staff members act as security guards.⁴¹⁷ Risk is sexy and marketable, but not if something goes wrong, so Deitch Projects wanted to capitalize on the positive and glamorous associations, without taking on an actual danger. Compromises are often necessary in exhibitions, but doing so can require concessions, too, in the way that a work is transformed within each new setting. Deitch Projects could never have passed out baggies of pills, but without the drugs something was fundamentally different.

“The nests,” explained Colen, “were all about wanting to invent a new place [where] only your rule is relevant.”⁴¹⁸ They were, on the whole, rather Cocteauian with their pursuit of the “spectacular and effective.”⁴¹⁹ Indeed, Jean Cocteau’s art “existed primarily for him, for his ego, for his salvation, rather than for some ultimate betterment of the human condition.”⁴²⁰ There are certain parallels between the nests and Cocteau’s novel *Les Enfants Terribles* (1929), which tells of siblings Elizabeth and Paul and the Game, a psychological one-upping that must be played inside the Room. It is substantially more depraved and crueller than the nests; ultimately, the Game kills both brother and sister. Colen told me that “the best part of the experience for dash [sic] and I was inviting people into the nests with us. We brought friends sometimes, sometimes there was a kind of orgiastic element but often we would bring street people in with us just to have the (platonic) experience, we brought both bums and prostitutes.”⁴²¹ But the privacy inherent to the nests could never be replicated within a public exhibition, even given the possibility afforded by Deitch Projects’ financial model.

⁴¹⁷ Alex Greenberger, “‘Let’s Make It Happen’: Deitch on Almost Joining MoMA, Bribing Michael Jackson’s Doorman, and More,” *ARTnews*, March 26, 2015, <http://www.artnews.com/2015/03/26/lets-make-it-happen-deitch-on-almost-joining-moma-bribing-michael-jordans-doorman-and-more/>.

⁴¹⁸ Dan Colen interviewed by the author, New York, September 6, 2016.

⁴¹⁹ Lydia Crowson, *The Esthetic of Jean Cocteau* (Hanover, NH: The University Press of New England, 1978), 7.

⁴²⁰ Crowson, *The Esthetic of Jean Cocteau*, 7.

⁴²¹ Dan Colen in an email to the author, May 5, 2018.

Ultimately, exhibiting secrecy is complicated. So much of Snow's practice can be informed by this question, especially the years he was active in IRAK. At its core, graffiti is as much an assault on physical structures as on culturally sanctioned aesthetics, so when it is exhibited, it is co-opted by the very institutions it seeks to subvert. And by exhibiting graffiti, these institutions and their patrons choose to accept vandalism as art—within the context of high art, that is.⁴²² There is a fine line between acknowledging the existence of an underground and defining it as a scene, and certainly the streets are more public than any gallery exhibition, even though these shows typically allow people to wander through and don't charge admission. Removing graffiti from the context of the street where it can be seen in situ limits not only who has access but also how tags are understood and valued. But a gallery's mission is first and foremost to sell art, and graffiti's main asset is its illegality.⁴²³ If the taggers are anonymous, how can the tags be sold? To sell street culture means packaging it in such a way that it can be marketed. If you choose to be in the world of high art, then you are only ever "flirting" with the world of graffiti.⁴²⁴

Moving *Nest* out of a hotel room and into the gallery similarly sanitized the experience of the work, and it lost its spirit of defiance. Nothing becomes uncool faster than when a parent approves, and Deitch's support obliterated anything subversive. It is akin to the type of status *Artforum* possesses, which is cool in a way that is socially acceptable, easily marketable, and somewhat sterile. While the hamster nests were personal, secret rebellions, *Nest* was a place for friends to gather, no

⁴²² James E. Walmesley, "In the Beginning There Was the Word," in *Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art and Street Culture*, eds. Aaron Rose and Christian Strike (New York: D. A. P. Books, 2004), 205.

⁴²³ James E. Walmesley, "In the Beginning There Was the Word," *Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art and Street Culture*, eds. Aaron Rose and Christian Strike (New York: D. A. P. Books, 2004), 205.

⁴²⁴ Walmesley, "In the Beginning There Was the Word," 204,

different than a coffee shop, just dirtier.⁴²⁵ Colen told me that it was “hard” to put his life on display like that, and after the exhibition at Deitch Projects, never again did they make a hamster nest.⁴²⁶

Colen’s discomfort at the visibility may have had something to do with how Deitch himself described the exhibition, and at the closing party, there was an undercurrent of aggrandizement to his statements. Deitch told *Artnet* that “this is the kind of thing that legend builds around.”⁴²⁷ He then compared the exhibition to Walter de Maria’s *Earth Room* (1977) saying that *Nest* could be thought of as the “New York dirt room,” and that it was a “Dadaistic explosion of [de Maria’s] pristine aesthetics.”⁴²⁸ Deitch’s words are irritating, because he comes across as so shameless in his exploitation of a downtown scene for his own gain. He calls himself an art world insider but in *Live The Art*, Deitch stages himself as both a tastemaker and an underdog. In his retrospective glance, every exhibition was daring, ambitious, one-of-a-kind and hugely influential.⁴²⁹

As much as the gallery is presented as a successful champion of the new and innovative, Deitch wanted Deitch Projects to “recapture the spirit of great modern artistic and theatrical collaborations,” citing as examples Marcel Duchamp and Sergei Diaghilev.⁴³⁰ These references

⁴²⁵ “Dan Colen Interview: From Bad Boy to Favorite Son,” *Louisiana Channel*, February 17, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXSb_vYnarg.

⁴²⁶ Dan Colen interviewed by the author, New York, September 6, 2016.

⁴²⁷ “Closing party for ‘Nest’ an installation by Dash Snow and Dan Colen for Deitch Projects.” YouTube video, *Artnet TV*, 2:29, September 12, 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PugWkh_gzxw.

⁴²⁸ Deitch, *Live the Art*, 266.

⁴²⁹ In 2010, Deitch was appointed the new director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. In the wake of his (rapid) hiring, Deitch shuttered the gallery and moved to Los Angeles, but his tenure at MOCA was short-lived and he left in 2013. Two years later, he published *Live The Art*. In light of these tumultuous Los Angeles years, the memoir reads like a plea for understanding and sympathy. It says: look at everything I contributed and everyone I have built up. Look at how the art world has benefited from my insights. Look at what I have done.

⁴³⁰ Deitch, *Live The Art*, 144.

point to the discourse in which he hopes to be situated, but they also come across as transparent desires to carve his own mythology onto the city. Indeed, Deitch Projects opened in SoHo, once the centre of the city's arts district, where government-backed demolition in the 1960s led to artists haphazardly and unofficially occupying much of the unused real estate. As more artists and galleries flocked to the neighbourhood, the city itself became an enduring point of artistic interrogation, from Gordon Matta-Clark's *Day's End* on the Chelsea waterfront to de Maria's *Earth Room*, which is housed in perpetuity in the DIA gallery founded by Snow's grandparents. SoHo had a synergistic relationship between artists and galleries until rapidly rising rents forced both to relocate. Most galleries moved twenty blocks further north to Chelsea. (This was the beginning of an international contemporary art that would eventually extend beyond New York, across the country and the world, with Chelsea at its heart. This swing would come to mean a constant rotation of art fairs and exhibitions, an aggressive hunt for the next big artist, the next big thing—uncompromising competition.⁴³¹ Saltz called it the corporatization of the art world, an “insider's game everyone is in on.”⁴³²) Deitch, however, wanted a return to the “open social network of cheap artist bars where young artists could meet each other” which had briefly been reincarnated in the East Village only to be decimated by New York's growing prosperity.⁴³³ He believed that Grand Street would be a “great thoroughfare” at the centre of a new art community, a link between SoHo's established galleries and the younger, scrappier scene further east.⁴³⁴ Accordingly, Deitch Projects positioned itself as both edgy and serious, relying on a blend of high

⁴³¹ For a brief discussion of art world real estate developments in Chelsea, see Randy Kennedy, “Chelsea: The Art and Commerce of One Hot Block,” *New York Times*, November 3, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/03/arts/design/03chel.html>.

⁴³² Jerry Saltz, “Babylon Now,” *The Village Voice*, September 11, 2001, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2001/09/11/babylon-now/>.

⁴³³ Deitch, *Live The Art*, 82.

⁴³⁴ Deitch, *Live The Art*, 24.

and low culture funnelled through the city's history. Deitch Projects branded itself as the heir to this scene, at once proven and untried, a contradiction underscored by its choice of location.

This new art community as advanced by Deitch was predicated upon a type of cool that no longer, or perhaps never, existed. This is the type of cool of the underground, a lifestyle that we believe can be found in basement bars and at 2:00 AM concerts, the places and people that no one knows about, where there is still the possibility of discovery that no longer really exists in New York, yet is powerfully marketable.⁴³⁵ A clear example of this form of capitalisation can be found in the clothing brand Supreme's 2016 line of t-shirts that feature Snow's collage *Untitled (in 20 parts)* (n. d.) (fig. 93-94). Each shirt, available in either black or white, was printed with a single image from the series, for which he took tabloid articles about Saddam Hussein, clippings he had collected over a three-year period, and ejaculated onto them, and then covered his semen in glitter: "Looking at his face could kind of kill the mood sometimes," Snow said.⁴³⁶ In one, *Untitled (Good Noose)*, Hussein appears to vomit white sparkles and in *Untitled (Saddam's Last Gasp)*, black glitter follows him like a spectre. This was not Snow's only masturbatory work. For *Fuck the Police* (2005), he came on forty-five individually framed tabloid pages with headlines about police brutality. The title, Snow acknowledged, wasn't particularly original, but part of the impetus behind the work was the triviality and predictability of the expression: "Been said a million times

⁴³⁵ Writer Rebecca Schuman thinks *Sex and the City* killed cool, and thus killed the '90s ethos: "Unlike the cool of the '90s, which depended upon a rejection of anything commercial and popular, you could purchase [*Sex and the City's*] cool at Barney's and the Patricia Field store on West Broadway. (As a sweet bonus, the show also ushered in the destruction of the island of Manhattan as a remotely interesting place to be.)" In the fantasy of *Sex and the City*, Supreme could not exist. See: Rebecca Schuman, "Blowin' Up the '90s," *Longreads*, December 2018, <https://longreads.com/2018/12/04/when-did-the-90s-end/>.

⁴³⁶ Dash Snow | Interview with Olivier Zahm," *Purple*, Fall/Winter 2007, <http://purple.fr/article/dash-snow/>.

before, but it needs to be said even more often.”⁴³⁷ His eternal pessimism is suggested through the gridded arrangement, a never-ending lattice of lines that is endlessly repeatable. Snow’s name can be found on the back of Supreme’s shirt in gothic script, but I’m not sure whether the Supremeheads know they have his glittery semen emblazoned across their chests.

Founded in 1994, Supreme is a skateboarding and clothing company that first opened in Manhattan on Lafayette Street; many of the earliest employees were extras in Larry Clark’s *Kids*.⁴³⁸ Initially, Supreme didn’t make clothing, just skateboards and gear, but slowly it began to experiment, first with a hoodie, then a cap. The collaborations with artists began early and have involved everyone from Nate Lowman to John Baldessari, as well as brands like Louis Vuitton, A.P.C. and Nike. Unlike these other pairings, however, Snow’s ‘collaboration’ came about after his death, and he did not select the image printed.

Today, Supreme collaborations generate enormous buzz; often, when I walk by the London shop in Soho, the queue runs for blocks. “Wear Supreme,” *Vice* explained, “and you’re part of their club, and everything that entails.”⁴³⁹ Maintaining such an aesthetic requires a strong and recognizable presence. As sociologist Yuniya Kawamura wrote, “Without any institutional support, a subculture remains marginal, unknown, and hidden... In order for a subculture to have a strong presence, it needs to be widely diffused through the media, retailers, and celebrities.”⁴⁴⁰

In the case of Supreme, the brand’s identity was constructed through the artists it promotes,

⁴³⁷ “Dash Snow,” interview with Olivier Zahm.

⁴³⁸ Robert Sullivan, “Charting the Rise of Supreme, From Cult Skate Shop to Fashion Superpower,” *Vogue*, August 10, 2017, <https://www.vogue.com/article/history-of-supreme-skate-clothing-brand>.

⁴³⁹ Jamie Clifton, “Why Are So Many People So Obsessed with Supreme?” *Vice*, July 19, 2016, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/5gq393/supreme-and-the-psychology-of-brand-devotion.

⁴⁴⁰ Yuniya Kawamura, *Sneakers: Fashion, Gender and Subculture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 97.

through magazines and by word of mouth. The store even launched its own short-lived publication. Now, much of this exchange occurs online: on Reddit, the online forum founded in 2005, there is an entire channel devoted to Supreme which, as of November 1, 2018, had over 122,000 subscribers.⁴⁴¹ Supreme only exists if it can sell an actual product, be that a skateboard or a t-shirt, but everything it sells represents a lifestyle. This aesthetic is distributed and reproduced through clothing and objects, what constitute a series of sustaining supports; the lifestyle is only able to exist by the “continuous production of ‘fashion’” as a culture.⁴⁴² It is the similar to the point that Grayson made in *Live Through This*: “For these artists whose outcome is indissoluble from their life and personal politics, there is the opportunity for their behaviour and lifestyle to shape things.”⁴⁴³

Consumption, in its manifold forms, is key to the generation and experience of any sustainable culture.⁴⁴⁴ And part of what Supreme sells is the recklessness and complete abandon that the nests seem to embody. Yet, although the nests present a marketable aesthetic, they were inherently non-commodifiable, and could never have been printed on a shirt. They were, in many ways, not-art, and even *Nest* at Deitch Projects could never really be bought or sold. Instead, their ephemerality evokes elements of performance art: both are recorded in photographic images and in film, which creates objects that can be more easily circulated. Unlike documents of performance art, however, which at least initially are quasi-reconstructive tools that favour the live act, the photographs of the nests were always objects in their own right.

⁴⁴¹ The total is from <https://www.reddit.com/r/supremeclothing>, which I accessed on November 1, 2018. Most social media platforms round user numbers once a certain threshold, usually 10,000, is crossed.

⁴⁴² Kawamra, *Sneakers*, 97.

⁴⁴³ Grayson, “Live Through This,” 79.

⁴⁴⁴ Kawamra, *Sneakers*, 97.

Philip Auslander has identified two types of performance documentation: the aptly named documentary, which conforms to a conventional understanding of how such images function, and then, the theatrical, which he sees to be those images that have an element of “performed photography.”⁴⁴⁵ Theatrical documentation represents an event that only ever occurred for the camera. In this category, Auslander locates Cindy Sherman’s and Gregory Crewdson’s practices as examples. But the hotel nests and their related images exist between the two, a performance with distributable images that also do more than simply attest to what happened. Neither the photographs nor Snow’s video “The End is Near” are impartial witnesses. Amelia Jones has argued for the “mutuality” of both document and performance, a position she defends in part to protect her continued study of performances that she never saw live, a problem to which I am quite sympathetic.⁴⁴⁶ She suggests that the performance itself is not the originary event. Rather the act and its images are interdependent, and the photograph possesses its own status.

Documentation serves as a testament to the act which once happened even as we move forward in time. Without the image or film, the performance is lost, but without the performance, the documentation is worthless.

When shared and passed around, documentation can provide a haptic encounter that establishes a “closeness” between the past (authentic) event and the present.⁴⁴⁷ But part of this mutual strengthening also comes from anecdote and storytelling. It is not enough simply to rely upon the

⁴⁴⁵ Philip Auslander, “The Performativity of Performance Documentation.” *PAJ*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2006): 2.

⁴⁴⁶ Amelia Jones, “‘Presence’ in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation,” *Art Journal*, vol. 56, no. 4 (1997): 16.

⁴⁴⁷ Kathy O’Dell, “Displacing the Haptic Performance Art, the Photographic Document, and the 1970s,” *Performance Research*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1997): 77.

visual information recorded in a photographic image. Because you cannot re-visit a performance, or re-inhabit a nest, cachet is reinforced through the stories that emerge. The nests were as much produced by the gossip and images as they were by Snow and Colen themselves; moreover, the resulting gossip also cemented their reputation as downtown's favourite 'bad boys'.⁴⁴⁸ And while physical objects may be sellable, even Supreme needs a narrative to hang onto. In the art world, it is your body and biography that hold currency, and even more so when the stories that surface have an underground or outsider prestige. While images may serve as an indexical mark of the original event, they too need stories to remain relevant.⁴⁴⁹

Art historian Isabelle Graw contends that the artist serves as a celebrity prototype whose image is part of and intertwined with the symbolic value of the art object.⁴⁵⁰ It has always been like this, since Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1558), since Albrecht Durer sold his self-portrait and copywrote his signature, but the idea of the celebrity-artist today would be nothing without Andy Warhol, who exploited his own name and transformed himself into a brand. He wanted his persona to be as desirable as any of his silk-screens which, in turn, made his art that much more sought after. Warhol became a brand contingent on downtown New York and a certain type of life. Still, during his reign, the art world was relatively small, and publications like *Page Six*, the *New York Post's*

⁴⁴⁸ See, among many: Henri Neuendorf, "'The Art World Mechanism Really Wants to Define You': Onetime Bad-Boy Artist Dan Colen on Achieving Maturity in His Work," *Artnet*, July 6, 2018, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/dan-colen-interview-1302428>; Justin Jones, "Art's Bad Boy Dan Colen Is All Grown Up," *The Daily Beast*, May 12, 2014, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/arts-bad-boy-dan-colen-is-all-grown-up>; and Jen Carlson, "Dash Snow Remembered by New York," *Gothamist*, July 15, 2009, http://gothamist.com/2009/07/15/dash_snow_1.php#photo-1.

⁴⁴⁹ Schneider, "Performance Remains," *Performance Research*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2001): 101.

⁴⁵⁰ Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009), 183.

gossip section created in the mid-1970s, could be effective publicity tools. Now there are so many more possibilities for self-staging and so much more material in circulation.

Warhol's rising fame also coincided with what Tom Wolfe called 'New Journalism', a subjective record filled with scene-by-scene accounts and lengthy descriptions detailing a subject's mannerisms, meals, jewellery, furniture, gait, laughter.⁴⁵¹ These articles read like novels, like fiction, and as a style, New Journalism no longer feels particularly innovative because it has become the norm. The launch of *Artforum's* Diary, therefore, seems almost preordained.

Celebrity, in its various forms, requires a public and institutions to prop it up: magazine covers, interviews and radio spots. But the bargain for being famous is that the public gets access, no matter how performative it may be. So much of celebrity consumption is bound up in trying to find something real in the lives of the famous; that the famous drive carpool, and queue up for airport security, and eat takeaway. Snow, Colen and McGinley became famous for making art out of their lives, but if they only did that, they would be no different than reality television stars who commodify their everyday existences. In the case of television personalities, once "unadulterated access" is denied, fame evaporates.⁴⁵²

In part, what made Warhol truly so visionary was his insistence on lifestyle as both an aesthetic and a point of interrogation. The blurring of artist and celebrity, however, came to the fore in the 1990s when the art world became a cultural industry.⁴⁵³ Now, there no longer is any shame in

⁴⁵¹ See: Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," in *The New Journalism*, eds. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (London: Picador, 1975).

⁴⁵² Anne Helen Peterson, "Confidentially Yours," *The Believer*, vol. 12, no. 4 (May 2014), https://www.believermag.com/issues/201405/?read=article_petersen.

⁴⁵³ "Isabelle Graw," interviewed by Alex Gartenfeld, *purple*, accessed on December 16, 2018, <http://purple.fr/magazine/ss-2011-issue-15/isabelle-graw/>. This is also part of what Julian Stallabrass argues about the YBAs in *High Art Lite*.

being associated with celebrity culture and fashion, and it is as common to pose for *Vogue* as it is to be written about in *Artforum*; neither will make or break a reputation. In fact, *Artforum* skews closer to *Vogue* than to any journal: “the artists you see on the *Artforum* website are the artists who constantly show up at the big openings and who want to be photographed.”⁴⁵⁴ For better or for worse, the aura of the artist has become akin to that of a celebrity, but by existing within the present conditions of celebrity culture, today’s artist “takes on even more object-like characteristics and is expected to stage himself accordingly.”⁴⁵⁵ As life becomes bound up with the work, it therefore can be both exhibited and traded, but choosing to perform biography is different than simply marketing yourself, even if the line dividing the two may be slippery.

Warhol held court at Max’s Kansas City, the nightclub where countless artists and writers dined, danced and drank. Basquiat and Jeff Koons hung out at the Mudd Club, a scene which served as the template for newly opened gallery-performance-nightclubs. These were settings to present a brand, reinforced through the prestige of “nocturnal visibility.”⁴⁵⁶ Much like the darkness of a theatre, night too stages a body, and the flash of the paparazzi’s cameras illuminates what otherwise would remain hidden.⁴⁵⁷ Darkness’ appeal comes from what it conceals, and when made visible, when revealed through tabloid photographs or neon glares, an exclusive world is momentarily exposed. The Mudd Club and Max’s Kansas City, among the many others, are famous and attractive for the people who frequented them. These places are remarkable not only

⁴⁵⁴ “Isabelle Graw,” interviewed by Alex Gartenfeld.

⁴⁵⁵ Graw, *High Price*, 183.

⁴⁵⁶ Dan Cameron, “It Takes a Village,” in *East Village USA*, ed. Michelle Piranio. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), 57.

⁴⁵⁷ For more on metaphors of the nighttime city, see William Sharpe, *New York Nocturne: The City After Dark in Literature, Painting, and Photography, 1850-1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). Although the book’s material predates this thesis, Sharpe’s account is a fascinating look at the evolution in attitudes towards nighttime after the introduction of artificial light. Sharpe positions nighttime as both subject and medium to consider how artists and writers tackled real and invented perceptions of night.

because they became embedded within a scene, but because they were the physical manifestations of the scene itself, where artists and musicians enacted a specific kind of self-performance. They had to be seen for the myth to spread.

Although most of these clubs themselves had closed or dried up by the time McGinley, Snow and Colen lived in New York, night-time as a set for a theatrical, specular self endures. This owes much to New York's reputation as 'the city that never sleeps' and the eternal possibility that those hours present. Instead, these artists went elsewhere, often to Lit Lounge, a bar on 2nd Avenue between 5th and 6th Streets that opened a few months after September 11th. "It was a bit of a fantasy land," remembered Colen, "two steps down and you were transported. But it was really our fantasy (fig. 95). All our other spots (maybe excluding The Cock) were really defined by a generation before us, or were too bougie to frequent or to call home."⁴⁵⁸ Writer Cat Marnell likened the bar to one of Goya's Black Paintings, a series of canvases never meant to be seen publicly.⁴⁵⁹ Likewise, McGinley referred to the bar as a "bunker" with really loud music.⁴⁶⁰ There he occasionally duct-taped a sheet of paper to the wall and shot his Polaroids; Lit, he said, was "our hangout."⁴⁶¹ It was where everyone always ended up because it was open after hours and because you couldn't hear the music from the street. 2002 was also the year smoking was banned in New York's bars, but Lit's basement was, if not a secret, then still relatively hidden away. After 9/11, the place to be was out of sight, safe and underground, away from the daylight, somewhere to smoke, sheltered in place. Bunkers are supposed to be temporary solutions to catastrophic situations, impenetrable safe rooms, forced hideaways. But if you choose to return

⁴⁵⁸ Disser, "'It was our fantasy': The story of Lit Lounge, Told By Its Regulars."

⁴⁵⁹ Disser, "'It was our fantasy': The story of Lit Lounge, Told By Its Regulars."

⁴⁶⁰ Disser, "'It was our fantasy': The story of Lit Lounge, Told By Its Regulars."

⁴⁶¹ Ryan McGinley in email to the author, June 11, 2018.

repeatedly to a bunker, then maybe you are less concerned with what is outside than what is concealed within. It is like what McGinley told me, “how a room or a space can hold a lot of value or aura or magic dust.”⁴⁶² Maybe, hidden inside, like a treasure chest at the centre of a fort, like an egg in a bird’s nest, is something to be preserved and protected.

Downtown as an aesthetic and an attitude is self-perpetuating, and it does continue to look backwards. In the Factory and in his art, Warhol “paved the way for the now ubiquitous recuperation of the underground by the mainstream” by embracing countercultural communities at the risk of estranging the more conventional art world establishment.⁴⁶³ Far from alienating the market, these communities were elevated out of a supposed obscurity and into the limelight. But Warhol also cultivated these personalities to bolster and sustain a brand staked upon the reputation of being a ‘true’ downtown artist.

Consider, for example, Molly Prentiss’s debut novel *Tuesday Nights in 1980* (2016), an ode to art and ambition swaddled in late nights and bumps of cocaine. Early on, Prentiss’s protagonist, the young, impossibly handsome, and impossibly talented painter, Raul Engales, befriends Keith Haring and Basquiat, and together they all hang out in a squat in Alphabet City. Here, Prentiss describes his first nights in New York City:

Engales danced to the B-52s at Studio 54, made out with models at Max’s, bummed cocaine from a performance artist with a silver-painted body, crashed maximalist parties in minimalist lofts. He hung out hungover on velour couches in illegal events spaces in what

⁴⁶² Ryan McGinley, interviewed by the author, New York, April 16, 2018.

⁴⁶³ Graw, *High Price*, 187.

was soon to be called SoHo but was then just the nameless hellhole where the streets went rebelliously against.⁴⁶⁴ Prentiss explicitly and overtly signals Engales' artistic authenticity by tying him to a set of codes established by Warhol. Although she is writing about 1980, this language remains in use and forces the artist into a prescribed role that hinges on the bohemian figure. It is vocabulary that should probably evolve.

“The fantasy of New York in the nineties,” said comedian Marc Maron, “was built on the carcass of seventies New York. That is when the city was really broke and there was something really raw and weird going on... [By the nineties] you're twice removed from the Factory.”⁴⁶⁵ The city is a skeleton of buildings and legends onto which we build more. But Maron had it wrong: this is the fantasy of downtown New York, of so many downtowns; it isn't limited to the 1990s. Believing this, however, means that we have petrified our artists in amber. We still imagine New York City to be home to a bohemian class where reputations can be made or broken in the back room of Max's Kansas City.

The problem with believing in a historical identity, however, is that it rooted in the rosiness of retrospect. Yet this system, the past art world, still required commodification. Warhol branded his name onto a series of products including film equipment, cigarettes and even money.⁴⁶⁶ He knew what an endorsement meant and what consumers were buying into. Some of the implications of Warhol's decision to market himself as a brand can be seen in the Young British Artists (YBAs)

⁴⁶⁴ Molly Prentiss, *Tuesday Nights in 1980* (New York: Gallery/Scout Press, 2016), 56.

⁴⁶⁵ Lizzy Goodman, *Meet Me in the Bathroom: Rebirth and Rock and Roll In New York City 2001-2011* (London: Faber and Faber, 2017), 7.

⁴⁶⁶ Ruth la Ferla, “The Selling of St. Andy,” *New York Times*, October 26, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/26/fashion/26warhol.html?mcubz=1>

of the early 1990s who “exploited the transparency of mass culture” to create art that fit into market.⁴⁶⁷ This art, argued Julian Stallabrass, was pessimistic about what it believed art could achieve.⁴⁶⁸ Certainly, similar critiques have been made about the practices of Colen, McGinley and Snow, yet we can only get to their work from Warhol and through the YBAs. But these artists can also be understood as, if not exactly resistant to the market apparatus then aware of how it operated.

By continuously morphing and evolving, the nests were never bound by a singular, set reading. Rather, as the paper scraps of a thousand phonebooks were broken down and reconstituted, they could be constantly regenerated, wildly and irrepressibly. Neither fully defined nor fully unrestricted, in their embrace of messiness as a technique, the nests collapsed oppositions. In doing so, the nests and *Nest* are a lens through which the mechanics of art making can be discussed. They reveal the collaboration between artists and the market – in all its forms – a complicity that has existed for centuries. But by actively engaging such systems, Colen and Snow were able to articulate how this relationship would look.

Messiness encourages the occupation of multiple spaces by its refusal to conform. This is central to the nests as they were positioned as both an object and a lifestyle, at once inside and underground. Inconsistency, that is, allows for things to exceed categorisation. The nests could be both performed and secretive, documented and not documentary, and it was possible to want to retain this privacy while still showing them publicly. It is possible to want to hold things back. These works objectified a lifestyle but also were inherently uncommodifiable, just as Snow’s

⁴⁶⁷ Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, 61.

⁴⁶⁸ Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, 169.

Supreme shirt was always more than simply a shirt. If mess is allowed, then these groupings are not in conflict but instead, merely jostling one another. Such multiple, metamorphosing identities can be seen in the ways in which the nests refused order and rejected a fixed narrative. By using mess as a strategy, they could be both art and not-art and remain a paradoxical realm of open-ended possibility.

Afterlives: when we were young, oh man did we have fun

On July 13, 2009, Dash Snow checked himself into Lafayette House for a three-night stay. Later that afternoon, he was found dead in the bathtub from a heroin overdose. Snow was two weeks shy of his 29th birthday. According to the *New York Times*'s report, detectives found the suite's bedroom littered with cans of Amstel Light and Heineken, an empty bottle of Bacardi, and baggies containing traces of heroin.⁴⁶⁹ Lafayette House is a luxury hotel located in a restored nineteenth-century brownstone that sees itself as continuing the legacy of Lafayette Street, which was once the centre of New York society, home to the Astor Library and Schermerhorn mansion. The hotel, however, is located on East 4th street, in the interstitial space that constitutes the NoHo neighbourhood. The formerly private home was converted into a five-room boutique hotel outfitted with marble fireplaces. The hallway has an ornately carved wooden staircase and is painted a rich, Catholic red.

Looking back, one of Snow's sculptures *A Means to an End* (2002) appears prophetic, even though it was constructed almost six years prior to his death (fig. 96). (Snow hated the word sculpture. He preferred terms like story or situation. Sculpture to him felt like a "guy in a beret, chiselling away at a piece of marble.")⁴⁷⁰ In *A Means to an End*, Snow filled a vitrine with pill bottles, sunglasses, a cassette player, a bone, paper fragments: the remnants of his apartment on Avenue C. "When I moved out," he said, "it took eleven days to clean it up, and this is all the stuff we found. I wanted

⁴⁶⁹ Alan Feuer and Allen Salkin, "Terrible End for an Enfant Terrible," *New York Times*, July 24, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/26/nyregion/26dash.html>.

⁴⁷⁰ "Dash Snow | Interview with Olivier Zahm." *Purple*, Fall/Winter 2007, <http://purple.fr/article/dash-snow/>.

to keep some things, like a lighter that was a gift, and then I couldn't edit it down at all. So I ended up showing all of it."⁴⁷¹ *A Means to an End* is a *Wunderkammer* without the taxonomies and labels.

Critic Glenn O'Brien believed that much of Snow's work was "meant to foreshadow a dramatic demise" that wasn't supposed to occur, and it is a mummification of sorts, a preservation in amber.⁴⁷² *A Means to an End* was included in *À rebours* (2012), the inaugural exhibition at Venus Over Manhattan in New York.⁴⁷³ *À rebours* translates as 'against the grain' and was taken from the homonymous novel by Joris-Karl Huysmans, published in 1884. In the story, Duc Jean des Esseintes, disgusted with conservative Parisian society, moves to the countryside to live in a world immersed in the obsessions that suit his decadent lifestyle. In conjuring the extremes of aesthetic devotion, Huysmans suggests that a life dedicated to art can be an all-consuming and incurable malady. In light of Huysmans' novel, *A Means to an End* seems at once symptomatic of larger social ailments and also a staging of the ailment itself.

Central to this chapter is how Snow's life has been framed since his death; overall, this chapter asks how memorialisation occurs and in what forms. I first will look at the various memorials and tributes that were realised by his family and downtown community before turning to published articles. These are then contrasted with Ryan McGinley's continuing memorial enacted through his Instagram account. The second part of the chapter turns to changes within McGinley's and Dan Colen's practices in the aftermath of Snow's death. Ultimately, both artists, to various degrees, withdrew from the city's downtown scene, a decision reflected in their evolving art practices.

⁴⁷¹ "Dash Snow," interview with Olivier Zahm.

⁴⁷² O'Brien, "A Eulogy for Dash Snow."

⁴⁷³ The gallery's name has since been shortened to Venus.

As news of Snow's death spread, an impromptu memorial grew outside of his apartment on the Bowery. In the same way that homes of celebrities who suddenly pass away become plastered in little tributes, Snow's apartment building entryway too was blanketed. There were purple flowers, notes, and pillar candleholders like the ones found on altars. A cardboard sign read 'We will miss you,' the i's dotted with hearts. Temporary memorials so often look the same because they are composed of similar ephemera. These things are rarely precious, in part because so many memorials are erected outside and subject to variable weather conditions, but also because the materials are inexpensive to procure. After 9/11, while Ground Zero was cordoned off, mourners assembled makeshift shrines in Union Square and Washington Square Park, large public sites for communion filled with flags and drawings of flags, hundreds of candles, and so many flowers. When Princess Diana died, thousands of bouquets were left outside of Kensington Palace. Snow's was smaller in scale but no matter: death and its surrounding rituals are entwined with material culture.⁴⁷⁴ We evoke memory through these objects.

Snow's grandmother, Christophe de Menil, also organized a memorial service, held three months later at the East River amphitheatre. The invitation featured a black and white portrait of Snow, and a reminder was posted on *paper* magazine's website. Around fifty people attended; it was a chilly autumnal day to be so close to the river, but the amphitheatre was selected because Snow

⁴⁷⁴ See: Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

and his friends used to hang out there. Aaron Bondaroff called it a “legendary” place.⁴⁷⁵ In the front row sat Snow’s siblings Maxwell and Caroline along with other members of the extended de Menil family, and “various other dignified silver-haired folk.”⁴⁷⁶ Christophe de Menil read aloud condolence cards and shared stories about her grandson with whom she had been close; she was the subject of some of Snow’s more playful Polaroids. (De Menil recounted the time she had offered to clean his hat: “‘Oh no,’ he said. ‘I’m trying to weather it, I want seven for a sculpture, and I’m on number five.’”⁴⁷⁷) There were performances by A.R.E Weapons and Gang Gang Dance, who had also performed at the opening of *Nest* at Deitch Projects. Bondaroff was disappointed by the memorial saying, “I don’t know, I’m lookin [sic] for the energy. You know Dash always wanted a wilder style. It’s very sweet that everybody came out, but it should be more — I’m waiting for the cops to shut it down, you know, make it a little more fun.”⁴⁷⁸

In addition to the spontaneous shrine on the Bowery, *Dash Snow: A Community Memorial* opened on July 23, 2009 at Deitch Projects. The gallery put out a call for photographs and videos of Snow, as well as work that was made in memorium, all of which was displayed alongside Snow’s own collages, Polaroids and sculptures (fig. 97). For a gallery to organize an exhibition in the wake of an artist’s death is an exceptional gesture, not simply because of logistical concerns.⁴⁷⁹ The exhibition speaks to the position Snow held within New York’s downtown community, and as a curated memorial, it was a way for the public to say goodbye. Nothing was for sale. The critic

⁴⁷⁵ Spencer Morgan, “Artists, Graffiti Writers, and Scenesters Turn Out for the Dash Snow Memorial,” *Vulture*, October 2, 2009. http://www.vulture.com/2009/10/dash_snow_memorial.html.

⁴⁷⁶ Spencer Morgan, “Artists, Graffiti Writers, and Scenesters Turn Out for the Dash Snow Memorial.”

⁴⁷⁷ Morgan, “Artists, Graffiti Writers, and Scenesters Turn Out for the Dash Snow Memorial.”

⁴⁷⁸ Morgan, “Artists, Graffiti Writers, and Scenesters Turn Out for the Dash Snow Memorial.”

⁴⁷⁹ The ‘retrospective’ was first used in Salons to exhibit dead artists, but with the arrival of art critics in the 19th century, the use of the retrospective shifted to promote living artists.

Roberta Smith compared the exhibition to a chapel.⁴⁸⁰ And with its tall ceilings and white light, it somewhat became one.

For the duration of the exhibition, Deitch Projects' façade was covered with an enormous SACER tag, overlapping and oozing lines of purple, pink and yellow (fig. 98). Inside, there were pencil and oil pastel portraits and hundreds of photographs: Snow smoking, standing with friends, bearded, shaved, behatted, seated, dancing, wearing sunglasses, with those sunglasses slung around his neck, at his apartment, at his studio, nearly naked—the snapshots of a whole life. On one wall was a hot pink t-shirt with a silkscreen of his mugshot; the back of which read 'Bin Laden Youth 212-673-3000'. (The number is for the Samaritans, an organization devoted to suicide-prevention.) McGinley printed out large photographs of Snow in black and white, and without colour, they are sombre and evanescent. Leo Fitzpatrick contributed *No Means No* (n.d.), a collaborative collage he had created with Snow. Even Snow's kindergarten teacher, Ann Conrad Steward, sent in a photograph of his class from the Trinity School and a letter which read, "Dash was wonderfully creative, kind, shy, loving and sometimes sad or silly. I am deeply saddened by his death but am not surprised by his creative accomplishments in his short life."⁴⁸¹ Tacked up on one wall was a note from Jade Berreau scrawled onto brown paper pasted with flower petals: 'I LOVE YOU WE ARE A FAMILY WE BELONG TOGETHER'. Another wall was left partially blank for people to write messages and memories, echoing the graffiti from *Nest* two years earlier, words that had long been painted over, and the myriad tributes would be painted over again as

⁴⁸⁰ Roberta Smith, "Images of a Camera-Toting Artist Turn a Gallery Into a Chapel," *New York Times*, July 23, 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/24/arts/design/24snow.html?_r=1&scp=3&sq=dash%20snow&st=cse.

⁴⁸¹ "Dash Snow: A Community Memorial @ Deitch Projects," *HYPEBEAST*, July 26, 2009, <https://hypebeast.com/2009/7/dash-snow-a-community-memorial-deitch-projects>.

well. These notes, like the cardboard sign ‘We Will Miss You’, communicate directly with the dead. They let the dead remain in the here and now, keeping them if not alive, then present.⁴⁸²

On one side of the gallery stood Snow’s lightbox work, *How Much Talent Does It Really Take to Come on the New York Post Anyway?* (2007), the line cribbed directly from Ariel Levy’s article. Roses lay at its base like flowers at a grave (fig. 99). When it was first exhibited at Peres Projects in Los Angeles, Snow placed an advertisement asking men to come masturbate onto the work; respondents included sex workers and the homeless, and everyone was paid. The ensuing performance was filmed and displayed on a loop in the gallery. The work evokes Vito Acconci’s *Seedbed* (1972) during which the artist crouched beneath a wooden ramp installed at Sonnabend Gallery and masturbated to the visitors walking overhead while narrating his fantasies out loud. Unlike *Seedbed*, however, Snow’s work was public and visual. Masturbation, as both an act and a symbol, suggests a “boundless excess” and the possibility of a “socially meaningless freedom.”⁴⁸³ Ever replenishable, there is always the potential for more. If masturbation is a “proclamation of autonomy,” then Snow’s gesture was a search for a specific, perhaps impossible sort of sovereignty.⁴⁸⁴

So much of what was published about Snow’s death mirrored the way the press covered his life and art: the tone was both admirable and doubtful, gossipy, thoughtful and provocative depending

⁴⁸² Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 101.

⁴⁸³ Thomas W. Laquer, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), 210.

⁴⁸⁴ Laquer, *Solitary Sex*, 36.

on the source.⁴⁸⁵ Tributes from his friends were complimentary and sympathetic, and largely painted a picture of Snow as a guileless artist who lived to the fullest. His friend, the filmmaker and photographer Cheryl Dunn wrote in *Interview* magazine, “Dash embodied New York. He was fearless, and he participated to the fullest extent in all of the extremes of this town. It’s a town designed to break people—that’s what makes it worth living in. He was perfectly suited for a town like this.”⁴⁸⁶ Or, as McGinley wrote in *Vice*: “One of my favourite things about Dash was always his unconscious moving hand. He would be sitting there smoking cigarettes, writing his tag in the air without being aware of it. I would just smile and watch the smoke twirl into the letters S A C E. That’s how I’ll always remember him.”⁴⁸⁷ Even *Vice*’s co-founder Gavin McInnis posted some comments on a blog: “He [Snow] was the kind of thing people move to New York for.”⁴⁸⁸

For his eulogy for Snow that was published in *purple*, Glenn O’Brien wrote:

Dash was a beautiful person and a genuine artist. A lot of people didn’t get the genuine part because to them he was a gossip star, all image. But he was the real thing, and sometimes his real was so in your face that people thought it must have been an act. It was an act, of course, but it was a real act. When you live in a world that’s inside a television there are no other options. But Dash and some of his friends were re-inventing what it is to be an artist, because that’s something every generation has to do. They had gotten the lay of the land and were responding accordingly.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁵ In *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993, 1994), Janet Malcolm reminds us that “a person who dies at thirty in the middle of a messy separation remains forever fixed in the mess...She will never reach the age when the tumults of young adulthood can be looked back upon with rueful sympathy and without anger and vengefulness...[Ted] Hughes has had to watch his young self being picked over by biographers, scholars, critics, article writers, and newspaper journalists. Strangers who Hughes feels know nothing about his marriage to Plath write about it with proprietary authority,” 7-9.

⁴⁸⁶ Cheryl Dunn, “Dash Snow, A Memorial,” *Interview*, July 22, 2009, <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/dash-snow-memorial>. Dunn is currently working on a documentary about Snow’s life, and she described him as having “had enough stories for three lifetimes.”

⁴⁸⁷ Ryan McGinley, “Remembering Dash Snow, July 14, 2009,” *Vice*, August 2, 2009, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/4w4v3n/remembering-dash-snow-980-v16n8.

⁴⁸⁸ Gavin McInnis, “Dash Snow 1981-2009,” *Street Carnage*, July 15, 2009, <http://streetcarnage.com/blog/dash-snow-1981-2009-2/#more-9517>.

⁴⁸⁹ O’Brien, “A Eulogy for Dash Snow.”

The concept of a 'real act' has interesting implications, and O'Brien's characterization dispels any gloss of naivete that threads through other accounts of Snow's career. Instead, he is presented as astute and shrewdly aware of how he performed within this 'television world'. A real act indicates a conscious understanding of self-performance and a belief that 'genuine' is a mutable identity. In the case of Snow, little has been done to think about how these obituaries and narratives function as historiography and consequently, his work is only discussed in relation to biography.

This is not to say that Snow's wild lifestyle was a conscious choice, but rather that there are other ways to address the lurid. Still, the media regularly highlighted the sensational and by doing so, embraced the oft-relied upon trope of the 'tragic dead artist'. For example, the *New York Times* reported, "He met a junkie's end but did so in \$325-a-night hotel room with an antique marble hearth. His death was not unlike his abbreviated life: a violent, jumbled collage of high and low."⁴⁹⁰ And: "Snow's unlikely biography as a scion of the uber-rich De Menil clan who has rejected his privileged upbringing categorically in favour of a liminal existence of drugs, sex and graffiti is the stuff of which dealers [sic] dreams are made."⁴⁹¹ As a society, we have long permitted the idea that artistic genius and self-destruction go hand in hand; it is an entertaining, yet damaging myth fuelled by the market.⁴⁹² Celebrity death, especially when premature, is an equalizing force resulting not only in the loss of wealth and status, but also the loss of the life itself.

⁴⁹⁰ Feuer and Salkin, "Terrible End for an Enfant Terrible."

⁴⁹¹ David Seldon, "Dash Snow at Contemporary Fine Arts. R.I.P. DASH SNOW 1981-2009," *WHITEHOT*, May 2007, <https://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/p-dash-snow-1981-2009/446>.

⁴⁹² Daniel Harris, "Celebrity Deaths," *The Antioch Review*, vol. 69, no. 4 (Fall 2011), 891.

One of the more extreme examples was Deborah Schoeneman's opening in *Slate*: "Dash Snow was the sexiest guy on the downtown art scene."⁴⁹³ Some of this, of course, is *Slate*'s voice which can be conversational and borderline insolent. Undoubtedly, it was an unusual lede for an obituary and it hints at an aspirational almost sexual closeness between Schoeneman and Snow, as if she knew him or wanted to know him. It is a text that presumes an intimacy, the mistaken belief that a public presence is equivalent to "emotional proximity."⁴⁹⁴

The language used in these examples reinforces the way that we remember Snow, not for his artwork necessarily, but for his person and his reputation, and his death provides "free mileage" for writers.⁴⁹⁵ It is a reminder that celebrities, who so often function like "mirages," are mortal too, and death is the reestablishment of the corporeality their bodies.⁴⁹⁶ But it also allows for a certain degree of laziness, because the life itself can outshine and reconfigure the work produced, especially in the case of an early death. Writing about the artist Eva Hesse, who died of a brain tumour at thirty-four, Anne Wagner said, "It is her (un)timely death that has meant that she has survived to play a special cultural role: forever under thirty-five, she answers a hunger for a youthful, tragic death."⁴⁹⁷ Hesse herself saw a direct link between her art and life, yet Wagner cautions against faithfully and firmly assuming such a methodology. The connection, she explains, is a "cultural artefact."⁴⁹⁸ As a pioneering feminist artist, Hesse's practice has long been defined by a discussion rooted in her self-reflexive gestures. Certainly, this was how her work was

⁴⁹³ Deborah Schoeneman, "An Homage to Artist Dash Snow," *Slate*, July 16, 2009,

http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2009/07/16/downtowns_art_star_dash_snow_flames_out.html.

⁴⁹⁴ Harris, "Celebrity Deaths," 888.

⁴⁹⁵ Anne Wagner, *Three Lives (Three Women): Modernism and The Art of Hesse, Krasner and O'Keefe* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1996), 197. And here I am writing about Snow's death almost ten years after the fact, and in doing so, am also inscribing myself within this, albeit thin, discourse.

⁴⁹⁶ Harris, "Celebrity Deaths," 887.

⁴⁹⁷ Anne Wagner, *Three Lives (Three Women): Modernism and The Art of Hesse*, 198.

⁴⁹⁸ Wagner, *Three Lives (Three Women)*, 203.

presented to me in my undergraduate coursework, and I was told of the bodily connotations of Hesse's material choices. To speak of a metaphoric body, however, is but one way of reading and contextualizing her art and doing so places her death—and its profound bodilyness, a result of multiple operations and a swift decline—front and centre.

Wagner also discusses the “tactic” of defining Hesse in relation to Sylvia Plath, which is employed by scholars and critics as a means of signalling the ‘tragic female artist’.⁴⁹⁹ These women are connected by virtue of being of the same period, and because both were ambitious and charted a radical course through their respective mediums. Yet this link also serves as a crutch: for as many similarities, there are also countless differences that distinguish each from the other, significantly, for example, that Hesse, unlike Plath, did not commit suicide. To associate the two, to put Hesse in dialogue with Plath, suggests that both drew from a similar wellspring of biographical inspiration, and such a comparison threatens to conflate their lives. Using an analogy as an aid, historical or otherwise, is one of the principal and important ways to define a career. In the case of Snow, rarely have these comparisons been unpacked or complicated. In many of the obituaries, for example, journalists exploited historical figures to undergird a narrative of defiance. The *New York Times* called him “the latest incarnation of that timeless New York species, the downtown Baudelaire.”⁵⁰⁰ Whereas the *Daily Beast* likened him to Georges Bataille and Kurt Cobain as well as Plath.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ Wagner, *Three Lives (Three Women)*, 206.

⁵⁰⁰ Feuer and Salkin, “Terrible End for an *Enfant Terrible*.”

⁵⁰¹ Ana Finel Honigman, “Dash Snow: Death of an Art Star,” *The Daily Beast*, July 16, 2009, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/dash-snow-death-of-an-art-star>.

By far the most common comparison, however, was to Jean-Michel Basquiat. From the *Guardian*: “In Snow the New York art scene had finally found an edgy young artist to compare with Jean-Michel Basquiat.”⁵⁰² Again, the *Daily Beast*: “So his [Snow’s] death has had the same convulsive impact as that of Jean-Michel Basquiat who died one year older in 1988.”⁵⁰³ And as with Hesse and Plath, Snow and Basquiat do have overlapping biographies, but only to a certain degree. The coincidences are not entirely coincidental, but they aren’t overwhelming either. Both began by making names for themselves writing graffiti and both died young of heroin overdoses. Both were so of New York in how they made canvases out of the city and their lives. That said, Basquiat’s ascendance was rapid and widespread. Snow did not come close to reaching his degree of success, and his death did not register at the same magnitude. Given the differences in their respective career arcs and the lack of formal correspondence within the works themselves, the similarities are a result of the biographical coincidences that the two artists share.

Comparing Snow to Basquiat also suggests that Snow was self-made, which was both untrue and true. Basquiat himself was only self-made until he wasn’t, and in his circle were some of the most powerful players including Andy Warhol and Larry Gagosian. His was a smaller art world, where a single review published in *Artforum* could be seismic. “The Radiant Child” by Rene Ricard gave us language to describe Basquiat’s emerging practice and made him a star. Even the review’s title implies luminescence. But the trajectory of Basquiat’s career cannot be replicated. Notwithstanding the cost of living in New York, the press’ role in cementing a reputation has also evolved. There are no longer one or two critics that can make or break a career, but instead a

⁵⁰² Sean O’Hagan, “The Last Days of Dash Snow,” *The Guardian*, September 20, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/sep/20/dash-snow-new-york-artist>.

⁵⁰³ Anthony Haden-Guest, “Remembering Dash Snow,” *The Daily Beast*, July 18, 2009, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/remembering-dash-snow>.

multitude of platforms and mouthpieces that allow an artist to circumvent and even undermine more traditional media.

When I went to visit McGinley in April of 2018, he told me that the tangled knot which was him, Snow and Colen remains quite central to his life. Of course, my interest in this history is the reason it was the focus of our conversation, but over the years, McGinley has done little to distance himself from his past, even as it continues to thrust certain interpretations upon his current work.

In a way, then, it is both surprising and entirely expected that he has become such a prolific Instagram user, which he uses both to promote current projects and to revisit the past in the present. @RyanMcGinleyStudios is frequently updated with pictures from photo shoots and his personal life, of his boyfriend Marc Domingo, @boticelliangels, their travels and dog, #dickthedog. These are often unremarkable scenes, but McGinley has always been open about his life: “It’s been in my nature to be public. There have been so many interviews in the last fifteen years, I am public through words.”⁵⁰⁴ In June 2018, he shared a series of photographs taken at New York’s Pride Parade. On March 4, 2018, he posted a group selfie taken at their friend Leo Fitzpatrick’s wedding. Regularly, McGinley posts birthday wishes: to friends like Colen, #DanColen, whose birthday is July 13, and to celebrities he has worked with such as Pharell Williams and Frank Ocean. (Colen isn’t on Instagram, but he has been tagged over 8,000 times.) These are tamer versions of the photographs that made McGinley famous, and these posts reinforce the notion of an identity rooted in an authentic youth.

⁵⁰⁴ Ryan McGinley in phone conversation with the author, May 16, 2017.

Interspersed throughout his account are snapshots from way back, images illustrating the earliest days of McGinley's career and life in New York which form a link from his beginnings to today. Many of these older photographs are of Snow, and part of McGinley's Instagram project is to develop a visual memorial. Every year, on July 13th, the date Snow died, and July 27th, his birthday, McGinley shares a photograph or two of Snow. Some are formally intriguing, some are cheeky. As a body of work, these shared images are complicated to address because we don't yet have the language to talk about Instagram as a separate viewing experience. To a degree, this is because the images are small, even if I look at them on my computer. When a user posts a photo, the file is automatically compressed and so much of the detail is lost in the low resolution. But also, Instagram as a platform is predicated on a visual blitz, and to gain followers, you must post, and post often, and more, more, more. Although it is possible to view a photograph alone, users want images; they devour images, and the stream of photographs, what is aptly called the 'feed', is never-ending, unrelenting and open for continuous gratification.⁵⁰⁵ In certain ways, this accumulation mirrors the experience of how Polaroids are viewed. Both, too, are square, and Instagram is a digital echo of Polaroid's iconic format. Yet Polaroids, by virtue of being material, singular objects can never be shared as widely as an Instagram post. As William Ivins noted, "A unique picture can make its communication to very few people, and it can make it only one place at one time."⁵⁰⁶ Ivins was writing about shifts in print technologies, from the woodblock to the lithograph, and finally to photography; the method that produced the most detail and the most copies always won out over its predecessor.

⁵⁰⁵ For more on Instagram feeds and the algorithmic choices that govern them, see Lev Manovich, *Instagram and Contemporary Image* (Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license, 2017), 28-145.

⁵⁰⁶ William M. Ivins, *Prints and Visual Communication* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1969, 1982), 161.

I would now like to look at a few of McGinley's posts from these dates. It is important to remember that Snow died before Instagram was released, but I doubt that he would have been particularly interested in the platform. To reiterate: none of the photographs shared *of* him were shared *by* him, an essential difference. Snow's online presence has been entirely defined by other users. Finally, I've copied the captions as they were posted.

July 27, 2017 (fig. 100): Three posts. First, Snow laughing in someone's bedroom wearing a Clash t-shirt and a baseball cap. He looks barely out of high school, which is maybe how old he was. The walls are decorated with sticky notes and doodles, ripped out pages of magazines, a picture of a woman covering herself with an orange slice, a woman in a bikini. McGinley wrote: "HBD Baby Boy. Luv u, Miss u, Kiss u. #DashSnow #SaceIRAK #tbt." Second, Snow flips off the camera while seated in front of a black wall covered in tags. Kunle Martins rests his head on Snow's shoulder. McGinley hashtags Martins. Third, Snow about to take a picture, his eye pressed into the Polaroid's viewfinder, a meta photograph. McGinley wrote, "Getting Polaroid-ed by #DashSnow HBD, Miss U lil' Angel #tbt."

July 13, 2017 (fig. 101): Two posts, two images of Polaroid photographs. In both, Snow poses against McGinley's blank white wall. There is some time separating the images, because, in one, Snow has no tattoos. In the other, a rosary dangles over his sugar skulls, his right eyebrow raised in a slight smirk. His hair is short and ruffled. Later, Snow would he grow his hair out and wear it plaited and long. But here, with his skinny body and loosely hung arms, he is young and looks it:

“Downtown’s little graffiti sprite,” said his friend Martins.⁵⁰⁷ McGinley captioned the photograph with a broken heart emoji and “RIP Dash Snow, today is 8 years #Dash Snow #tbt.”

July 27, 2016 (fig. 102): Two posts, both captioned “HBD Dash, miss u.” The first shows Snow with his sister Caroline as she pulls him in for a hug. In the other, Snow is shopping in a bodega. Plastic bags dangle from his wrists, and the shelves are entirely covered with packets of cookies and crackers; there are orderly rows of Tic Tac boxes and lines of candy-coloured lighters; a small American flag has been stuck into the cash register; a bucket stuffed with straws perches precariously on the counter. It has the same vibe as Andreas Gursky’s photograph *99 cent* (1999) without the flattening effect.

July 13, 2016 (fig. 103): McGinley shared a thirty-second video clip of an extreme close-up of Snow’s face taken from the filmmaker Daniel Joseph’s “You Doing You” (n. d.) which features short interviews with all different people and no one is ever introduced. Snow says, “I’ll tell you what I don’t believe in, can I do that? Alright, I don’t believe in the laws or the system, by any means, whatsoever. I try not to obey them at any time [laughs]. That’s what I believe in, not believing in.” When he speaks, a single gold tooth glints, and little curls of smoke waft upwards from an unseen cigarette. In his caption, McGinley writes, “Miss you Dash RIP 07/13/09 #dashsnow.”

July 13, 2015 (fig. 104): Two posts. First, Snow in profile, staring at a screen or a stage bathed in red or green light. It is an image that would fit aesthetically with McGinley’s series of Morrisey

⁵⁰⁷ Brant Foundation Art Study Center, “A Discussion of the Work of Dash Snow,” filmed May 2, 2016 at Hunter College, New York, NY, video, 1:10:41.

concertgoers that he worked on between 2004 and 2006. In the other, Snow wears a faded trucker hat and a pink, satiny blazer draped loosely over his shoulders. He drinks gingerly from a tiny minibar bottle, his mouth puckered over the too small opening. He looks like an imitation mob boss. The light is warm and rosy, and feels exceptionally beachy, like a 1970s southern California motel, which makes sense since the photograph was taken during a trip to Los Angeles. Both posts were captioned, “RIP Dash Snow July 27, 1981–July 13, 2009 #dashsnow #saceirak.”

“Being a photographer is constantly about going back to the past,” McGinley told me, and Instagram itself is a novel way to time travel as the platform has a peculiar relationship to temporality.⁵⁰⁸ You can scroll back years in someone’s posted pictures to find photographs of ex-boyfriends, now-dead relatives, former houses, babies before they grew, and the images themselves are ordered by when they were shared and not by their date of creation. Most physical photo albums tend not to cover such an expanse of time, but Instagram lets us see way back; it is a Wayback Machine. But even when writing about McGinley’s posts, I use the present tense, the present participle or -ing that denotes an action still in progress, the state of continuous being. It is as if the act of looking brings everything into the present day, even if I know that that face which would become my face no longer exists.

Although the platform allows users to share in real-time and post ‘live’ stories, Instagram also offers a variety of editing tools that can make an image look decades older, and many users have

⁵⁰⁸ Ryan McGinley in phone conversation with the author, May 16, 2017.

gravitated towards nostalgic-looking faux-vintage filters, soft edges and diffuse light, in a bid for a sense of authenticity.⁵⁰⁹ McGinley's photographs align with this sentimental, super-saturated yet granular style, but the truth is that they actually are old images. While other photo sharing applications like Hipstamatic frame digital images to look like Polaroids, McGinley's Polaroids are the real deal. But in a way, all his photographs look dated even without the time stamps. Perhaps this is because they were shot on film and lack the hyper-saturated look of a digital image, what normally populates an Instagram feed. But also, formally, many do resemble the photographs that might be stuffed into shoeboxes, with a sentence or date handwritten on the back, because they were. Aesthetically and in their content, many of these photographs look like they were taken in an earlier, pre-digital moment.

As @RyanMcGinleyStudios has over 254,000 followers, every tribute to Snow, every birthday wish and joke, is made important. These posts aren't just personal reminiscences, but a public archive that is added to each year in July. McGinley told me that it was his job to make sure people remember, a conviction he regularly repeats.⁵¹⁰ "It's my responsibility and our other friends' responsibility to keep his name and legacy alive, making sure a new generation of people are aware of him," he said.⁵¹¹ By sharing photographs of Snow, @RyanMcGinleyStudios introduces him to new audiences, as Instagram facilitates a circulation and engagement otherwise unavailable

⁵⁰⁹ Nathan Jurgenson, "The Faux-Vintage Photo: Full Essay (Parts I, II, and III)," *The Society Pages*, May 14, 2011, <https://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2011/05/14/the-faux-vintage-photo-full-essay-parts-i-ii-and-iii/>.

⁵¹⁰ Ryan McGinley in conversation with the author, New York, April 16, 2018.

⁵¹¹ "Ryan McGinley: 'New York was melting in front of me'," 52 Insights, August 10, 2017, <https://www.52-insights.com/ryan-mcginley-photographer-new-york-was-melting-in-front-of-me-kids-were-alright/>.

through exhibitions or magazines, even for someone as well-known as McGinley. But Snow's memory is kept alive through photographs *of* him and not of his artwork. His legacy is constructed through his biography and through his friendships. Seemingly every time McGinley posts, the image is seen by thousands instantaneously, which ensures that Snow, the person, remains present and visible, and furthers the submission of his art to his life.

But shared online, these images and memories take on new narratives, as social media platforms produce alternate and exponentially larger afterlives, both for the images themselves and for the people and sites they present. It is virtually impossible to trace the life cycle of a single post; since digital files can be shared and copied ad infinitum, possession in the digital sphere is tricky to pin down. Although McGinley took the original photograph, he isn't always credited, especially as any edit can give a picture a new maker. Each user feels a sense of ownership over the images he or she posts and re-shares, even as it is impossible to hold these photographs.⁵¹² (There is an entirely different discussion to be had over who owns and uses the data on social media platforms, and the way a photograph in film is transformed into a series of zeros and ones.)

Moreover, since users can re-post the same images, each new upload may be used differently than originally intended; digital photographs are unsettled and “endlessly recycled.”⁵¹³ Photographs can be tagged with hashtags which aggregate content across thematic channels; #DashSnow has been used by a whole range of users. Sometimes this tag is attached to Snow's work or to his portrait, but just as often, a user deploys #DashSnow to something altogether disconnected, like the image posted on June 4, 2018 of two Styrofoam mannequin heads captioned ‘sexism’. (There are over

⁵¹² Although you can hold their vessel—a phone, a computer—this is not the same as touching the image itself.

⁵¹³ José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 115.

6,000 posts on Instagram tagged with #DashSnow.) Since content can be so easily misattributed online, one side-effect of this hashtagging is that photographs become living pictures. As meaning is never anchored, images can always serve multiple ends, and the hashtags only make this more obvious.⁵¹⁴ Each reframing allows for and encourages new interpretations, and there are both known and anonymous recipients as presentational contexts shift. Photographs that once would have remained private, tucked into the sides of mirrors or taped up on the refrigerator, no longer are, and increasingly, personal archives are becoming part of the public domain.⁵¹⁵ But by making the personal public, memory, too, must negotiate with and is ultimately affected by this evolving public/private relationship.⁵¹⁶

Photographs have always had existences that spiral out endlessly, and social media platforms like Instagram simply have created new afterlives. As a result, digital technologies fuse temporalities, and yet, we can only ever access the past through the present.⁵¹⁷ Everything is constantly recontextualized through the current moment. New media theorist José van Dijck contends that photography in the digital age “may yield more control over [one’s] own pictorial identity” because “personal photographs dictate our autobiographical memory.”⁵¹⁸ The more images taken and viewed, the more fleshed out a person becomes, and these snapshots contribute to a portrait that, although not “immutable,” can seem more real than any single painting or posed shot.⁵¹⁹ Almost a century before Snow’s death, Alexander Rodchenko wrote that paintings, what he called

⁵¹⁴ Martin Lister, “Photography in the age of electronic imaging,” in *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Liza Wells (New York: Routledge, 1996, 2004), 317.

⁵¹⁵ van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, 119.

⁵¹⁶ van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, 172.

⁵¹⁷ van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, 172.

⁵¹⁸ van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, 100.

⁵¹⁹ Alexander Rodchenko, “Against the Synthetic Portrait, For the Snapshot,” in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940*, ed. Christopher Philips (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 240.

“synthetic portraits,” led to a false depiction of a person; to synthesize someone into a single portrait inevitably flattened out and romanticized a life.⁵²⁰ Instead, he argued for collections of photographs that, when taken together, would create not an “absolute resemblance,” but rather a multifaceted one.⁵²¹ Rodchenko was writing in the earliest days of photography and about Lenin, but, in some ways, social media bears out his thinking. By capturing the everyday, snapshots can round out someone’s life. Furthermore, if you believe a portrait doesn’t have to be of someone’s face, then social media has exploded the idea of portraiture. Every day, people share pictures of their dinners, queues for the bus, bags of groceries, all that is unremarkable and minor. If everything is public, then there is no room for a romanticized life. However, there is a false faith that the photograph shows reality. I know a photograph, or an Instagram post, can be manipulated, framed and filtered, but somehow, I still buy into these wild nights; I still believe these photos show us the truth of someone’s life, of Snow’s life. Then that belief becomes the truth that I will remember, even though it was edited by other people.

As a society, we are accustomed to the posthumous visibility that is granted to celebrities—how their names and faces trend after death—and these platforms allow for the same sort of embalming through images of both the famous and non-famous alike.⁵²² Still, we don’t yet know exactly how to deal with death and mourning in the digital sphere. Social media pages don’t automatically delete when someone dies. In fact, many remain in use so that communities can engage with the dead, in the same way you might tell stories at a funeral or how Deitch Projects had a wall where people could write to Snow. It reminds me of the phone booth installed in Otsuchi, Japan, a town

⁵²⁰ Rodchenko, “Against the Synthetic Portrait, For the Snapshot,” 239.

⁵²¹ Rodchenko, “Against the Synthetic Portrait, For the Snapshot,” 240.

⁵²² Cath Davies, “Nowhere Man: John Lennon and Spectral Liminality,” in *Envisaging Death: Visual Culture and Dying*, ed. Michele Aaron (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 84.

devastated by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami: mourners used a disconnected rotary phone to speak to their dead “over the wind.”⁵²³ In much the same way that social media allows for a prolonged relationship with the deceased, the wind phone too provides a similar one-way connection. If everything is forever on the Internet, then these tributes will live on in the digital cloud for anyone to access like an eternal flame.

In the years since Snow’s death, much of his work and personal ephemera have been moved to a storage facility in Saugerties, a bucolic town in upstate New York. While talking to McGinley, Colen remembered that, towards the end of Snow’s life, he had spoken about leaving New York: “He used to talk about getting out of the city and going to India, or Africa, or somewhere.”⁵²⁴ Snow needed to leave behind the psychic pull of the city, and the desire for the not-New York as a thematic and point of discovery was shared by McGinley and Colen. Snow began to explore this most explicitly in the videos he made in the last years of his life. For *Sisyphus*, *Sissy Fuss*, *Silly Puss* (2009, 00:16:39) he filmed Berreau and Secret wandering through dandelion-dotted fields, trudging like Sisyphus up a hill, tromping through the grass (fig. 105). They are the only two people alive in a silent land, newly born and exploring the verdant hills of this little world located in upstate New York. Shot on Super 8mm film, the colours are powerful and lusty, the deep blues and greens of dusk. Visually and thematically, *Sisyphus*, *Sissy Fuss*, *Silly Puss* is a far cry from Snow’s Polaroids and collages which are so tied to an urban and scrappy aesthetic, and while not

⁵²³ Jessica Leigh Hester, “The Phone Booth for Japanese Mourners,” *Citylab*, January 10, 2017, <https://www.citylab.com/life/2017/01/otsuchi-wind-phone-japanese-mourners/512681/>.

⁵²⁴ “Dan Colen and Ryan McGinley in conversation,” in *Ryan McGinley: The Kids Were Alright*, ed. Nora Burnett Abrams (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2017) 43.

entirely antithetical to his New York lifestyle, the video certainly is suggestive of an alternative existence.

Speaking in 2007, Snow decried how his community in New York had changed, in part a result of the “rent situation.”⁵²⁵ He said, “New York is a separate nation from America. I declare that I’m a New Yorker, not an American. But New York is becoming more and more like America. Taller, uglier, shinier buildings. I’ve seen the city change so much.”⁵²⁶ The city he loved so much seemed foreign and little remained that matched his mental picture of the place. *Sisyphus, Sissy Fuss, Silly Puss* offers a new landscape ripe for discovery far from the city. Perhaps Snow wanted a new means of seeing differently and being different through the supposed simplicity and innocence of nature: as his life became so public, then a little cabin in the woods would have been a way to reclaim some of that for himself.

For McGinley, an urgent need to find a new visual vocabulary propelled his ‘artistic exit’, which occurred earliest and most strikingly. The summer after *The Kids Are Alright* opened, a collector lent him a country house in Vermont. The grounds were outfitted with a trampoline and skate ramp, and McGinley invited his friends up to be photographed. While technically similar subject-wise they present a departure from the work he had exhibited at the Whitney. Inspired by the resulting photographs, McGinley began planning for a summer road trip across the United States. The fashion designer Agnès B., an early supporter of his work, provided funding for the trip.⁵²⁷ That summer, McGinley took *Lily (Black Eye)* (2005) of Lily Wheelwright, one of his first

⁵²⁵ “Dash Snow,” interview with Olivier Zahm.

⁵²⁶ IBID.

⁵²⁷ “Ryan McGinley: ‘I am just so fascinated by the body’.”

“muses.”⁵²⁸ In the photograph, she stands in a white-sand desert about to light a cigarette, her black eye outlined by a reddish crescent (fig. 106). It is an image that looks like a film still, cinematic in its constructed contradictions: a woman topless, a blackeye but no assailant, an empty desert, immense and serene. *Lily (Black Eye)* was the cover image for *Vice*’s 2006 Photo Issue, and the image forms the link between McGinley’s earliest snapshot aesthetic and everything that would come next. Like all photographs, it is a timestamp as two years later Wheelwright would die of an apparent drug overdose.

The road trip itself is a particularly American idea and ideal, where cars, as the ultimate symbol of freedom, are instruments of leisure and play. This 2005 road trip was the first of many road trips to yield new bodies of work: *Sun and Health* (Galerie du Jour–Agnès B., Paris, 2006), *I Know Where the Summer Goes* (Team Gallery, New York, 2008) and *Moonmilk* (Alison Jacques Gallery, London, 2009) all followed. For *I Know Where the Summer Goes*, McGinley shot over 4,000 rolls of film as he traversed the United States, which he then narrowed down to just fifty images, including *Fireworks Hysteria*. The exhibition’s title was taken from a breathy Belle & Sebastian B-side track. Inspired by Jules Verne and Mark Twain, *Moonmilk* follows models through underground caves. *Jonas & Marcel (Blue Altar)* (2009) is a wide shot of a blue and purple underground grotto (fig. 107). Tinted the same disco shades, Jonas’ and Marcel’s limby, angular bodies blend with the stalactites, and the acidic colours transform the cavern into somewhere fantastical. This is terra incognita.

⁵²⁸ Ryan McGinley, “Lily Wheelwright,” *Vice*, May 1, 2007, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/vd39dx/wheelwright-v14n5.

Each road trip grows from a specific idea and before embarking, McGinley pulls together files of inspirational images: screengrabs from movies and television shows, exhibition catalogues and vintage pornography. Of his own process, McGinley has said, “We start off by looking at a lot of imagery and ideas and then narrow them down to a few that feel right and work that day. Then I let them run free and direct them with a very loose hand.”⁵²⁹ The photographs continue to be what writer Chris Kraus calls “pseudo-fictions,” or what happens when real people are placed in “extraordinary situations.”⁵³⁰ McGinley is interested in pre-planned chaos and the photographs express, as critic Karen Rosenberg wrote, “the idea, rather than the experience, of spontaneity.”⁵³¹ While the first forays out of New York were impulsive and hectic, the trips now take months to plan and require a large team to scout locations and drive everyone around. There are multiple groups of models who participate in different legs of the trip. As the youngest of eight children, McGinley was raised by teenagers, what he calls a “rock n roll” bunch, so traveling around with a big group of models and producers feels altogether familial.⁵³²

In McGinley’s worlds, everything is drenched in the golden haze of late summer, even a winter landscape. There aren’t taxes or laundry or job interviews, and everything shines. His photographs are luscious in person with colours so intoxicatingly rich that excessive looking produces a fatigue, like eating too much cake. I was taught not to call things pretty or beautiful in art, because they aren’t the most evocative or useful descriptors. Embracing the beautiful can also be shameful, as beauty is both entrapping and marketable: “If [art] sells itself, it is an idolatrous commodity; if it

⁵²⁹ “Ryan McGinley,” in *Interviews, Volume 2*, 197.

⁵³⁰ Chris Kraus, “Pseudo-Fiction, Myth, and Contingency,” 26.

⁵³¹ Karen Rosenberg, “Art in Review: Ryan McGinley, I know Where the Summer Goes,” *New York Times*, April 25, 2008, E29.

⁵³² Ryan McGinley interviewed by the author, May 16, 2017.

sells something else, it is a seductive advertisement.”⁵³³ Yet, beauty, explained critic Dave Hickey, is the reason that certain works of art continue to resonate; it is almost Darwinian. He links beauty to religious patronage and the Church’s idea of “grace as sanctity-visibly confirmed,” but even Renaissance artists mixed sex and morality disguised behind lavish surfaces.⁵³⁴ “Beautiful works survive sans virtue,” says Hickey. “Virtuous works sans beauty do not.”⁵³⁵ McGinley’s photographs are pretty, in the way in which sunsets or wildflowers are satisfying. But in the beauty there lies a representation of a more idealized, more equitable world, far from the reality of actual life.

That the experience of looking itself is pleasant owes much to the size of the photographs, which are often large, and need be hung on a wall; this is the scale of paintings.⁵³⁶ What keeps the photographs from feeling too saccharine or too posed, however, is the movement. His subjects are boisterous, active and alive. In *Dakota (Hair)* (2005), a girl rides in the back of a truck, slurping down a soda, hair blowing wildly (fig. 108). There is Alex, who is suspended in a rushing wind and Wade leaping through a sea bathed in cotton candy pinks and oranges; the entire photograph is plucked from a rose-coloured dream (fig. 109-110). Photography stops all motion, but McGinley’s are so wholly alive, a feeling reinforced by colours that have been enhanced and adjusted. The photographs are reminders of what it means to be young and believe you are going to live forever. Who doesn’t want to be living that life, unburdened and unhurried? Who doesn’t want to be good-looking? Or, like McGinley has said, “My photographs are a celebration of life,

⁵³³ Dave Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, 2009), 8.

⁵³⁴ Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon*, 91.

⁵³⁵ Hickey, 104.

⁵³⁶ See: Julian Stallabrass, “Museum Photography and Museum Prose,” *New Left Review*, vol. 65 (September-October 2010): 93-125.

fun and beauty. They are of a world that doesn't exist, a fantasy. The life I wish I was living."⁵³⁷
Me too man, me too.

Fittingly, the road trip photographs, and the narratives surrounding the images, are suggestive of hippie communes and mini arcadias, the halcyon days, but absent any sexual overtones. It is as if we are back in the prelapsarian world. With *Deep Creek (Hot Springs)* (2005), for example, six people rush naked into a ribbon of water (fig. 111). It is a skinny-dipping dare; the most perfect summer's day. This flesh is so flawless it glows, taut, unblemished and unimpeachable. Visually, *Deep Creek* resembles of Thomas Eakins' painting *Swimming Hole* (1885), which celebrates the male body in the hope of creating some sort of utopia (fig. 112). In *Swimming Hole*, a handful of men frolic and lounge in the woods, each depicted in quiet reverie: they are muscular and active, the personification of health. *Swimming Hole* is an undeniably masculine space and a celebration of the naked male body; Eakins, argued art historian Randall C. Griffin, drew from Classical Greece to "embody a fantasy of returning to a pristine and fictive masculine past."⁵³⁸

If *Swimming Hole* is a tribute to Classical aesthetics and the male body, which Eakins felt to be the "highest form of beauty," then photographer Justine Kurland evokes a contemporary feminization of the pastoral.⁵³⁹ In *Bathers* (1998), a group of women wade in a placid pool. Tree boughs bend lazily, and everything is washed in warm-green tones (fig. 113). It looks like the East Coast of the United States, but I'm not sure why. *Bathers* is a thoughtfully arranged image

⁵³⁷ Cheryl Newman, "Ryan McGinley: joy unconfined," *The Telegraph*, December 24, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/photography/8972599/Ryan-McGinley-joy-unconfined.html>.

⁵³⁸ Randal C. Griffin, "Thomas Eakins' Construction of the Male Body, or 'Men Get to Know Each Other Across the Space of Time,'" *Oxford Art Journal* Vol. 18, No. 2 (1995): 74.

⁵³⁹ Griffin, "Thomas Eakins' Construction of the Male Body, or 'Men Get to Know Each Other Across the Space of Time,'" 72.

and like Eakins' *Swimming Hole*, like so much of academic art, it too is stabilized by a triangular composition. Both works transport us out of our own time into places seemingly untouched by external circumstance, and yet *Bathers* is a direct rebuttal to the masculine space of *Swimming Hole*. It reclaims the land as a feminine frontier.

Formally indebted to both Kurland and Eakins, McGinley's models are purposefully waifish and androgynous, and they give his images a virginal and unsexed feeling. Rather, McGinley's interest lies in the corporeal: "All I know is that when I am shooting people nude it takes me to this other place. I am just so fascinated by the body."⁵⁴⁰ Yet McGinley is inspired by a violent and overpowering Romanticism, including paintings by Caspar David Friedrich and Antonio Vivaldi's *Le Quattro Stagioni*. He has, as such, endeavoured to insert his art within this tradition, particularly its American incarnation. He loved both Walden and Thoreau in high school, and his photographs play with what that inheritance might look and feel like. Thoreau's question, "Why should we live with such hurry and such waste of life?" undergirds much of McGinley's practice.⁵⁴¹

McGinley still lives in New York, but the city as a backdrop no longer seems so inspiring, a shift apparent in his commercial work as well. In a dizzying campaign for Levi's filmed in 2012, for example, laidback yet chic models in cut offs and jeans run along the beach, roll down sand dunes and climb trees. More recently, McGinley photographed Brad Pitt for *GQ* posing in Comme des Garçons clothing against the majesty of America's national parks (fig. 114). The photoshoot was widely ridiculed, mostly because of the accompanying interview, but Pitt's willingness to emote makes the photographs unnaturally earnest.

⁵⁴⁰ "Ryan McGinley: 'I am just so fascinated by the body.'"

⁵⁴¹ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, 150th ed. (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 93.

Whereas McGinley took on the pastoral within his practice, for Colen, the countryside has simply provided a new way to see as he left New York. Now, Colen splits his time between studios in Brooklyn and upstate, in Columbia County, NY. If you live in the city, upstate is often an ambiguous signifier, specifically used to refer to the area just to the north, but metaphorically a description of all that is not-New York City, a land of bucolic towns, autumnal colours, clean air and folksy stores. Snow's death was the catalyst for Colen to get sober, and after spending time in rehab, he purchased Sky High Farm in 2011; Colen had a "romantic" vision of an old barn on lots of land.⁵⁴² The farm has provided a way out from the city's scene in which he was so ingrained and today, the forty acres is home to apple and peach orchards, a variety of vegetable plots, and raises sheep, cows, chickens and pigs.⁵⁴³ All the food is donated to foodbanks across New York State.⁵⁴⁴ In certain ways, this semi-rural landscape has influenced his work too. Most obviously, this is evident in his Flower paintings, a series of canvases and linens covered in the remnants of petals and stems. For these, Colen smashed bodega flowers (because you can't fully take the city out of the boy) with mallets, dildos and billiard balls, among other implements. The artifice was further underscored by the Day-Glo colours the flowers had been dyed. Residual petal marks mar the white expanses, a confetti-like index of the flower, and these paintings are delightful even in their grubby muddiness.

⁵⁴² Olivier Zahm, "Dan Colen's Farm Project," *Purple*, accessed on December 16, 2018, http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.

⁵⁴³ Email conversation with Dan Colen, June 4, 2017.

⁵⁴⁴ Zahm, "Dan Colen's Farm Project."

It is perhaps fitting then that in 2014 *Help!*, the first major monographic exhibition spanning the entirety of Colen's career, opened outside of New York City at the Brant Foundation Art Study Center. Beginning with *Secrets and Cymbals, Smoke and Scissors: My Friend Dash's Wall in the Future* (2004), which was on view for the first time in seven years, *Help!* framed Snow's death as the hinge in Colen's practice. The hamster nests were invoked by the inclusion of Snow's video *The End is Near* but also in *Infinite Jest* (2012-2014), an oversized knot of wire and refuse that Colen called a "tumbleweed" (fig. 115).⁵⁴⁵ With hindsight, the hamster nests can seem enervating, but *Infinite Jest* looks like an atom, with live canaries fluttering and roosting in its branches. It is a "resurrection."⁵⁴⁶

For the Brant, Colen also created a site-specific installation *At Least They Died Together (after Dash)* (2013-2014). Outside, on the polo field, he buried two pickup-trucks and left their cavities open to the elements, for the flora and fauna to root, nest, grow and decay (fig. 116). The title refers to one of Snow's collages, in which people desperately cling to boulders to keep from going over a waterfall. The colours are supersaturated like a 1970s pulp novel, and it hints of a violent and crazy death, reinforced through the headline overhead: AT LEAST THEY DIED TOGETHER (fig. 117). Colen's trucks, on the other hand, feel more woeful than sensational. Twin trucks, like twin towers, sunk into the ground, but did they grow from the earth or were they dropped from the sky? Colen said, "The sculpture, for me at least, provokes this thought, 'is it a burial or is it like a

⁵⁴⁵ Brant Foundation Art Study Center, "Peter Brant and Dan Colen in conversation with Mark Tribe," filmed September 23, 2014 at The School of Visual Arts, New York, NY, video, 00:57:51.

⁵⁴⁶ Ken Johnson, "Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Powder," *New York Times*, July 10, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/11/arts/design/dan-colen-creates-an-elegy-for-dash-snow.html>.

planting’ ‘Is life going to grow out of them, or more of a monument?’”⁵⁴⁷ Monuments are always a bit of both and the trucks are simultaneously death and renewal.

The catalogue for the exhibition read, “There is a direct connection between these literal depictions of Colen and Snow’s time together and much of the work Colen has produced in the years following Snow’s death.”⁵⁴⁸ But this is not the only way to read these works, even if their titles allow for such interpretation. Eradicating biography is an almost impossible task but viewing *Help!* entirely as a lamentation has its own challenges. It refuses any formal critique or analysis, and as a methodology, assumes a direct link between artist and artwork. Inspiration and interpretation are not equivalent. Moreover, a biographical reading believes that a work’s meaning is determined by the artist, while social forces are considered secondary. Readings constructed in this way also rigidly and aggressively control a life, as everything becomes a little bit lost in time.

When I first met Colen, at his Red Hook studio on a muggy September day, these ghosts tailed our conversation. We ate lunch upstairs in his office, and all the food was harvested from his farm; it was a delicious meal. (One of the things about getting older and being successful, he told me, is that it became important to take care of his team, some of whom have been around for years. Providing health insurance and lunch are just a couple of those ways.⁵⁴⁹) At the time of our meeting, the Whitney Museum of American Art was halfway through its yearlong exhibition *Human Interest: Portraits from the Whitney’s Collection* (2016). To advertise the show, banners

⁵⁴⁷ Julie Baumgardner, “Dan Colen, Art World Bomb Thrower, Gets Respectable. Sort Of,” *T Magazine*, May 8, 2014. <https://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/05/08/dan-colen-dash-snow-brant-foundation/>.

⁵⁴⁸ “Dan Colen – Help!” *The Brant Foundation Art Study Center*, May 1, 2014. <https://brantfoundation.org/exhibitions/dan-colen-help/>.

⁵⁴⁹ Dan Colen interviewed by the author, New York, September 6, 2016.

were hung throughout the city illustrated with *Dan Dusted* (2002), McGinley's early photograph of Colen covered in pen marks, clutching a yellow afghan around his waist, high as a kite (fig. 118). He was at Dash's house," remembered McGinley, "and the dust gave him tunnel vision, so he blindly felt his way home at 9 AM by clinging to the side of buildings, naked, with just that blanket wrapped around him and graffiti covering his face and body. When Vice ran that photo, Dan was going to school at RISD and he said strangers would come up to him going, 'Oh my God, are you OK???'"⁵⁵⁰

The composition is strikingly subtle: the horizon line cuts directly through Colen's eyes while a pen mark splits his body in half, nose to knees. It is an exceptionally vulnerable and revealing portrait even if it hadn't been splashed across a thousand lampposts or published initially in a thousand issues of *Vice*. But when I ask him if it's weird to see his own, supersized face everywhere, Colen doesn't blink. It is as if the portrait really was taken forever ago, a relic from another time, and anyway, being young is cool almost always, but also brief and unsustainable for everyone. I wonder what his friends see in the photo now, and if the photograph makes them miss those times or just the people gone or that that life is so far away, it is almost unrecognizable.

In 2016, seven years after his death, Snow was given a solo exhibition at the Brant Foundation. *Freeze Means Run* was a collaborative curatorial effort between the Brant and Snow's friends: Colen, artists Hanna Liden and Nate Lowman, and Blair Hansen, then the director of the Dash

⁵⁵⁰ Amy Kellner, "An Interview with Ryan McGinley," *Vice*, July 13, 2010, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/ryan-mcginley-2.

Snow Archive. McGinley did not participate in the exhibition's curation. It was the first monographic presentation of Snow's work since 2006. Over a hundred Polaroids were displayed, many of which had never been shown publicly, as well as many of his three-dimensional "articulate objects" and dozens of collages.⁵⁵¹

The Brant also showed *Book Fort* (2006-2007), one of the few large-scale sculptures Snow made, constructed out of 1,122 books (fig. 119). The texts were all carefully selected: fringe philosophies, conspiracy theories, true-crime and the occult, with titles like *Blood and Money*, *The Body Snatchers* and *Evil Twins*. To read all the titles, you would need to sprawl out on your stomach, face to the floor. Hardcover and softcover are grouped in seemingly arbitrary piles, and the stacks are tented by white tarpaulin hanging like a canopy or a mosquito net. Writer Thomas Michelli compared the dangling tarp to the "woozy ghost" of a Klu Klux Klansman.⁵⁵² To get inside, you would either need to step over the books and risk toppling them, or build it around yourself, or be walled in by someone else, a somewhat ominous thought in the vein of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846). In Poe's story, Montresor lures Fortunato into the darkest, furthest corner of his wine cellar; chains, traps and walls him inside; and leaves him there to die. *Book Fort* is a tomb with nothing but the titles to drive you mad. The idea of a fort is to protect a strategic position, to be an indestructible stronghold, although they obviously fail from time to time. But we forget that to protect a fort, to stave off the siege, you do end up walling yourself in, brick by brick, day by day. Certainly, the idea of the recluse was absolutely enthralling to Snow, and *Book*

⁵⁵¹ Dan Colen quoted in Randy Kenney, "Recalling the Outlaw Eye of Dash Snow," *New York Times*, November 12, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/13/arts/design/recalling-the-outlaw-eye-of-dash-snow.html>.

⁵⁵² Tomas Michelli, "Dash Snow. Review: *Silence Is the Only True Friend That Shall Never Betray You* Rivington Arms September 7–October 15, 2006," *The Brooklyn Rail*, October 2006, <https://brooklynrail.org/2006/10/artseen/dash-snow>.

Fort is a hideaway without an exit. Although we associate forts with children, *Book Fort* is far from childlike; it lacks the faith a child would provide.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Hunter College in New York City hosted a panel conversation with Colen, Hansen, Liden, Lowman, and Kunle Martins. The critic David Rimanelli moderated the event. The audience was mostly made up of students and amongst them sat McGinley and Berreau. In describing Snow as both “alive in our memories but also a cultural artefact,” Rimanelli quickly laid bare the stakes of the panel.⁵⁵³ Mired in memory yet needing to serve an academic purpose, the panel was a Greek chorus and a eulogy presented as a *viva voce*. Undeniably, it is difficult to periodize one’s own time, even when there is no personal link, and disentangling memory from commentary and critique is difficult at best. This was evident in the language used, which at times was dismissive and defensive, as if being critical could ruin Snow’s reputation. Rimanelli, for example, became agitated over criticism that Snow’s photography was derivative of Larry Clark and Nan Goldin: “So what? Are flowers over because people painted and took enough pictures of them? No.”⁵⁵⁴ Closing down this line of inquiry, however, removes Snow from photography’s history and does not allow for any discussion about how he, in this example, extended or exploded Clark’s or Goldin’s legacies. Avoiding context treats Snow as an aberration, and the panel is uncomfortable to watch because no one seemed to know how to navigate this gap. People talked over one another. Longwinded reminiscences took centre stage. Although Colen tried to refocus the conversation, too much time was spent relaying biography and Snow-as-memory loomed large.

⁵⁵³ Brant Foundation Art Study Center, “A Discussion of the Work of Dash Snow,” filmed May 2, 2016 at Hunter College, New York, NY, video, 1:10:41.

⁵⁵⁴ IBID.

As Hansen said, “We wanted to make this point that he was an artist about resistance. It wasn’t party photography.”⁵⁵⁵ But of course it was also party photography, and there isn’t anything wrong with that. I have watched, and re-watched, the Hunter College panel, and I am no closer to understanding why Snow can’t be both. Why can’t he be a central figure to some and peripheral to many, and still be deserving of exhibitions and money, but can’t that money not actually matter? These people all have their own investments in Snow’s legacy, and the cynical take is that their choices are motivated by career concerns. Certainly, The Brant and Deitch Projects need Snow to be unique and spectacular so that he remains a figure worthy of financial investment. But for his friends to give credence to different narratives requires amending their own histories and decentralizing a key figure. I believe that they see Snow as important and wonderful, but I also think it is possible to hold this thought close and critically consider his body of work without flattening out his life. Offering an alternative account, or reworking the one that already exists, presents an opportunity to change the future in certain ways. The panel’s purpose was to nuance Snow. Instead, the panellists suggested that the current framing of his life is inaccurate and that they, his friends and family, possess the only honest version.

The panel’s subtler and more intriguing argument was that a true archive is found in the memories of one’s friends, even if privileging personal memory can be thorny. They are growing his archive in the same way that oral histories are told and retold to make sure the memories (and legends) remain present and known. Memory, then, is never dead but instead an evolving product located

⁵⁵⁵ IBID.

in the present.⁵⁵⁶ Testimony and stories provide counterpoints to more formalized narratives, and in the case of Snow, the story repeated in the media. Jacques Derrida warns of the archive's future-looking thrust. Perhaps Snow's friends believe that by wresting control of his memory, they can relocate and secure his place in the world to come. Oral history can therefore be understood as already archived.⁵⁵⁷

An archive, however, is not the same as memory; it is just the extant traces of a person's life. But shifting *who* archives is an interesting proposal, since the resulting repository is always produced by and reproducing hierarchies.⁵⁵⁸ It is a delicate balance, between preserving what is historically and culturally useful, and preserving everything. Warhol filled hundreds of boxes with the mementos and detritus of his life: perfume bottles, coffee sachets, autographs, invitations, food scraps—both the minutia and the memorable. Everyone can be their own historian, but not all of one's history is so useful.

Derrida wrote, "There would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude."⁵⁵⁹ He writes of Freud's death drive, but even without the Freudian lens, we can understand how memory is always dogged by forgetting. The archive's role is not simply to preserve the past, but instead to serve as "a pledge, and like every pledge, a token of the future."⁵⁶⁰ We are always shielding

⁵⁵⁶ Jean Fischer, "In Living Memory... Archive and Testimony in the Films of the Black Audio Film Collective," in *The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of The Black Audio Film Collective*, ed. by Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 17. Here Jean Fisher is expanding upon Stuart Hall's "Constituting the Archive." *Third Text*, vol. 15, no. 54 (2001).

⁵⁵⁷ See: Rebecca Schneider, "Performance Remains," *Performance Research*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2001): 100-110.

⁵⁵⁸ See: Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1969, 2002). Emphasis is the author's own.

⁵⁵⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 19.

⁵⁶⁰ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 18.

ourselves against time's erosion of all that has been built and accomplished. It isn't just the life lost, but the potential loss of the recollection of a life, too, that motivates memory-keeping; history is but a repeated endeavour to "secure memory."⁵⁶¹ In Mexican tradition, there are three deaths. The first occurs when the heart stops beating; the second when the body is interred; and the third death is when the last memory of the living person fades, when there is no one left to remember. To build an archive is to try and stave off this final death, and yet construction must begin before any forgetting has happened.

"Modern memory," wrote Pierre Nora, "is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image."⁵⁶² Yet, he warns of the "exterior scaffolding and external signs" that can disturb and fragment memory when it is not experienced internally.⁵⁶³ This is why the configuration of the archive has become such a focal point: the panel at Hunter College directly rebukes the ways Snow has thus far been memorialized, but their version is not faultless. There is no such thing as an archive without an order. And moreover, as exemplified by the panel and by this thesis, Snow remains enigmatic; he can no longer speak for himself and so others choose to speak for him. Both a result of time passing and as Colen and McGinley have actively removed themselves from the downtown scene, the world that brought these three artists together no longer exists for the study as it was. Ultimately, this chapter considers memorialisation of both Snow himself, but also the community these artists created, participated in and were propelled by.

⁵⁶¹ Schneider, "Performance Remains," 105.

⁵⁶² Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," 13.

⁵⁶³ IBID.

Perhaps, someday, in the complete archive of Dash Snow's work, there will be a catalogue raisonné and copies of his publications, photographs taken by the press and friends, and hundreds of relics and scraps saved from his studio. But alongside these there will be video footage from The Brant Foundation panel, screengrabs of a thousand Instagram re-postings, a picture of the Dash Snow storage unit, the transcript from my interview with Colen, postcards and trinkets, newspaper clippings, music, text from blogs, as much as possible to make Snow concrete. Perhaps also, this archive will be linked to the future Dan Colen archive and to the future Ryan McGinley archive and to several other archives. Together, they will grow a synthetic portrait, a token of the future to come, stories that get added and added, an interlocking network of memories and lives.

CONCLUSION

Dan Colen, Ryan McGinley and Dash Snow share the practice of staging identity, both public and private, in their respective mediums. By making public their own lives, these artists present a slice of life, an intimate portrait, of their shifting landscape after September 11th. Taken together, the art discussed in this thesis questions how a person should be, both in the world and privately, and the slippages that increasingly occur between the two. But by revealing all sorts of personal details, their work is regularly dismissed as tasteless, as “nothing more than the result of a flurry of drug-induced adolescent pranks.”⁵⁶⁴ Yet at the same time, these artists are well-collected and prefigure many of the debates around self-performance today. Selfhood is a lifelong, unstable performance, and there are ebbs and flows as well as a constant (re)negotiation with memory. Neither pure truth nor pure artifice, for a brief and delineated period, Colen, McGinley and Snow chose to represent their lives in their art.

As this thesis maps out, Colen’s, McGinley’s and Snow’s developing ideas of selfhood were allied with a vision of New York City, which was always more than just a backdrop to their lives. They shrewdly defined themselves as New York artists, as artists rooted in the downtown community; like McGinley said, “14th Street to Canal, east to west. This is it.”⁵⁶⁵ Indeed, one of the aims of this thesis is to offer a glimpse, however brief and fragmented, of a changing city, its architecture and streetscapes. For artists who tied themselves so closely to New York, September 11th was both a historical event and a historical marker within their own personal mythology.

⁵⁶⁴ Caitlin Colford, “Dash Snow. Creative. Master. Baiter.” *The Rumpus*, February 5, 2010, <https://therumpus.net/2010/02/dash-snow-creative-master-baiter/>.

⁵⁶⁵ Ryan McGinley interviewed by the author, New York, April 16, 2018.

That 9/11 left a jagged scar on the city encouraged Colen, McGinley, Snow and their larger community to embrace hedonism in a false return to the city's artistic past. There was a certain bravado in being a New Yorker in the aftermath of the terrorist attack, and these artists understood the intrinsic power of presenting themselves as bohemians, even as the choice to do so also accurately reflected the lives they were living. Yet to pretend as if Colen, McGinley and Snow were the first to actively court capitalist institutions is also incorrect. Describing the artists of the 1960s, Sally Baines wrote, "In criticising the middle-class values of modern culture, even in choosing to live and work in Greenwich Village (that is, in joining the 'traditional' bohemia), these artists—many of whom were from the middle class—found they could not help simultaneously rejecting and reproducing middle-class culture."⁵⁶⁶ Baines noted how these artists reached out to both outsider and mainstream communities to "circulate[] transgressive ideas in what would ultimately become acceptable packages."⁵⁶⁷ Both artists and critics used the East Village as a "place-identity" to represent this hip and alternative community, which, as a term, was eventually taken up by real estate developers and the mass media. By the 1980s, argues Christopher Mele, "the promotion of self and personality, artistic product, and neighbourhood became the overwhelming characteristics of the downtown scene."⁵⁶⁸

The groundwork for Colen, McGinley and Snow had already been laid, so by the time they met each other and started making art together, "symbolic representations" of New York's downtown had long been "transformed from marginal and inferior to central and intriguing."⁵⁶⁹ The density

⁵⁶⁶ Baines, 6.

⁵⁶⁷ Baines, 7.

⁵⁶⁸ Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side*, 233.

⁵⁶⁹ Mele, 220.

of cultural figures and institutions made the supposedly outsider and unrefined culture palatable and marketable to a mainstream audience. Perhaps the best example of this is the Broadway musical *Rent*, which tells the story of the love lives, jobs and the effects of the AIDS epidemic on a group of young New Yorkers living in the East Village in the 1990s. According to its promotional material *Rent* “is the thrilling story of a group of impoverished young artists struggling to survive in New York City’s East Village in the thriving days of Bohemian excess.”⁵⁷⁰ *Rent* opened in 1996 and ran for twelve years; it earned over \$280 million on Broadway and millions more on tour, making it one of the highest grossing musicals ever.⁵⁷¹ In her review of the play, critic Machiko Kakutani wrote that *Rent* gives the bourgeois class a peek into an alien subculture by capitalizing on poverty and “rock-bottom desperation.”⁵⁷² The grit, that is, can be pretty because it is only so gritty. And only a certain class of people benefit from that grit anyway, including Colen, McGinley and Snow for whom the downtown served as a wellspring of energy directly connected to the imagined, historical version of the city. Drawing on these myths was possible because these artists could afford to live as they did; they could afford to pay rent and eat. Their downtown was not decaying, but nor did they claim that it was. This artistic community may not have looked like Warhol’s or Basquiat’s, or Pollock’s for that matter, but because ideas of the downtown remain somewhat frozen in time there is also no escape.

If, within this thesis, September 11th served as a form of scene setting, situating these artists and the city itself within a larger dialogue around identity formation, then the three subsequent chapters examined the ways in which notions of public and private play out. Central to chapters two and

⁵⁷⁰ This tagline is currently being used to advertise the 20th anniversary tour of the musical.

⁵⁷¹ Campbell Robertson, “Nearly 12 Years Old, ‘Rent’ Is to Close.” *New York Times*, January 16, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/16/theater/16broad.html?mcubz=1>

⁵⁷² Machiko Kakutani, “Culture Zone; Slumming” *New York Times Magazine*, May 26, 1996, n. p.

three was the idea of the permeable self, and what it looks like to make art out of, within and defined by a community of people. Considering the cinematic self, Chelsey Crawford sees the distinct individual to be “an illusion rather than a static, coherent entity.”⁵⁷³ She argues against a “singular being” writing that “we cannot definitively set ourselves apart from any other person because we continue to touch those other singular beings constantly.”⁵⁷⁴ Crawford uses filmic quotation to support her argument, specifically Gus van Sant’s remake of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*; she demonstrates how quotation makes the belief in a fixed ‘I’ difficult.⁵⁷⁵ In quoting from one another, Colen, McGinley and Snow similarly depicted elements of their shared world, displaying a capacity for appropriation and an understanding of subjectivity as constantly in flux.

Chapter four considered what happens when these private worlds are made public, and the ways in which these artists can be both complicit and defiant. This section returned the narrative to New York in order to think about how diverse institutions, including the media, galleries and fashion, also shape expectations of the ‘artist figure’. But since the artist can never be free of such institutions, understanding how to exist within this system is vital.

In chapter five, some of these threads were tied up, a necessary outcome given Snow’s death in 2009. At different rates, both McGinley and Colen have moved away from sharing so much of their private selves, an understandable change that perhaps is also a result of age and the passage of time. Although their art may be less obviously biographical and may require different sorts of analysis and critique, it is still often read in light of their past selves and what those selves were

⁵⁷³ Chelsey Crawford, “The Permeable Self: A Theory of Cinematic Quotation,” *Film-Philosophy*, vol. 19, no. 1 (December 2017): 111.

⁵⁷⁴ Crawford, “The Permeable Self,” 120.

⁵⁷⁵ Crawford, “114.

willing to say and do. Once a version of the self is public, that version seems to live on forever. Writing about Ted Hughes' life after Sylvia Plath's suicide, Janet Malcolm said, "Like Prometheus, whose ravaged liver was daily reconstituted so it could be daily reravaged, Hughes has had to watch his young self being picked over by biographers, scholars, critics, article writers, and newspaper journalists."⁵⁷⁶ Snow's life remains fixed, but in many ways, Colen and McGinley are also implicated by his death, forever reporting to the people they once were. Yet unlike Hughes, whose career was and remains overshadowed by the narrative around Plath's death which he believed to be inaccurate and callous, for Colen and McGinley, the past self is undeniably alluring and undeniably marketable. They remain bathed in the glow of a glamour associated with recklessness and youth.

In many ways, Colen's, McGinley's and Snow's practices can be read as works of visual autofiction, a literary term in which the traditional components of a novel, such as plot and character development, are side-lined in favour of an "experimental narrative of self."⁵⁷⁷ Autofiction, a term coined by the writer Serge Doubrovsky, refers to fictionalized autobiography, what he called "fiction, of events and facts strictly real."⁵⁷⁸ It requires a "homonymy" between author, narrator and character, and is both "absolutely referential" and also fictitious.⁵⁷⁹ Doubrovsky was writing ten years after Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" was published,

⁵⁷⁶ Malcolm, *The Silent Woman*, 8.

⁵⁷⁷ Alex Clark, "Drawn from Life: why have novelists stopped making things up?" *Guardian*, June 23, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jun/23/drawn-from-life-why-have-novelists-stopped-making-things-up>. For examples of autofiction, see novels by Sheila Heti, Rachel Cusk, and Olivia Laing.

⁵⁷⁸ Serge Dubrovsky, *Fils*. Collection Folio ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), 10.

⁵⁷⁹ Philippe Vilain, "Autofiction," in *The Novelist's Lexicon: Writers on the Words That Define Their Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 5.

and in his seminal essay, Barthes argued against incorporating the author's own intentions and life into the interpretation of a text. Autofiction, however, not only conflates the two, it also amplifies this relationship by presenting itself as fictional. But as the art object is no longer understood to be a substitute for the artist, then how the self is constituted can be a form of visual autofiction; selfhood and self-fashioning have become types of work.⁵⁸⁰ Biography as a genre is not nearly as objective as it pretends, and through their practices, and in how they conducted themselves publicly, Colen, McGinley and Snow presented honest portraits of their world that were not necessarily true. As a result, they melded their lives to their work.

In writing, autofiction takes selfhood as its subject, understanding and embracing the fact that the self is never a "steady state."⁵⁸¹ These novels do not pretend to offer a single unifying truth about identity except to make clear that, despite however many similarities there might be, a character is not a stand-in for the author. Fiction necessarily embraces distance but is also governed by a set of a paradoxes regularly reinforced in critics' reviews: to be subjective but not narcissistic, be imaginative but true to one's own life experiences, and above all, do not lie, even though a novel is not the truth. As Colen, McGinley and Snow illustrate, such inconsistencies are also at play when we theorize biographical art, or what we believe to be biographical. Yet, this understanding of autofiction has not been extended into the visual arts, for which a biographical reading has long demanded a substitution, where one could understand the artist in the work, and the work from the artist; the art serves as an index for a life.⁵⁸² Indeed, argues Paula Backscheider, "biography is

⁵⁸⁰ For more on the artist's subjectivity as a "symptom" of art, see Robert Williams' reflections on the Renaissance in "Leonardo's Modernity: Subjectivity as Symptom," in *The Life & The Work*, ed. by Charles G. Salas (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2007): 34-44.

⁵⁸¹ Tim Perkins. "How to Best Read Autofiction," *New York Review of Books*, May 25, 2018, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/05/25/how-best-to-read-auto-fiction/>

⁵⁸² A discussion around visual autofiction could be used to consider the practices of such artists as Amalia Ulman, Ryan Treccartin and Lizzie Fitch, and Martine Syms, among others.

more interesting today because of the acknowledgement that the portrayal of an individual is not the only possible one.”⁵⁸³

These artists illuminate the various and powerful forces that come into play in biography, revealing such flux to be both externally and internally located, and my inclusion of the first-person further highlights the framing of such narratives. Certainly, my role as the interpreter of these artists’ lives requires some explanation of my own positioning. I had the privilege of meeting Colen and McGinley, and of living in New York; to the degree that it is possible, I have tried to explain why I understand this community the way that I do. But I also think these artists provide a template for thinking through new ways to write about contemporary art. Problems of the first-person can occur when “the boundaries between biographer and subject are breached,” often coming to the fore in works that are “simultaneously autobiographies and biographies.”⁵⁸⁴ Yet *Together as Kids* does not function as an autobiography; it uses autobiographical writing as both a foil and a buttress for the narratives within. The interviews I conducted were useful not in terms of exposing secrets, but rather to clear up misunderstandings, introduce language and establish a rapport vital to the project’s argument. Indeed, by choosing to make their lives public, these artists allow for the encroachment of personal narrative. This is clearly the case in *Secrets and Cymbals*, which, I argue, acts as a backdrop for one’s own projections. And against the backdrop of this thesis, I too am projecting.

⁵⁸³ Backscheider, 228.

⁵⁸⁴ Caine, 72.

Selfhood seems always a process of reckoning and transforming, but the internet has fundamentally reconfigured how we approach identity. Elements of current debates around performativity and authenticity in relation to social media were anticipated by these artists. The irony of the works discussed in this thesis, however, is that although they are in dialogue with these digital debates, they retain a clear and obvious sense of physicality; they are wholly grounded in real life.⁵⁸⁵ Indeed, Colen, McGinley and Snow remained remarkably committed to the analogue, which, as a thematic, only became a consideration after artists refused to switch over to digital equivalents.⁵⁸⁶ In the example of these artists, however, their strategies, if not their mediums, prefigured the now-accepted digital landscape, where everything (and everyone) is always up for grabs. Consequently, the works discussed here suggest a sense of self that is never fixed, but instead constantly reacting and re-joining. In part, this is because these artists' practices were actively intertwined with a conception of community that was decidedly offline. Certainly, in the almost-decade since Snow's death in 2009, online participation has changed and mutated at a pace so much faster than anything in the real world; online life is like the hyper-speed of a summer camp romance in the way that you can feel connected to someone halfway across the world in the blink of an eye.⁵⁸⁷ Accordingly, how we present ourselves has been transformed as digital technologies "provide the space for the emergence of a new state of the self, split between the screen and the physical real."⁵⁸⁸ Through our avatars, the internet has become an entire realm devoted to autofiction: as sociologist Sherrie Turkle wrote, "We recreate ourselves as online

⁵⁸⁵ While this thesis does consider McGinley's Instagram account, I have made clear that its role is parallel to his art practice.

⁵⁸⁶ Margaret Iverson, "Analogue: On Zoe Leonard and Tacita Dean," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 38, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 796.

⁵⁸⁷ Sherrie Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Our Technology and Less From Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 751.

⁵⁸⁸ Sherrie Turkle, *Alone Together*, 80.

personae and give ourselves new bodies, homes, jobs and romances.”⁵⁸⁹ Because of its seductive and life-like appearance, the internet could be discussed within an aesthetic framework and not as a surrogate for real-world experience.⁵⁹⁰

Identity, of course, can never be solely an internal process; rather, it is a constant evaluation of the individual in relation to a greater whole. Identity is always porous. What unites Colen’s *Secrets and Cymbals*, *Smoke and Scissors (My Friend Dash’s Wall in the Future)* with McGinley’s not-quite candid candid and Snow’s Polaroids is the doubling and tripling of the artistic self. Not only are these artists central figures in their own works, operating as both the maker and a character within, they are also present in each other’s art. By exposing the scaffolding, Colen, McGinley and Snow inscribed themselves within their art, subtly articulating the gap between representation and witness; contingency was intrinsic and as essential as any corresponding visual image. Turning a lens on their own lives may have been self-involved, but so is the process of growing up, which is perhaps why critics have referred to this art as self-serving.⁵⁹¹ True, Colen, McGinley and Snow were inward-looking, and they were concerned with the banal, almost insular elements that dominated their day to day; in short, the everydayness of their lives, which might not be everyone’s definition of ordinary, but was ordinary to them, nonetheless. It was a normal that hinged upon the group, as amorphous and capacious as it may have been.

⁵⁸⁹ Sherrie Turkle, *Alone Together*, 67.

⁵⁹⁰ See Virginia Heffernan, *Magic and Loss: The Internet as Art* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 22-23.

⁵⁹¹ With regards to Colen, McGinley and Snow, reviews of their work and broader takes by the media were discussed primarily in Chapters 4 and 5. But the same criticism is regularly hurled at works of autofiction; see, for example, reviews of Sheila Heti’s *Motherhood* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2018). In the novel, the narrator, Sheila, struggles whether to become a mom. Although mostly positive, critics faulted the meandering text for being “self-indulgent” (Alexandra Schwartz, “Sheila Heti Wrestles with Big Decisions in Motherhood,” *New Yorker*, May 7, 2018) and for ignoring any larger political or ethical debates in favour of a personal account (Elaine Blair, “Mother of All Decisions: Sheila Heti’s new novel weighs whether to have a child,” *New York Times*, May 18, 2018).

Although not collaborative in the sense of an explicit shared activity, in knitting together their already overlapping lives, these artists relied upon collaborative gestures to form a symbiotic and synergistic constellation. These artists understood the difficulty of being anyone at all, but in trying to honestly present their lives, they proposed an understanding of biographical art as fictional and plastic, foreshadowing the performative sense of self that is now in near-constant demand. In doing so, Dan Colen, Ryan McGinley and Dash Snow make the case for personal narratives as a centre of cultural production and for an understanding of the personal as both genuine and fictitious.



Figure 1: Dash Snow, *Nobody Ever Did What We Did*, 2006-2007.
Collage, 44.45 x 27.3 cm.



Figure 2: Dash Snow, Ryan McGinley and Dan Colen at the Nike Women's Spring 2007
Footwear Collection & Reception on September 9, 2006 in New York City.



Figure 3: Luc Sante, Maurizio Torrealta and Peter Stack eating seafood off artist Magdalen Pierrakos for the Fellini party at AREA, c. 1983-1987.



Figure 4: Jan Davidszoon de Heem, *Still Life with Lobster*, 1643. Oil on canvas, 79.2 x 102.5 cm.



Figure 5: Ryan McGinley, *Sam (Ground Zero)*, 2001. Chromogenic print, face-mounted to acrylic, 67.2 x 100.8 cm.



Figure 6: Ryan McGinley, *Dan (9/11)*, 2001. Chromogenic print, face-mounted to acrylic, 67.2 x 100.8 cm.



Figure 7: David Goldblatt, *Emmanuel Luthuli in his bedroom where he allegedly raped two girls. Sponjane, Eshowe, 30 August 2010 (4_A0719)*, 2010. Silver bromide gelatin print, 55.5 x 68.5 cm.



Figure 8: Thomas Hoepker, *USA. Brooklyn, New York. September 11, 2001*, 2001. Edition of 7, pigment print, 111.76 x 167.64 cm.



Figure 9: Tony Oursler, still from *9/11*, 2001. Video, 57:51 min, colour, sound.



Figure 10: Photograph from *Here is New York*.



Figure 11: Ezra Stoller, *Windows on the World* dining room, on the 107th floor of the North Tower, 1976.



Figure 12: Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker) and Mr. Big (Chris Noth) outside of the Plaza Hotel, New York. *Sex and the City*: 'Ex and the City'. Season 2, episode 18, October 3, 1999.



Figure 13: Ryan McGinley, *SACE (Canal Ledge)*, 2001. Chromogenic print, 101.6 x 127 cm.



Figure 14: Gordon Matta-Clark, *Day's End (Pier 52)*, 1975, dimensions variable.



Figure 15: Dan Colen, *Untitled*, 2004. Papier-mâché, Styrofoam, felt, oil paint, wood and steel, 243.8 x 274.3 x 243.8 cm.



Figure 16: Jeff Wall, *The Vampire's Picnic*, 1991. Cibachrome transparency in fluorescent lightbox, 229 x 335.2 cm.



Figure 17: Dash Snow, *Untitled*, 2001. Chromogenic print made in 2005, 50.8 x 50.8 cm.



Figure 18: Ryan McGinley, *Tom (Golden Tunnel)*, 2011. Chromogenic print, 183 x 279.5 cm.

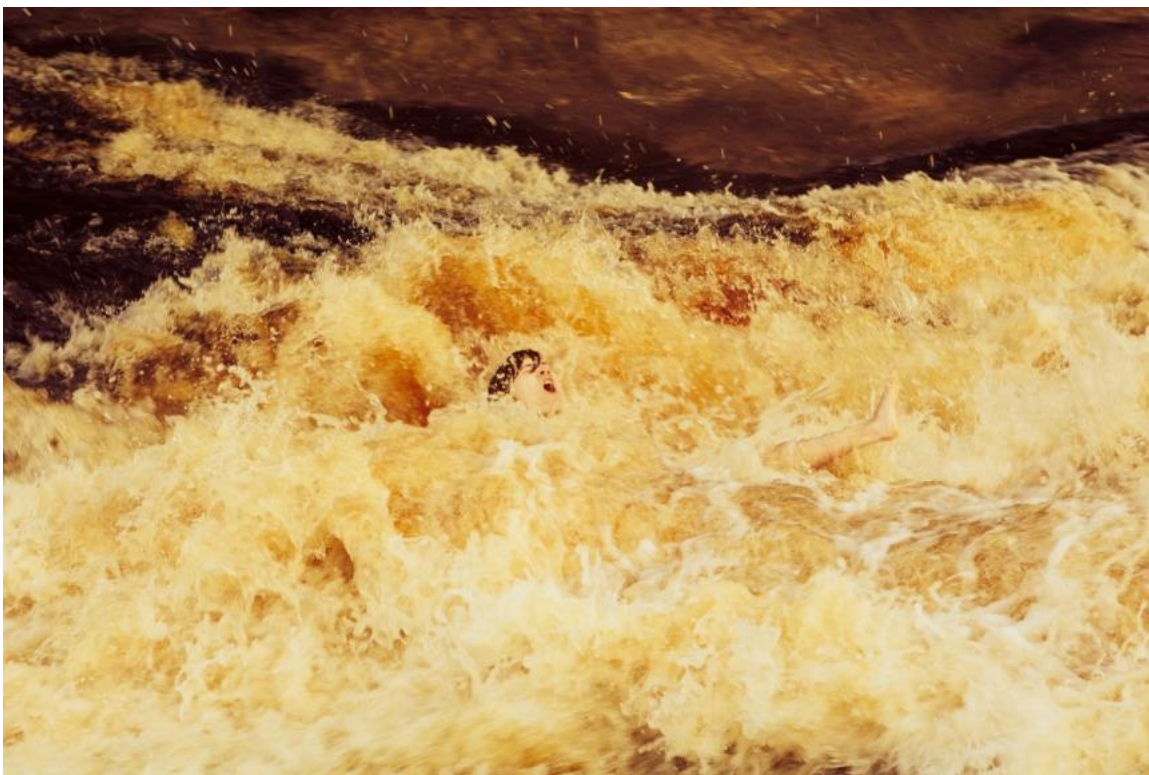


Figure 19: Ryan McGinley, *Taylor (Rushing River)*, 2011. Edition of 3, chromogenic print, 183 x 280 cm.



Figure 20: Dan Colen, *Blop!*, 2011. Tar and feather on canvas, 205.74 x 299.72 cm.



Figure 21: Dash Snow, *Untitled*, 2008. Digital chromogenic print, 101.6 x 152.4 cm.



Figure 22: Terrence Koh, *The Next Generation*, 2011. Neon, 86.36 x 243.84 cm.



Figure 23: Installation of *Post 9-11*. On the floor is Adam McEwen's *Rats, Mice, Snakes*, 2006 and Hanna Liden, *Nobody is perfect I am nobody*, 2011.

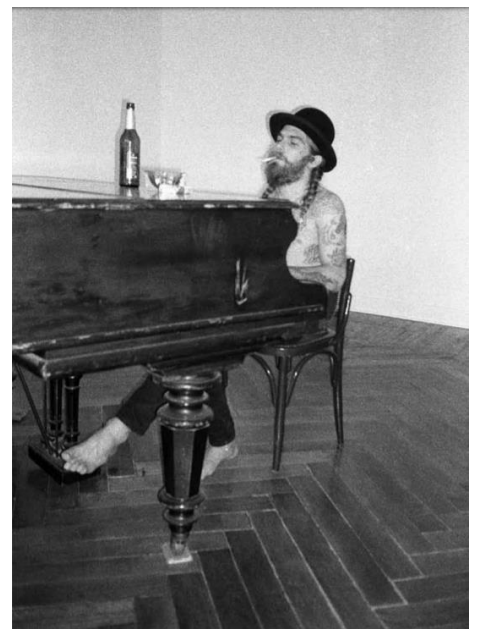
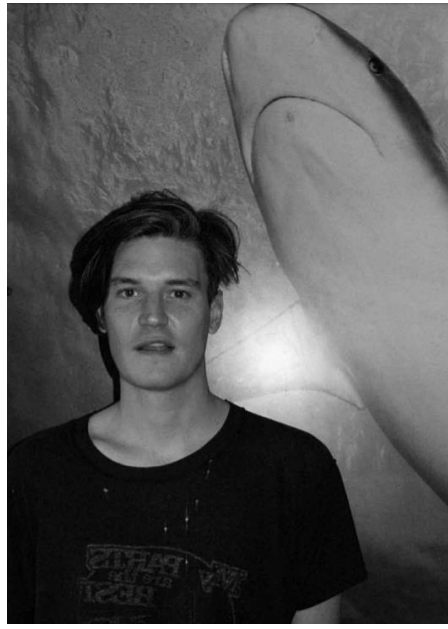
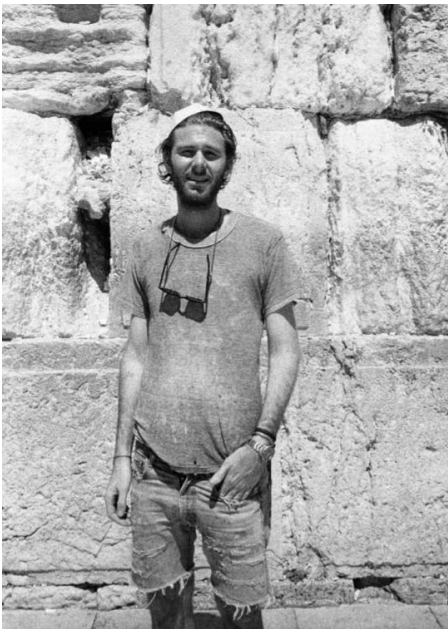


Figure 24: Photographs by Leo Fitzpatrick, of, from left, Dan Colen, Nate Lowman and Dash Snow, 2006-2009.



Figure 25: Dan Colen, *Secrets and Cymbals, Smoke and Scissors (My friend Dash's Wall in the Future)*, 2004. Styrofoam, oil paint, paper and metal, 269 x 287 x 15 cm.



Figure 26: Reverse of *Secrets and Cymbals, Smoke and Scissors* (*My friend Dash's Wall in the Future*), 2004.



Figure 27: Detail of *Secrets and Cymbals, Smoke and Scissors* (*My friend Dash's Wall in the Future*), 2004.



Figure 28: Ryan McGinley, *Drinking and Peeing*, 1999. Chromogenic print, 102 x 69 cm.



Figure 29: Detail of *Secrets and Cymbals, Smoke and Scissors (My friend Dash's Wall in the Future)*, 2004.



Figure 30: Dash Snow, *Secret Conception*, 2007. Mixed media, 22.22 x 36.19 x 36.19 cm.

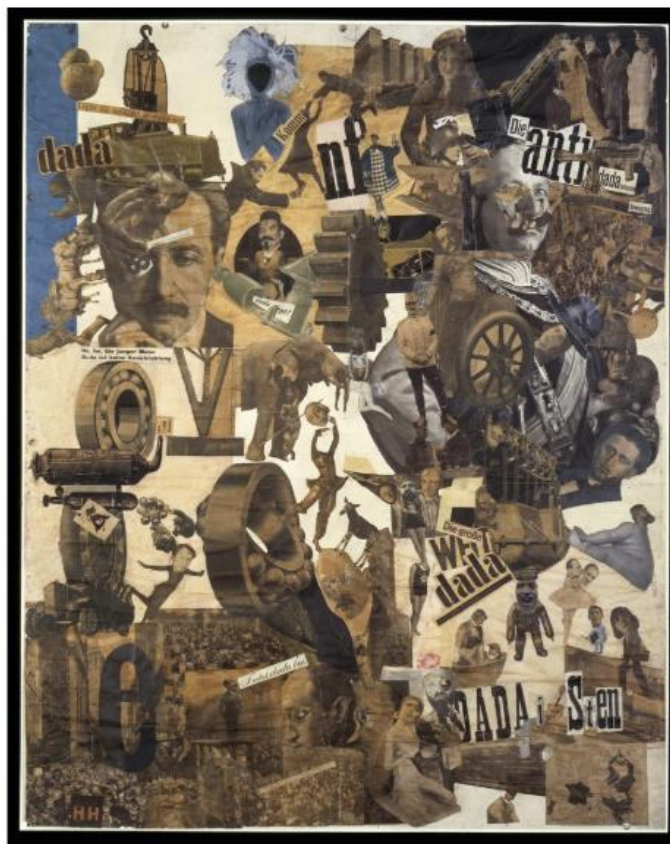


Figure 31: Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch*, 1919. Collage, 114 x 90 cm.



Figure 32: Dash Snow, *Because I am Real and You are Only Imaginary*, 2006-2007. Collage, 30 x 43 cm.



Figure 33: Dash Snow, *Untitled (Tired of Suffering?)*, 2004. Collage, 18.4 x 10.16 cm.



Figure 34: Kat Stafford's bedroom in "Ten Things I Hate About You", 1999.
Directed by Gil Junger, 99 minutes.



Figure 35: Chainsaw's bedroom in "Summer School," 1987. Directed by Carl Reiner,
98 minutes.



Figure 36: Dan Colen, *Holy Shit*, 2003. Enamel and molding paste on wood panel, 121.9 × 88.9 cm.



Figure 37: Dike Blair, *Untitled*, 1996. Gouache and pencil on paper, 30.48 x 22.86 cm.



Figure 38: John Haberle, *A Bachelor's Drawer*, 1890-1894. Oil on canvas, 50.8 x 91.4 cm.



Figure 39: John Haberle, *Japanese Corner*, 1898. Oil on canvas, 205.75 x 131.97 cm.



Figure 40: Tracy Emin, *My Bed*, 1998. Box frame, mattress, linens, pillows, and various objects, dimensions subject to change.



Figure 41: Dash Snow, *Untitled and undated*. Polaroid print, 10.31 x 10.16 cm.



Figure 42: Ryan McGinley, *Agathe & Dash (Black Leather Couch)* 2001. Chromogenic print, 68 x 101.6 cm.



Figure 43: Dash Snow, *This Was Your Life*, 2005. Leather couch, palm tree, and various objects, 205.7 x 195.6 cm.

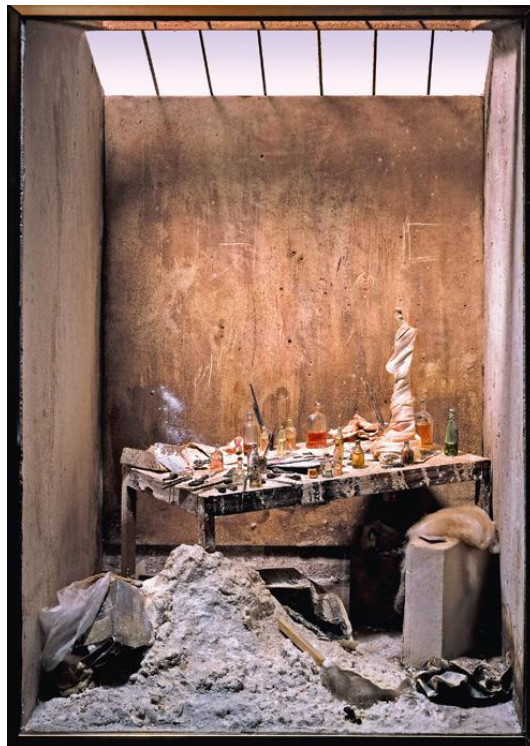


Figure 44: Charles Matton, *Atelier de Giacometti*, 1987. Wood, oil, glass, newspaper, rock, dust, 48.5 x 33.5 x 36.5 cm.



Figure 45: Francis Bacon's studio at the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane. Mixed materials, variable dimensions.

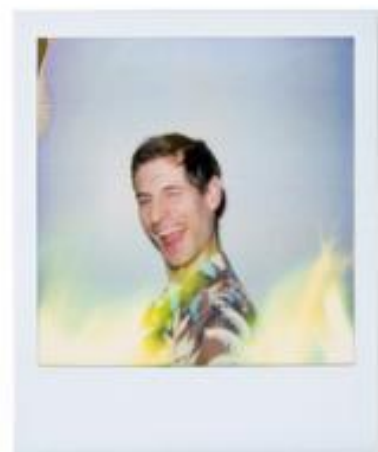


Figure 46: Ryan McGinley, *Fireworks Hysteric*, 2007. Chromogenic print, 101.6 x 75.5 cm.



(Left) Figure 47: Raoul Ubac, *La Nébuleuse*, 1939. Gelatine-silver print, 40 x 28.3 cm.

(Right) Figure 48: Man Ray, *Explosante-Fixe Prou del Pilar*, 1934. Gelatine-silver print, 12.1 x 9.2 cm.



Figures 49: Ryan McGinley, Polaroids taken between 1999 and 2005.

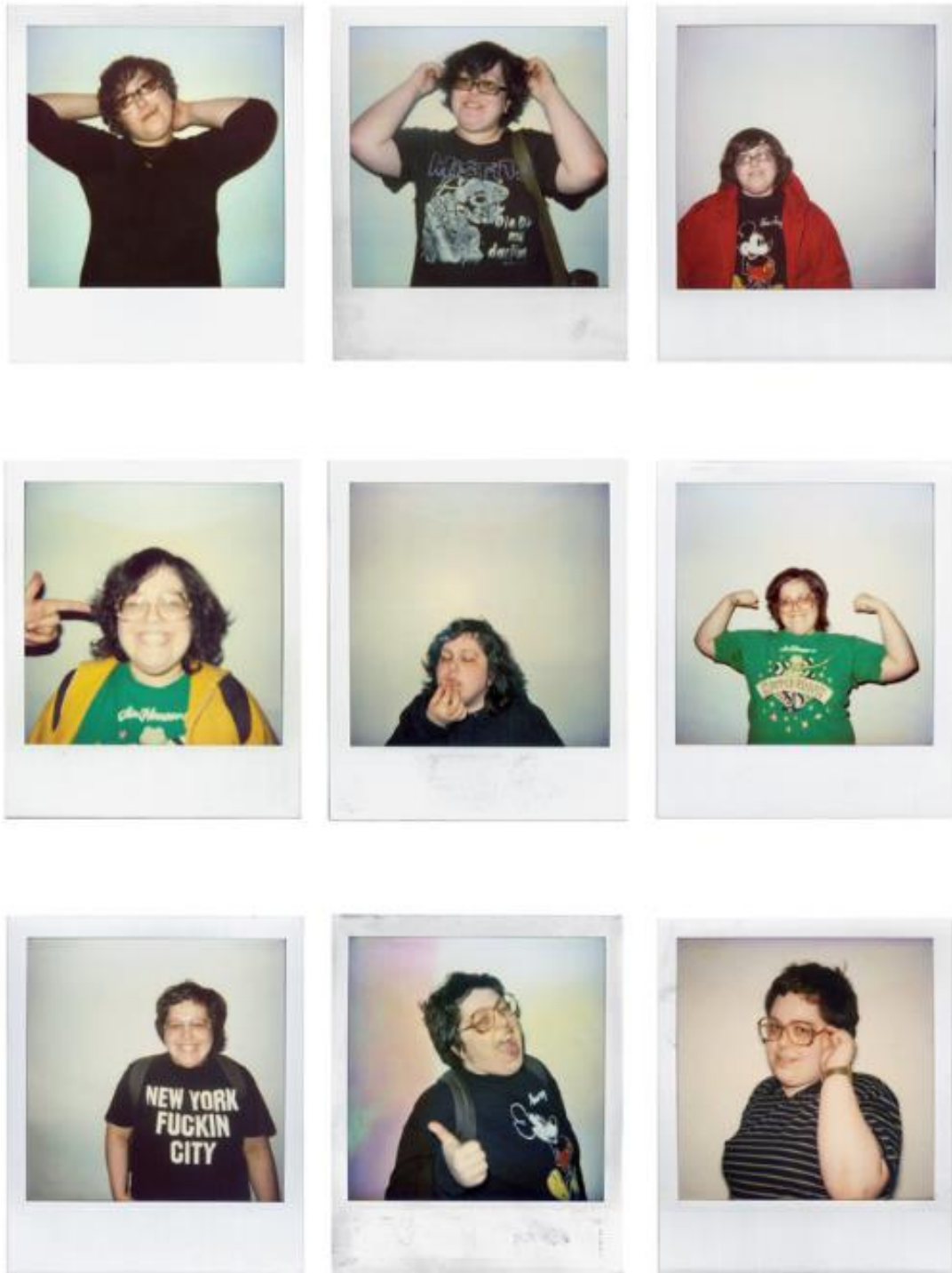


Figure 50: Ryan McGinley, Polaroids taken between 1999 and 2005.



Figure 51: Ryan McGinley, *Polaroid Studio (The Hole)*, 2002. Chromogenic print, 50.8 x 40.64 cm.



Figure 52: Ryan McGinley, *Having Sex (Polaroids)*, 1999. Chromogenic print, 76.2 x 101.6.



Figure 53: Corinne Day's photograph of Kate Moss for *The Face*, 1990.

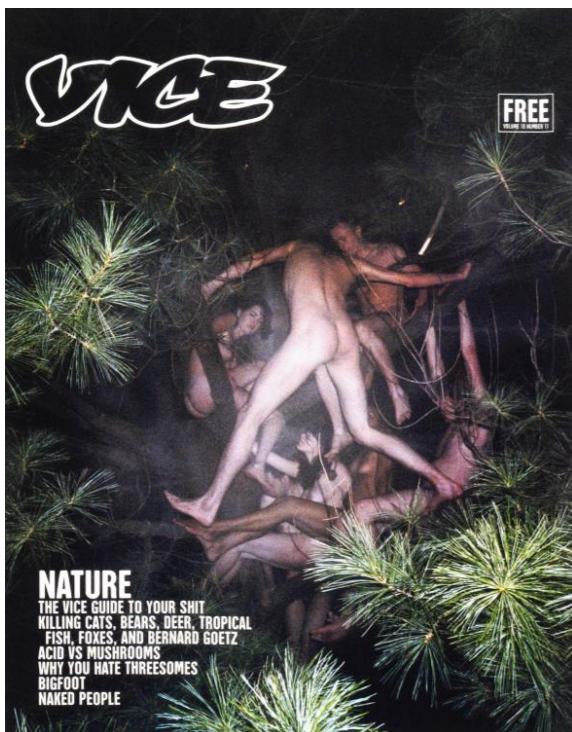
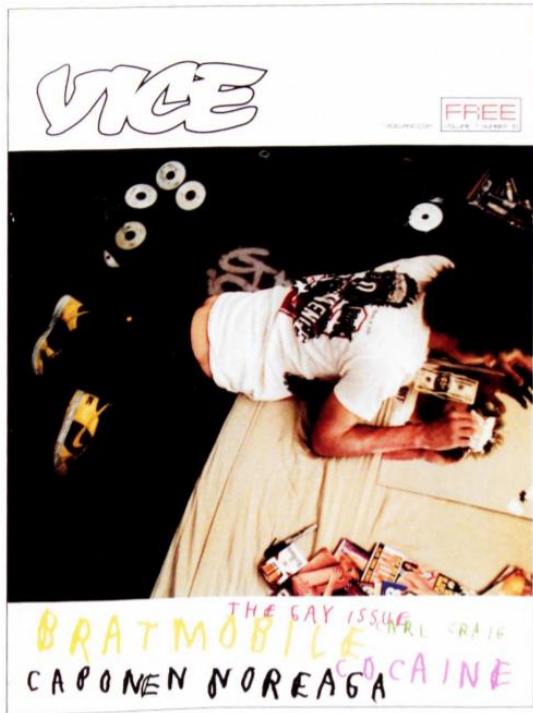


Figure 54: Ryan McGinley's covers for *Vice* magazine. Clockwise from top left: Dash Snow snorting cocaine, November 2000; Grid of NYC doors, May 2001; friends in trees, December 2003; and naked girls wearing fox tails, April 2007.



Figure 55: Ryan McGinley's collage for *Vice* magazine, 2004.



Figure 56: Ryan McGinley, *BMX New York*, 2001. Chromogenic print, 101 x 75.5 cm.



Figure 57: Ryan McGinley, *Puke*, 2002. Chromogenic print, 28.34 x 25.4 cm.



Figure 58: Ryan McGinley, *Lizzy*, 2002. Chromogenic print, 101 x 75.6 cm.



Figure 59: Ryan McGinley, *Dash Bombing*, 2000. Chromogenic print, 76.2 x 101.6 cm.



Figure 60: Ryan McGinley, *Root Canal*, 2000. Chromogenic print, 76.2 x 101.6 cm.



Figure 61: Ryan McGinley, *Tim and Dakota*, 2002. Edition of 6, chromogenic print, 76.2 x 101.6 cm.



Figure 62: Ryan McGinley, *Cum*, 2002. Edition of 3, chromogenic print, 76.6 x 101.6 cm.



Figure 63: Ryan McGinley, *Dan and Eric Sleeping*, 2002. Chromogenic print, 76.2 x 101.6 cm.



Figure 64: Nan Goldin, *Nan and Brian in Bed*, New York City, 1983. Silver dye bleach print, printed 2006, 39.4 x 58.9 cm.



Figure 65: Nan Goldin, *The Hug*, New York City, 1980. Silver dye bleach print, printed 2008, 39.4 x 58.7 cm.

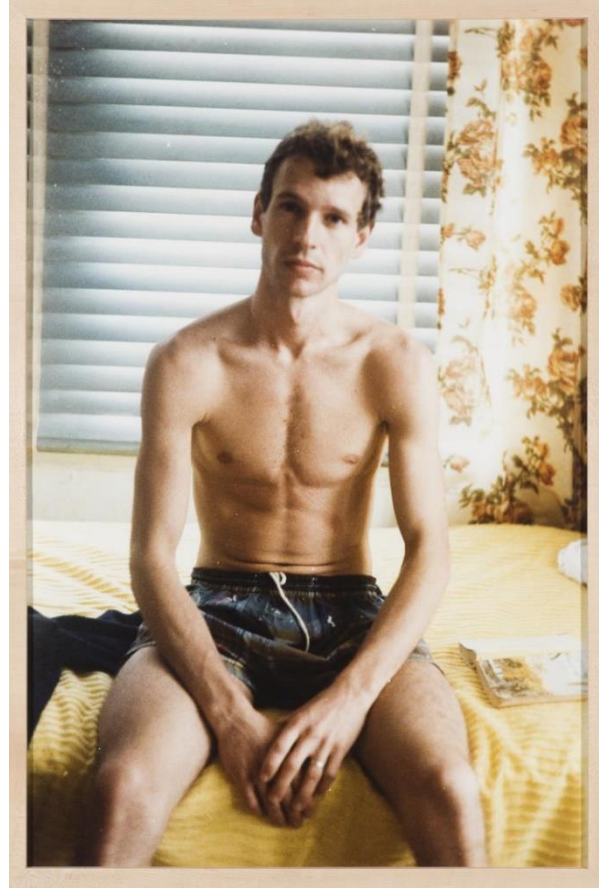


Figure 66: Jack Pierson, *Ocean Drive*, 1985. Chromogenic print, 76.2 x 50.1 cm.



Figure 67: Portrait from David Armstrong's *615 Jefferson Avenue*, 2011.

+++



Figure 68: Ryan McGinley, *Sace*, 2000. Chromogenic print, 101.6 x 152.4 cm.



Figure 69: Ryan McGinley, *Dash (Supermarket)* 2000. Chromogenic print, 101.6 x 68.6 cm.



Figures 70 and 71: Dash Snow, Untitled and undated. Polaroid print, 10.31 x 10.16 cm.



Figures 72 and 73: Dash Snow, Untitled and undated. Polaroid print, 10.31 x 10.16 cm.



Figures 74 and 75: Dash Snow, Untitled and undated. Polaroid print, 10.31 x 10.16 cm.



Figure 76: Larry Clark, *Untitled*, 1971. Black and White photograph, 35.6 x 27.9 cm.



Figure 77: Dash Snow, Untitled and undated. Polaroid print, 10.31 x 10.16 cm.



Figure 78: Still from 'La Belle et la Bête', 1946. Directed by Jean Cocteau, 96 minutes.



Figures 79 and 80: Dash Snow, Untitled and undated. Polaroid print, 10.31 x 10.16 cm.



Figure 81: Dash Snow, Untitled and undated. Polaroid print, 10.31 x 10.16 cm.



Figure 82: Installation views from *The Kids Were Alright*, 2017 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver.

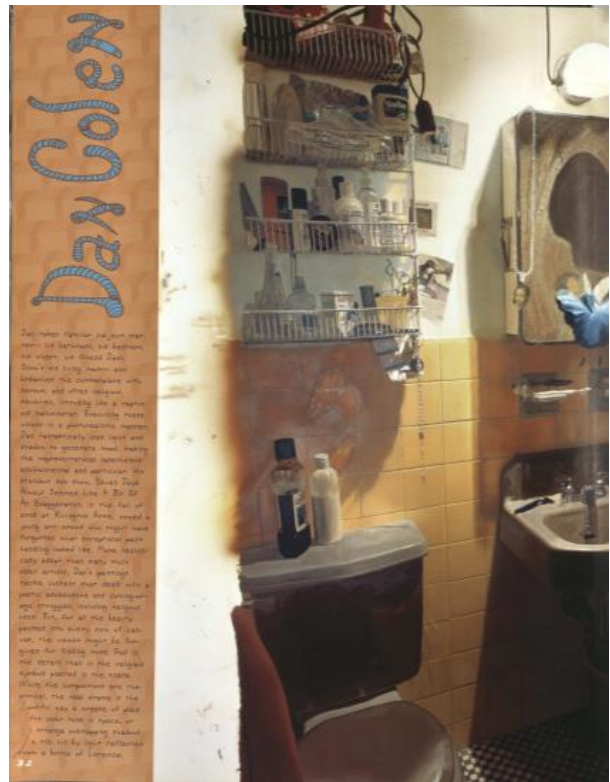


Figure 83: Pages from Deitch Projects' *Live Through This: New York 2005* exhibition catalogue.



Figure 84: Screenshot from Ryan McGinley's Instagram account @RyanMcGinleyStudios, July 14, 2016.



Figure 85: Installation image of *Nest*, Deitch Projects, July 28 – August 18, 2007.



Figure 86: Dash Snow and Dan Colen at *Nest*, Deitch Projects, July 28 – August 18, 2007.



Figure 87: Video still from “Closing Party For Nest At Deitch Projects,” 00:02:30, published February 18, 2011.

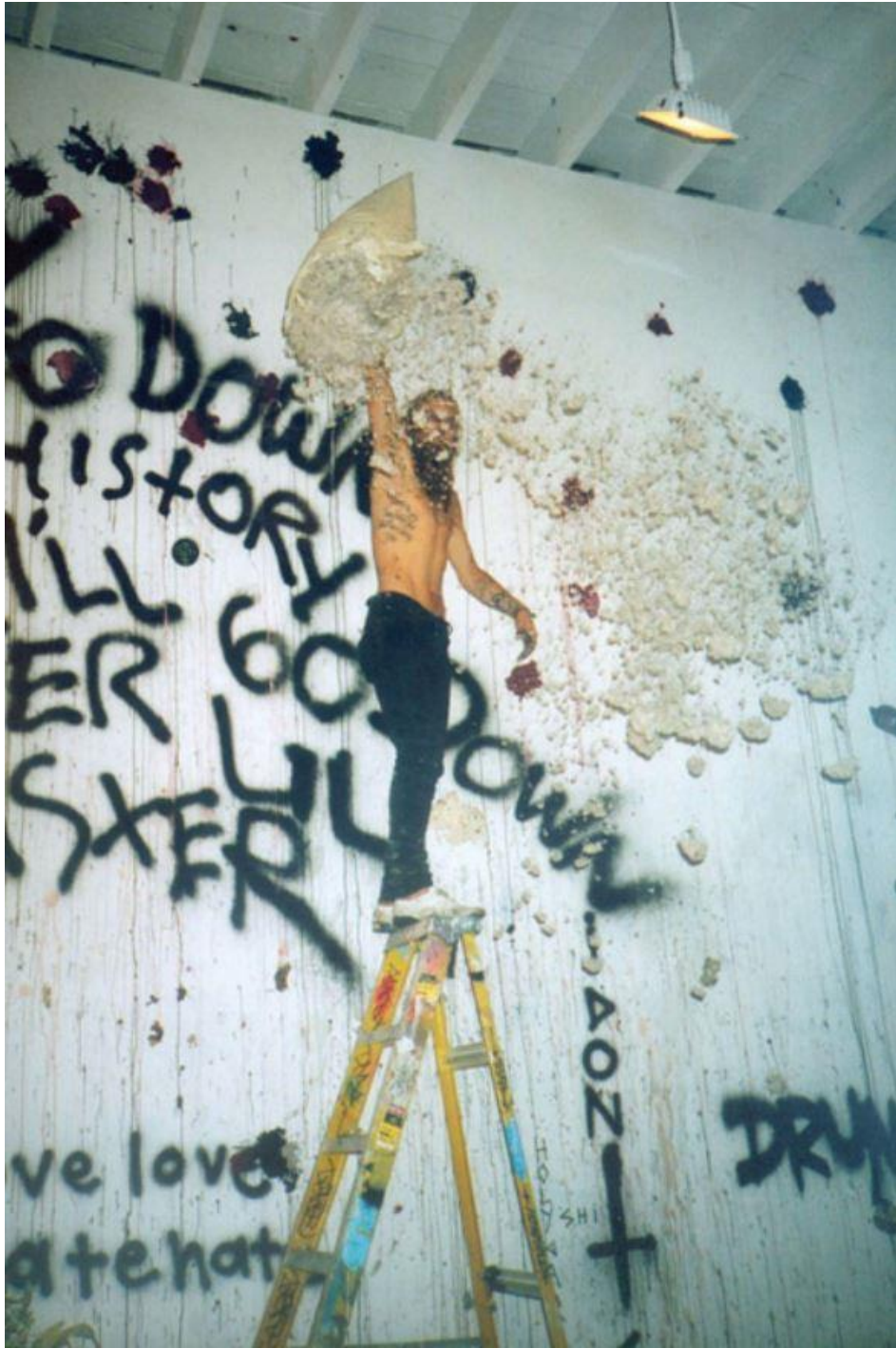


Figure 88: Dash Snow at the Installation of *Nest*, 2007.



Figure 89: Exhibition poster for *Nest*.



Figure 90: Photograph Deitch Projects' exhibition catalogue *Nest*.



Figure 91: Hélio Oiticica and Neville d'Almeida, *CC5- HENDRIXWAR*, 1973. Projectors, slides, hammocks, Jimi Hendrix soundtrack, and audio equipment, variable dimensions.



Figure 92: Rob Pruitt, *Cocaine Buffet*, 1998. Cocaine and plexiglass mirrors, variable dimensions. Installation shot.



Figure 93: T-shirt featuring Dash Snow's collage, *Untitled (in 20 parts)* from the Supreme collection.



Figure 94: Dash Snow, *Untitled (in 20 parts)*, 2006.
Newsprint, semen and glitter, 35.6 x 27.9 cm.



Figure 95: Photographs taken at Lit Lounge
(Top) Dash Snow and (Bottom) Unknown, Maripol and Ryan McGinley.



Figure 96: Dash Snow, *A Means to an End*, 2002. Table with mixed media, 93.98 x 46.99 x 51.43 cm.



Figure 97: Installation view of *Dash Snow: A Community Memorial*, Deitch Projects, New York, 2009.



Figure 98: Exterior of *Dash Snow: A Community Memorial* at Deitch Projects, New York, 2009.



Figure 99: Dash Snow, *How much talent does it take to come on the New York Post, anyway?*, 2007. Lightbox, and fliers, dimensions variable.



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New York, New York

ryanmcginleystudios HBD Baby Boy. Luv u, Miss u, Kiss u. #DashSnow #SaceIRAK #tbt

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artheartstar My baby! 🌟❤️ I miss him.

studmuffin1333 🍌🍌🍌🍌

sogun_photo 💜💜💜

mywingman @ryanmcginleystudios👀👀



3,261 likes

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ryanmcginleystudios HBD Dash, Miss U, Love U, Kiss U #DashSnow #SaceIRAK #earsnot @kunleirak #tbt

robertmajer 🍌🍌

msmelissaburnsxo ❤️

pauldeltastudio The hole?



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ryanmcginleystudios Getting Polaroid-ed by #DashSnow HBD, Miss U lil' Angel #tbt

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studmuffin1333 🍌🍌🍌🍌

thomas_skou ❤️❤️❤️

amanda_strachan 🍌

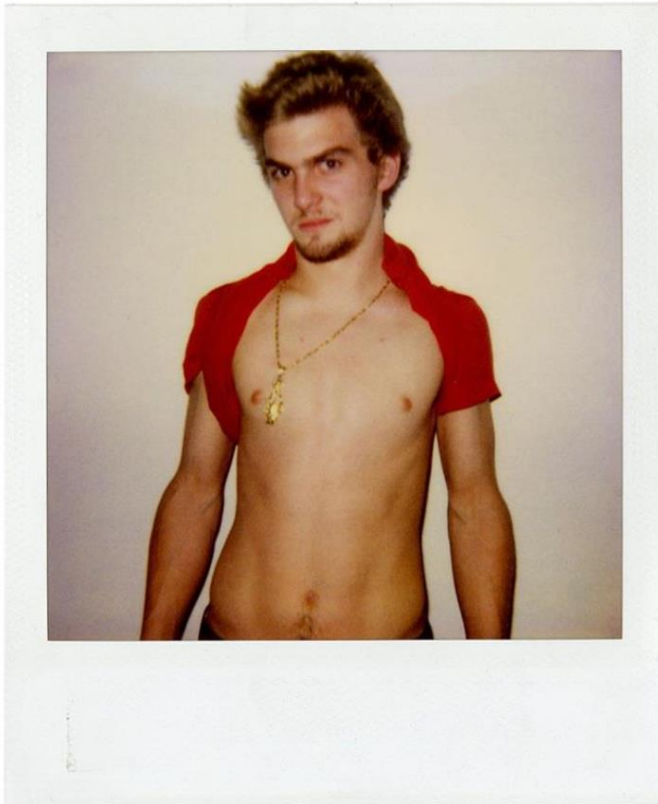
snitzsls Just randomly came across your work and then saw this - jade and secret are family - aura is my sister in law. So much love man. This is a beautiful memory to have.



4,469 likes

JULY 27, 2017

Figure 100: Screenshots from Ryan McGinley's Instagram account @RyanMcGinleyStudios, July 27, 2017.



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MCA Denver

ryanmcginleystudios Dash 12:43am July 25th 2000 #tbt #DashSnow Included in the museum exhibition focusing on my earliest photographs thru Aug 20th @mca_denver #TheKidsWereAlright #mca_denver Tue-Thurs 12-7pm, Fri 12pm-9pm, Sat-Sun 10am-5pm closed monday

View all 9 comments

alannalannibug 🧡🧡🧡🧡🧡🧡🧡🧡🧡🧡

loughlin_joseph ❤️

bo_sail 🧡🦋🧡

robotodindustries Incredible show. It's really wild to see what must be thousands of Polaroids hung like that



1,470 likes

JULY 13, 2017

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ryanmcginleystudios • Follow
New York, New York

ryanmcginleystudios ❤️ RIP Dash Snow, today is 8 Years #DashSnow #tbt

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4cryingartloud Really missing Dash. 😞

tcarnsc ❤️ Missing special people is hard. Thinking of you. ❤️

em_orejuelar @eli8t

bo_sail 🧡🦋🧡



2,454 likes

JULY 13, 2017

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Figure 101: Screenshots from Ryan McGinley's Instagram account @RyanMcGinleyStudios, July 13, 2017.



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ryanmcginleystudios HBD Dash, miss u #dashsnow

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meredithhuelbig 7th and 1st ave corner store

zrhule_ @wyatt.manobla dis our bodega?

wyatt.manobla @zrhule_ you know it! #trendy

badgalmaariri Looks like yours @cheports



2,293 likes

JULY 27, 2016

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ryanmcginleystudios HBD Dash, miss u @carolineksnow #tbt #dashsnow

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xxregina_xx @mario_lopez_corona

mario_lopez_corona @pocketregie ;(

seven711seveneleven @yabboskateshop

mywingman @ryanmcginleystudios☺



1,423 likes

JULY 27, 2016

Figure 102: Screenshots from Ryan McGinley's Instagram account @RyanMcGinleyStudios, July 27, 2016.

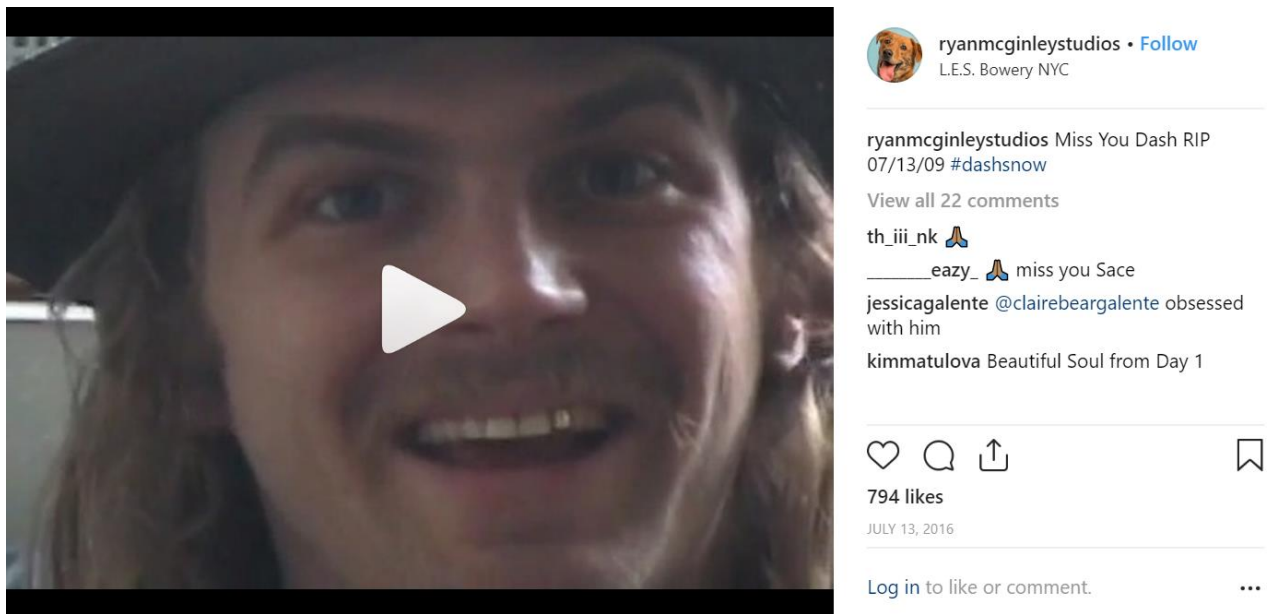


Figure 103: Screenshot from Ryan McGinley's Instagram account @RyanMcGinleyStudios, July 13, 2016.



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ryanmcginleystudios RIP Dash Snow July 27, 1981 – July 13, 2009 #dashsnow #saceirak

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shabahang_tayyari #legendaryartist

clawmoney 🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟

jeremykost Still so hard to believe it's been six years

polagusti 😞



1,173 likes

JULY 13, 2015



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ryanmcginleystudios RIP Dash Snow July 27, 1981 - July 13, 2009 #dashsnow #saceirak

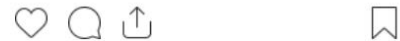
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brettwebb1 Happened way too early in life..miss you young God

cleyeroner Some Snowmen never melt.

minivanboy666 Legend

nateborgman @kristen_noelle_



1,756 likes

JULY 13, 2015

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Figure 104: Screenshot from Ryan McGinley’s Instagram account @RyanMcGinleyStudios, July 13, 2015.



Figure 105: Dash Snow, *Sisyphus, Sissy Fuss, Silly Puss*, 2009. 00:16;38, projection from Super 8 original, no sound.



Figure 106: Ryan McGinley, *Lily (Black Eye)*, 2005. Chromogenic print, 121.9 x 28.34 cm.

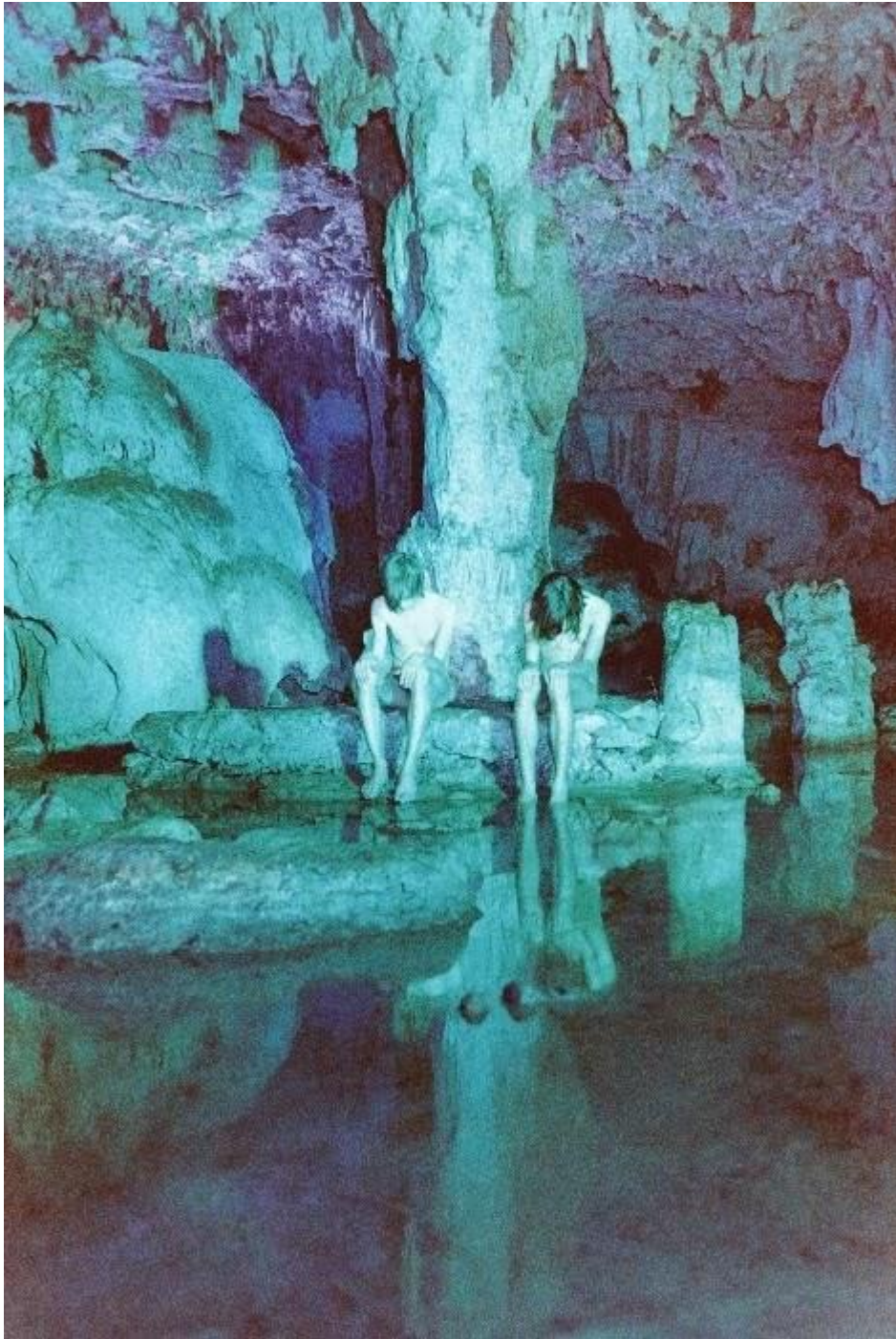


Figure 107: Ryan McGinley, *Jonas & Marcel (Blue Altar)*, 2009.
Chromogenic print, 114.3 x 76.2 cm.



Figure 108: Ryan McGinley, *Dakota (Hair)*, 2005. Chromogenic print, 76 x 101.5 cm.



Figure 109: Ryan McGinley, *Alex (Hurricane)*, 2005. Chromogenic print, 68.58 x 101.6.



Figure 110: Ryan McGinley, *Wade Wave*, 2004. Chromogenic print, 76.2 x 101.6 cm.



Figure 111: Ryan McGinley, *Deep Creek (Hot Springs)*, 2005. Chromogenic print, 27.94 x 35.56 cm.



Figure 112: Thomas Eakins, *Swimming Hole*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 69.5 x 92.3 cm.



Figure 113: Justine Kurland, *Bathers*, 1998. Chromogenic print, 76.2 x 101.6 cm.



Figure 114: Ryan McGinley photograph of Brad Pitt at White Sands National Monument for *GQ*, May 2017.



Figure 115: Dan Colen, *Infinite Jest*, 2012-2004. Barbed wire and trash, dimensions variable.



Figure 116: Dan Colen, *At Least They Died Together (After Dash)*, 2014. Box trucks, dimensions variable.



Figure 117: Dash Snow, *At Least They Died Together*, 2007.
Collage on newsprint, 40 x 28.57 cm.

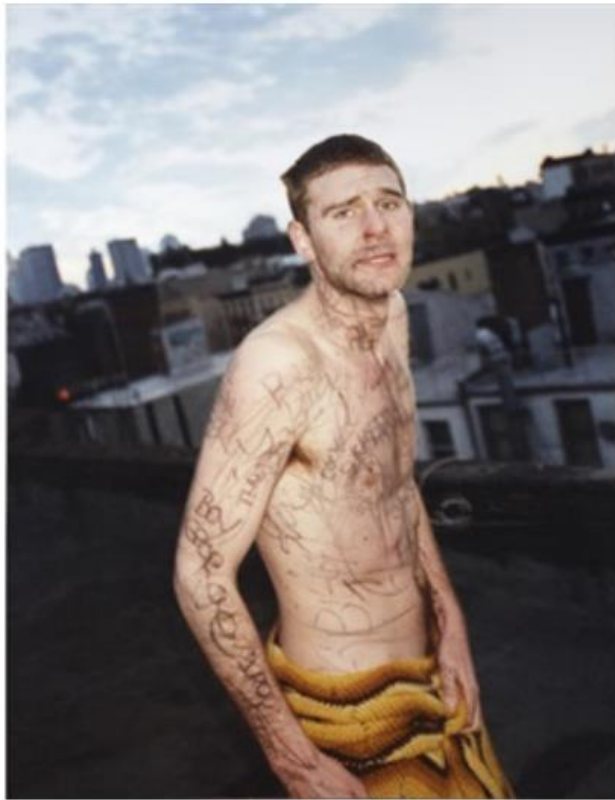


Figure 118: Ryan McGinley, *Dan Dusted*, 2002, printed 2003. Chromogenic print, 101 x 75.6 cm.



Figure 119: Dash Snow, *Book Fort*, 2006-2007. 1,122 books and tarpaulin, 360 x 189.865 x 203.2 cm.

DAN COLEN

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *High Noon*, Gagosian Gallery – US
Astrup Fearnley Museet 25 Years, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art – NO
Dan Colen: Mailorder Mother Purgatory, Lévy Gorvy – US
- 2017 *Dan Colen: Sweet Liberty*, Newport Street Gallery – UK
Dan Colen: Purgatory Paintings, Massimo de Carlo – IT
- 2016 *Dan Colen: First they exchanged anecdotes and inclinations*, Vito Schnabel – US
Dan Colen: Oil Painting, Dallas Contemporary – US
Dan Colen: When I'm Gone, Gagosian Gallery – CN
- 2015 *Dan Colen: Shake the Elbow*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery - US
Dan Colen—Viscera, Venus Over Los Angeles – US
Dan Colen, And Now, Dallas Contemporary – US
Dan Colen: Psychic Slayer, Herning Museum of Contemporary Art – DK
- 2014 *The L...o...n...g Count*, The Walter De Maria Building – US
Dan Colen: Miracle Paintings, Gagosian Gallery – US
Help!, The Brant Foundation Art Study Center – US
- 2013 *Dan Colen: The Illusion of Life*, Inverleith House, Royal Botanic Garden – UK
Dan Colen: The spirits that I called, Oko – US
- 2012 *Out of the Blue, Into the Black*, Gagosian Gallery – FR
Cracks in the Clouds, Seagram Building – US
Blowin' in the Wind, Gagosian Gallery – GR
Blowin' in the Wind, Karma – US
In Living Color, FLAG Art Foundation – US
- 2011 *Trash*, Gagosian Gallery– IT
Oh God!, Massimo De Carlo, Palazzo Rospigliosi – IT
Come Out Come Out Wherever You Are, dedicated to Dash Snow, Carlson Gallery – UK
Peanuts, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art – NO
- 2010 *Poetry*, Gagosian Gallery– US
Karma, Massimo De Carlo – IT
- 2009 *Dan Colen, An Allegory Of Faith...*, Gagosian Gallery – UK
- 2008 *I Live There...*, Gagosian Gallery – UK
- 2006 *Dan Colen*, Peres Projects – US
Potty Mouth, Potty War, Pot Roast, Pot is a Reality Kick, Gagosian Gallery – US
Secrets and Cymbals, Smoke and Scissors (My Friend Dash's Wall in the future), Deitch Projects – US
NO ME, Peres Projects – DE
- 2003 *Seven Days Always Seemed Like A Bit Of An Exaggeration*, Rivington Arms – US
Dan Colen, Rivington Arms – US

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *Force and Form*, De La Cruz Collection – US
Abstract/Not Abstract, Gagosian Gallery and Jeffrey Deitch, Moore Building – US
- 2016 *I still believe in miracles*, Inverleith House, Royal Botanic Garden – UK

- Progressive Praxis*, de la Cruz Collection – US
Enzo Cucchi Tano Festa Dan Colen, The National Exemplar – US
After Effect, Ballroom Marfa – US
- 2015 *Popular Images*, Karma – US
The Rainbow Serpent, Gagosian Gallery – GR
First Show / Last Show, 190 Bowery – US
- 2014 *One Way: Peter Marino*, Bass Museum of Art, Miami – US
Le Jardin Décomposé / Decomposed Garden, Gagosian Gallery – FR
Broadway Morey Boogie, Montefiore Square presented by Marlborough Chelsea – US
5x5: Alter/Abolish/Address, US CLEAR, Gagosian Gallery – US
CLEAR, Gagosian Gallery – US
- 2013 *Confronti – Enrico Castellani, Dan Colen, Dadamaino, Piotr Uklanski*, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo – IT
The Show is Over, Gagosian Gallery – UK
Meanwhile... Suddenly and Then. 12th Biennale de Lyon – FR
- 2012 *A Rebours*, Venus over Manhattan – US
Group Shoe, curated by Joe Bradley, Gavin Brown's Enterprise – UK
WONDERS, Masterpieces from Private Collections in Denmark, KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art Aalborg – DK
To Be Wiith Art Is All We Ask, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art – NO
Holy Crap!, The Fireplace Project – US
Joe Bradley and Dan Colen: Epiphany, Gavin Brown Enterprises – US
- 2011 *Post 9/11*, OHWOW – US
The Coke Factory, Ritter/Zamet – UK
Unpainted Paintings, Luxembourg & Dayan – US
Don't Do It Etc, Galerie Bruno Bischofberger AG – CH
Grisaille Part II, Luxembourg & Dayan – US
OH!, Galerie Patrick Seguin – FR
Grisaille Part I, Luxembourg and Dayan – UK
Ray's a Laugh, Half Gallery – NY
Invitation to the Voyage, Albus Greenspon – NY
The Trilogy Exhibition: Dan Colen, Ryan McGinley, Dash Snow, Ring Art Center – US
Love Roses, National Exemplar Gallery – NY
George Herms: Xenophilia (Love of the Unknown), Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles – US
The Art of Wit, Paddle 8 – US
New York Minute, Garage Center for Contemporary Culture – RU
Unpainted Paintings, Luxembourg & Dayan – US
- 2010 *Skin Fruit: Selections from the Dakis Joannou Collection*, curated by Jeff Koons, The New Museum – US
Art Cologne, Peres Projects – DE
- 2009 *New York Minute*, curated by Kathy Grayson, Macro Future Museum – IT
Minneapolis, Peres Projects – US
Time – Life, Taxter & Spengemann – US
Abstract America: New Painting and Sculpture, Saatchi Gallery – UK
Slough, David Nolan Gallery – US

- The Living & the Dead*, Gavin Brown's Enterprise – US
- 2008 *The Unforgiven*, Stellan Holm Gallery – US
Wet Pain, Step Brother, Dan Colen & Nate Lowman, A Palazzo Gallery – IT
Closing Down Sale: Dan Colen & Nate Lowman, MacCarone – US
Substraction, Deitch Projects – US
Sack of Bones, Asia Song Society – US
Meet Me Around the Corner, Works from the Astrup Fearnley Collection, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art – NO
- 2007 *Nest*, Deitch Projects – US
Pop Art is, Gagosian Gallery – UK
Unholy Truth, Initial Access, Frank Cohen Collection – UK
Generation, Art Gallery of Alberta – CA
Fractured Figure, works from the Dakis Joannou Collection, curated by Jeffrey Deitch, Deste Foundation – GR
Beyond Zero, Peres Projects – GR
Sweet Bird of Youth, curated by Hedi Slimane Arndt & Partner – CH
Last Attraction Next Exit, curated by Neville Wakefield, Max Wigram Gallery – UK
Absent Without Leave, Victoria Miro Gallery – UK
Beneath the Underdog, Gagosian Gallery – US
- 2006 *Whitney Biennial 2006: Day for Night*, Whitney Museum of American Art – US
USA Today, Royal Academy of Arts – UK
Fantastic Politics, The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design – NO
Survivor, Bortolami-Dyan Gallery – US
Defamation of Character, PS1 Contemporary Art Center – US
Mid-Life Crisis, Salander-O'Reilly Galleries – US
Axis of Praxis, Midway Contemporary Art – US
Infinite Painting, Villa Manin – Centre for Contemporary Art – IT
- 2005 *Interstate*, Nicolw Klagsbrun Gallery – US
Bridge Freezes Before Road, curated by Neville Wakefield – US
The Armory Show, Peres Projects – US
- 2004 *Art Works for Hard Money*, Gavin Brown's Enterprise – US
Art Basel Miami, Peres Projects – US
- 2003 *New York*, Galerie du Jour – FR
40 Views of an Icon, Comme de Garçons – FR
- 2002 *First Show*, Rivington Arms – US

RYAN MCGINLEY

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *Mirror, Mirror*, Team Gallery - US
My NY, Tomio Koyama Gallery - JP
Paradiso, Ratio 3 - US
- 2017 *The Kids Were Alright*, Museum of Contemporary Art Denver - US
Early, Team Gallery – US
Yearbook, La Termica – ES
Ryan McGinley: Survey, Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery – JP
- 2016 *The Four Seasons*, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea - IT
- 2015 *Masters of Photography: Ryan McGinley*, Embassy of the United States – BG
Fall, Team Gallery - US
Winter, Team Gallery, US
Ryan McGinley Photographs 1999-2015, Kunsthal KAdE Amsersfoort - NL
- 2014 *Yearbook*, Team Gallery – US
Ryan McGinley: Vertical Color of Sound, Perrotin - CN
- 2013 *Magic Magnifier: Photographs 1998 to 2013*, Daelim Museum – KR
Body Loud, Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin – FR
Yearbook, Ratio 3 – US
Running Water, What Are You Running From?, Bischoff Projects – DE
- 2012 *Reach Out, I'm Right Here*, Tomio Koyama Gallery – JP
Animals, Tomio Koyama Gallery – JP
Animals, Team Gallery – US
Grids, Team Gallery – US
- 2011 *Wandering Comma*, Alison Jacques Gallery – UK
Somewhere Place, Galerie Gabriel Rolt – NL
- 2010 *Life Adjustment Center*, Ratio 3 – US
Crooked Aisles, The Breeder – GR
Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere, Team Gallery – US
- 2009 *Moonmilk*, Alison Jacques Gallery – UK
- 2008 *Spring and By Summer Fall*, Ratio 3 – US
I Know Where the Summer Goes, Team Gallery – US
- 2007 *Irregular Regulars*, Team Gallery – US
- 2006 *Project Space*, Kunsthalle Vienna – AT
Sun and Health, agnes b. galerie du jour – FR
- 2005 *Laboratorio 987: Entre Nosotros*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León - ES
Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie – FR
- 2004 *New Photographs*, P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center / The Museum of Modern Art - US
Ryan McGinley: The Kids Are Alright, University of the Arts, Philadelphia - US
- 2003 *The Kids Are Alright*, The Whitney Museum of American Art - US
Untitled, curated by David Sherry, Rhode Island School of Design, Red Eye Gallery - US
Untitled, Bailey Fine Arts - CA
- 2002 *Ryan McGinley*, MC Magma - IT
Ryan McGinley: Photographien, Galerie Giti Nourbaksch – DE
- 2000 *The Kids are Alright*, 420 W. Broadway, New York – US

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *Becoming Human*, Skulptur Odense 17 – DK
Youth, Daelim Museum – KR
amour, amours...dans ma collection de photographiés: selections from the collection of agnès b, Isetan Museum – JP
The Open Road: Photography and the American Road Trip, traveling exhibition: Detroit Institute of Arts (US), Crystal Bridges Museum of Art (US), Amarillo Museum of Art (US) and Museum of Fine Arts (RU)
Give Me Yesterday, Fondazione Prada – IT
- 2016 *The Public Body .01*, Artspace – AU
Human Interest: Portraits from the Whitney's Collection, The Whitney Museum of American Art – US
Taguchi Art Collection – CORRELATION DIAGRAM OF HAPPINESS, Mitsubishi-Hisho ARTRIUM – JP
On the Origin of Art, The Museum of Old and New Art – AU
Vogue 100, National Portrait Gallery – UK
- 2015 *Storylines: Contemporary Art at the Guggenheim*, Solomon R. Guggenheim – US
Degrees of Freedom, Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna – IT
Framing Desire: Photography and Video, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth – US
Dries van Noten: Inspirations, Mode Museum – FR
- 2014 *The Marseillaise(s)*, Museum Huis Marseille – NL
Private Eye: Allen G. Thomas Jr. Photography Collection, North Carolina Museum of Art – US
Tattoo, Brandts Museet for Fotokunst – DK
It's an Invasion, National Arts Club – US
Only The Good Ones: The Snapshot Aesthetic Revisited, Galerie Rudolfinum – CZ
- 2013 *(con)TEXT*, Sharon Art Center – US
APPARATUS, M+B – US
Why not live for Art? II - 9 collectors reveal their treasures, Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery – JP
Folk Devil, David Zwirner – US
Alchemical, Steven Kasher Gallery – US
In alle staten: De mens in de hedendaagse kunstcollectie van de Fondation Francès, Museum Dr. Guislain – BE
You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet, FotoMuseum Provincie Antwerpen – BE
Coconut Water, White Flag Projects – US
Magnetic North, Ratio 3 – US
Une affaire de famille: La photographie dans les collections de Stéphane, Rodolphe et Sébastien Janssen, Musée de la Photographie à Charleroi – BE
Photography, traveling exhibition: Gallery Target (JP) and Aperture Gallery (US)
Black Cake, Team Gallery – US
- 2012 *Privat/Privacy*, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Frankfurt – DE
The Kids Are All Right: An Exhibition about Family and Photography, traveling exhibition: John Michael Kohler Arts Center (US) and Weatherspoon Art Museum (US)
Photography, Galleria Carla Sozzani – IT

- Pop Politics: Activism at 33 Revolutions*, CA2M Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo – ES
Audience as Subject Part 2: Extra Large, curated by Betti-Sue Hertz, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts – US
Pubart, Galerie Sophie Scheidecker – FR
The Importance of Being Photographed, University of South Florida Art Museum – US
The Kids Are All Right, John Mihcael Kohler Arts Center – US
Photographic!, Daegu Photo Biennale – KR
Do Your Thing, White Columns – US
Looking at Picasso, Huis Marseilles Museum voor Fotografie – NL
The New Ages of Life, Palazzo Re Enzo – IT
CA, Real to Real: Photographs from the Traina Collection, M.H. de Young Memorial Museum – US
Out of Focus: Photography, Saatchi Gallery – UK
Accelerating Toward Apocalypse: Works from the Doron Sebbag Art Collection, ORS Ltd., traveling exhibition: Givon Art Forum (IL) and Daimle Contemporary (DE)
- 2011 *Post 9/11*, OHWOW – US
George Herms: Xenophilia (Love of the Unknown), Museum of Contemporary Art: Pacific Design Center – US
The Last First Decade, Ellipse Foundation – PT
Involuntary, fordProject – US
Ryan McGinley, Sam Samore, Tørbjørn Rødland, Galerie Rodolphe Janssen – BE
The Trilogy Exhibition: Dan Colen, Ryan McGinley, Dash Snow, The Ring Art Center – US
It's All American, New Jersey Museum of Contemporary Art – US
- 2010 *Summer Teeth*, The Breeder – GR
3+1, agnes b. galerie du jour – FR
SWEAT, Patricia Low Contemporary – CH
Roundtrip: New York Now Selections from the Domus Collection, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art – CN
Out of the Woods, Leslie Tonkonow – US
Calling Beauty, Columbus College of Art & Design – US
NEW YORK The Loudest, Gallery Koko – JP
- 2009 *Emporte-Moi/Sweep Me Off My Feet*, Musée National Des Beaux-Arts Du Québec – CA
Who Shot Rock: Photographers of Rock and Roll, Brooklyn Museum of Art – US
KaraokeLike, Fotomuseum Winterthur – CH
New York Minute, MACRO Museum of Contemporary Art – IT
The 2009 Vice Magazine Photography Exhibition, Spencer Brownstone – US
The Art of Caring, New Orleans Museum of Art – US
- 2008 *The Station*, Midtown Miami – US
Feature Photography, National Portrait Gallery – US
Listen Darling...The World is Yours, Ellipse Foundation – US
DARKSIDE, Fotomuseum Winterthur – CH
Boys of Summer, The Fireplace Project – US
Fair Market, Rental – US
History Keeps Me Awake at Night: A Genealogy of Wojnarowicz, PPOW – US

- I Won't Grow Up*, Cheim & Read – US
- 2007 *Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue*, Marella Gallery – IT
- Now Playing: Artists Borrow Film*, Glenn Horowitz Bookseller – US
- Young at Heart*, Galeria Helga de Alvear – ES
- People Take Pictures of Each Other*, LaMontagne Gallery – US
- Picturing Modernity: The Photography Collection*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art – US
- Sweet Bird of Youth*, Arndt & Partner – US
- She Was Born to Be My Unicorn*, Smith Stewart – US
- Other Scenes*, Roberts and Tilton Gallery – US
- Rebel Rebel: A Tribute to Karlheinz Weinberger*, Anna Kustera Gallery – US
- 2006 *Americans 1940-2006: Masterpieces of American Photography* Kunsthalle Vienna – AT
- Defamation of Character*, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center – US
- People*, Museo d'Arte Donna Regina – IT
- Into Me / Out of Me*, traveling exhibition: P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center (US); Kunstwerke, Berlin (DE); MACRO (IT)
- The Name of This Show Is Not GAY ART NOW*, Paul Kasmin Gallery – US
- The 6th Annual Vice Magazine Photo Issue Exhibition*, Silverstein Photography – US
- Youth of Today*, Schirn Kunsthalle – DE
- 2005 *with us against reality, or against us!*, galerie S.E. – NO
- Greater New York 2005*, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center – US
- 2004 *Color Wheel Oblivion*, Marella Arte Contemporanea – IT
- Summer Solstice*, Ratio 3 – US
- Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art, Skateboarding, & Street Culture*, traveling exhibition: Contemporary Arts Center (US); Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (US).
- Fresh: Youth Culture in Contemporary Photographs*, Center for Photography at Woodstock – US
- 2003 *My People Were Fair and Had Cum in their Hair (but Now They're Content to Spray Stars from your Boughs)* Team Gallery – US
- A NEW SCENE: WHAT ABOUT NEW YORK?*, agnes b. galerie du jour – FR
- amfAR Portfolio*, Cheim & Read – US
- 2002 *K48 Teenage Rebel: The Bedroom Show*, traveling exhibition: John Connelly Presents (US); agnes b. galerie du jour (FR)
- You're just a summer love, but I'll remember you when winter comes*, Priska C. Juschka Fine Art – US
- Bystander*, Andrea Rosen Gallery – US
- 2001 *Alleged at Space 1026*, Space 1026 – US
- Raw: New York, New Work*, Mamma Roma Ltd. – US

DASH SNOW

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2016 *HELLO, THIS IS DASH*, Annka Kultys Gallery, London – UK
2015 *Freeze Means Run*, Brant Foundation, Greenwich – US
2012 *Dash Snow*, Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin – DE
2011 *Dash Snow, part of Three Amigos*, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma – IT
Dash Snow Movie List, Andrew Roth – US
2007 *God Spoiled a Perfect Asshole When He Put Teeth In Yer Mouth*, Peres Projects – US
The End Of Living, The Beginning of Survival, Contemporary Fine Arts – DE
2006 *Silence Is The Only True Friend That Shall Never Betray You*, Rivington Arms – US
2005 *Moments Like This Never Last*, Rivington Arms – US

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *Slam Section*, GSB/Gallery Steinsland Berliner – SE
2014 *Group Exhibition*, agnes b. galerie du jour – FR
Sed Tantum Dic Verbo (Just Say the Word), Blain Southern – DE
Bbbbbreeze, Ethan Cohen Fine Arts – US
Front Row, Contemporary Fine Arts – DE
2013 *And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music*, Friedman Benda Gallery – US
2012 *Nach dem frühen Tod*, Staatliche Kunsthalle – DE
Privat/Privacy, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt – DE
A Rebours, Venus over Manhattan – US
2011 *Post 9/11*, OHWOW – US
Don't Do It Etc, Galerie Bruno Bischofberger – CH
Parallel Perceptions, New York City Opera – US
HOME ALONE: The Sender Collection, The Sender Collection – US
The Trilogy Exhibition: Dan Colen, Ryan McGinley, Dash Snow, The Ring Art Center – US
2010 *The Coke Factory*, Ritter/Zamet – UK
3+1, galerie du jour agnès b. – FR
Permanent Trouble, traveling exhibition: Kunst aus der Sammlung Kopp (DE);
Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie (DE)
Frost, Contemporary Fine Arts – DE
2009 *New York Minute*, Macro Future Museum – IT
Scorpio's Garden, Temporare Kunsthalle Berlin – DE
The Angelo and Massimo Lauro Collection, Il Giardino dei Lauri – IT
Minneapolis, Peres Projects – US
Story Without a Name, Peres Projects – DE
The New Yorkers, V1 Gallery – DK
Get a Rope, curated by Kathy Grayson, CTRL Gallery – US
Mind the Cracks! Collages from the Museum and from Other Collections, Museum of Art – IL
Visions of the frontier, curated by Robert Wilson, IVAM, Gallery 7 – ES

- Story without a name*, Peres Projects – DE
Accrochage, Contemporary Fine Arts – DE
 2008 *The Hidden*, Maureen Paley Gallery – UK
Fit to Print, Gagosian Gallery – US
Babylon. Myth and Truth, Pergamon Museum, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz – DE
Murder Letters, Galeria Filomena Soares – PT
Materialized: New American Video and..., Bergen Kunsthall – NO
I Want a Little Sugar in My Bowl, Asia Song Society – US
 2007 *Beyond the Zero*, Peres Projects – GR
Cabinet of Curiosities, The Journal Gallery – US
Jalouse, Palais de Tokyo – FR
Come, Come, Come Into My World, Ellipse Foundation – PT
Stalemate, Leroy Neiman Gallery, Columbia University – US
Sweet Bird of Youth, Arndt and Partner – DE
Beneath the Underdog, Gagosian Gallery – US
Nest, Deitch Projects – US
 2006 *Whitney Biennial 2006: Day for Night*, Whitney Museum of American Art – US
USA Today, Royal Academy of Arts – UK
Moments Like This Never Last, Rivington Arms – US
Defamation of Character, P.S.1 – US
American Concentration Camp, The Proposition – US
There is a U IN US, V1 Gallery – DK
Survivor, Bortolami Dayan – US
Partial Recall, Lehman Maupin – US
Good Bye To All That, Rivington Arms – US
 2005 *Live Through This: New York 2005*, Deitch Projects – US
Interstate, Nicole Klagsbrun – US
With us against Reality, Or Against Us, traveling exhibition: Willy Wonka Inc. (NO) and Gallery S.E (NO)
 2003 *Session the Bowl*, Deitch Projects – US
A New York Scene, agnes b. galerie du jour – FR
Don't Be Scared, Rivington Arms – US

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