BOSTON SCHOOL

Lia Gangitano
Milena Kalinovska
Curators

Lia Gangitano
Editor

Mark Morrisroe (1959-1989)
A Survey from the Estate
Organized by Pat Hearn Gallery

The Institute of Contemporary Art,
Boston, Massachusetts
Primal Media, Allston, Massachusetts

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The Institute of Contemporary Art,
955 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116
Primal Media POBox 1179, Allston, MA 02134

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Notes

[1] Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Letters to a Young Poet,* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1934): 19.

[2] Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida,* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1980): 119.

[3] Barthes: 115.

[4] Barthes: 119.

[5] McPhillips, Ramsey, *Am I Dead Yet?,* (forthcoming).

[6] Barthes: 117.

INTRODUCTION

LIA GANGITANO

People love telling stories. I know some I shouldn't repeat. The story of *Boston School* could go a couple of ways. It's a story about this town, relationships, and remembering things. And as one artist said, "It's also about throwing things away."[1] The fact that the pictures that preserve and further this story can be gathered and presented is incidental to just knowing that they are there. At an earlier time they might not have made it into the public sphere, as they represent a mixture of private longings, art world ambitions, and personal remembrances. Pushing them into view wasn't easy, I'm sure, for the artists involved, which makes the reassembly more delicate, and vital. Many of the stories recalled by the artists that constitute a basis for this project emanate from one character, Mark Morrisroe, who made sure that his legendary biography, fully illustrated, remained beyond his years. While the biographical facts may not be entirely correct, the artists' histories are worth recounting. Conversations about the time period Mark Morrisroe seems to define linger upon a certain distrust—an ambition laced with doubt that anyone would really accept what they each had to offer. The decision to exhibit (and document in this book) a large portion of Mark's profound body of work together with that of David Armstong, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Nan Goldin, Jack Pierson, Tabboo! (Stephen Tashjian), and Shellburne Thurber is uninhibited by his, in some cases, nominal influence on the others.[2] The choice of artists is rooted in personal ties, shared views, and an artistic intention that prioritizes the intimate; sometimes made to look strange, yet always nearby. Their placement together in *Boston School* substantiates the speculation that the everyday lives portrayed in the work of these seven artists over the past ten

Mark Morrisroe, Blow both of us, Gail Thacker and me, *1978, 1986, c-print.*

to twenty years, whether their own or of those around them, matter. Their beginnings in Boston and their at times converging approaches have resonance beyond purely incidental recordings of the familiar. Their gestures may be grandly explained as a refusal to follow in the traditions laid before them (for example, refusal of the mastery of objectivity and of creating distance through a documentary approach); however, a shared aesthetic may be most concretely seen in the details of their work. Even the occasional landscape rendered by these artists bears the traces of self portraiture. While thematically centered around the self and those close to home (the family or club or street outside: "A 'house' is the people you 'walk' with"[3]), *Boston School* also hinges on a significant moment in history in Boston, a place uncommonly recognized for having attributes such as intimacy, openness, and experimentation. What constitutes a group of artists, or even a movement, is both the things that fit into it and the things that don't. The premise of *Boston School* could be viewed as "flawed"[4] if you care about the dates matching up. Although all of the artists attended either the School of the Museum of Fine Arts or Massachusetts College of Art during the period between 1971 and 1984, the degree to which each artist knew or knew of the others varies widely. Fueled by Mark Morrisroe's rich mythology, it's tempting to imagine him as the indisputable center, the Andy Warhol to the Museum School Factory, but this wasn't really the case. Philip-Lorca diCorcia had left the Museum School before Mark arrived; they may have met once in New York. DiCorcia's affiliation with the school and some of his friends there (Nan Goldin and Shellburne Thurber, for example) is modestly recorded in a handful of early black and white photographs. His work has developed into a refined

Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Untitled, circa 1975, gelatin silver print.

and complex vision of defamiliarized life and constructed intimacy. Yet his impulse to photograph his family members amidst the iconic mundanity of the "American home" defines one parameter of *Boston School*. Shellburne Thurber talks about a sense of alienation from the documentary tradition that was so prevalent when she studied at the Museum School in the late 70s. At the time, she was taking photographs that her teachers might have made "on the side,"[5] not for the purpose of art. Her teachers' professional photographs depicted situations and people outside of their lived experience, often in locations geographically, economically, or otherwise removed from themselves. This approach could be described as masculine and was abandoned, for the most part, by all of the artists in *Boston School*, who opted to put themselves within, or at least closer to, their own images.[6] After retreating to the painting department and putting the photographs into hiding, Shellburne found an affinity with Nan Goldin. Both artists use photography as a means of connecting to other people and of remembering these connections. Their shared approach and friendship constitute another aspect of *Boston School*. Nan Goldin and David Armstrong were at the Museum School when Mark Morrisroe arrived. David was a strong advocate of Mark's admission to the school and was a model of artistic success, being the first one to make the move to New York. As artists who often photograph a shared circle of friends, Nan's and David's pictures document their longtime companionship with one another. When viewed together, they also show the mutual and triangular bonds that develop over time, visible in much of the work in *Boston School*. Their images, however formally dissimilar, have the cumulative effect of interlocking family albums. This delineation of a community or extended family was underscored by Nan's early decision to present her photographs in the form of slide shows, a typ-

Shellburne Thurber, Marion in the bathroom, 1972, silver gelatin print.

ical form of familial validation. The Museum School of the late 70s has been described to me as a place where "the art was what you wiped the floor with...."[7] I take this to mean that the lives being lived and recorded were the primary concern, and matching the existing standards of the art world was not. "Tearing down whatever came before without putting anything back in its place"[8] was not only a viable artistic endeavor, but also a good way to be noticed. These attitudes could be immediately expressed through appearances: what you were wearing and where you were going. Punk rock, new wave, and drag were all parts of the chemistry. Jack Pierson, known as Jonathan at the time he was living in Boston in the early 80s, attended Mass Art, and he and Mark were boyfriends. Stephen Tashjian, who goes by the name Tabboo!, also attended Mass Art and he, Mark, and Jack formed another overlapping circle of friends that constitutes *Boston School*. They made and screened films, performed, and exhibited their work together in makeshift spaces while trying to define their own artistic identities. Jack recalls, "I was totally living out this fantasy of 'It wasn't gritty.' When [my images] were reviewed, well, it wasn't even my review, but of Mark Morrisroe who I had this big connection with in Boston, and it described his work and it said, like, 'the ravaged faces of these pathetic tenement dwellers.' I was like... 'What do you mean?!' I thought they were very glamorous, like beautiful dresses."[9] The club-like venues that served as exhibition and performance spaces at the time such as Polly Cow, Thayer Street, 11th Hour, Red Alert, and the Underground, organized by film, video, and performance artists Pat Hearn, Kathe Izzo, and Penelope Place, among others, were important centers for artistic production, the

Jack Pierson, poster for The Laziest Girl in Town, *1982. Courtesy of Tabboo!.*

exchange of ideas, and for hanging out in a town that closes at 2 am. It would be difficult to name all of the other artists, performers, and friends who contributed to this scene and whose images have become familiar through Mark's photographs—Lynelle White, Jason Gavann, Gail Thacker —to name a few. I had come to appreciate the many faces of Tabboo! through photographs by Nan Goldin and Mark Morrisroe. During my first studio visit with Jack Pierson he picked up the phone to call Tabboo! and arranged for us to meet. Jack told me that Tabboo! had an excellent collection of artifacts from Boston, including photographs, flyers and posters for performances and films starring Mark, Jack, and Tabboo!. The first thing I saw in his aqua apartment was something he had prepared for the occasion. It was a painting of a tree with the names of the artists in the exhibition written around it in his signature loopy letters. It was titled "Boston Branch." Tabboo!'s fascination with figurines, flowers, taxidermy, and retro home accessories provides subject matter for his paintings. It seemed clear that the 50s aesthetic Jack had just explained to me as their barometer of success as young artists—if it looked like the photograph was taken in the 50s, it was good[10]—was cultivated in Tabboo!'s apartment. He is often the beauty in front of the lens and his sensibility informs the props, costumes, and bittersweet outlook recorded in certain images by Mark Morrisroe, Nan Goldin, David Armstrong and others. Settings designed for his own use in paintings and performances define their everyday atmosphere as part-fantasy. It is not surprising that the term "Boston Branch"[11] has been used before to describe this group of artists but has never been fully explained through an exhibition. Although many of them have exhibited together in a variety of configurations (often in exhibitions curated by the artists themselves), their work

David Armstrong, Christopher Wool at Elizabeth Street, NYC, 1980, silver gelatin print.

resists easy categorization. It is difficult to explain what characterizes the work of the entire group since each artist has a distinct style. It would be nice if everything were clearer. But the connections between the work of these seven artists are as loosely tangled as their relationships with each other. One way of seeing the connections is to view the sheer number of photographs they took of one another. In an article regarding the use of portraiture by Warhol and his artistic circle, art historian Reva Wolf has observed, "'The friends are forever involved in the *family photo*,' a line by the poet Gerard Malanga, who was a close associate of Andy Warhol during the 1960s, alludes to the dynamic connections between portraits and social interaction."[12] Each of the artists in *Boston School* has developed a particular style of portraiture as autobiographical gesture, reflecting their sometimes shared, sometimes disparate social affiliations. Nan Goldin's photographs of the drag queens who frequented The Other Side, a Boston bar, now closed, bear only a formal resemblance to Shellburne Thurber's photographs of her family and friends at home; but the impulse to document their "families" is rooted in a complex desire for closeness through the act of photographing. Portraits of friends or family members by Philip-Lorca diCorcia are staged; they are manufactured as a way to examine intimacy through the uncomfortable enactment of its absence. (His subjects are often utterly alone.) Our interest in the details of other peoples' lives draws us in. David Armstrong's portraits—images created out of shadows—often of lovers held close in each other's arms show that photographs relying on somewhat formal poses and settings bear an emotional charge drawn from what the viewer cannot see.[13] Despite all of these stories, there's a lot that remains unspoken. This book attempts to recount a complex history as well as to examine the

Mark Morrisroe, Untitled (portrait of Nan Goldin), circa 1980, silver gelatin print.

work of seven artists that has changed over time. Like the exhibition itself, the selection of authors was guided predominantly by the artists and their connections to the project are often personal. Their texts range from scholarly to "trashy" and place the work of these artists in a broader context to include music, performance, lived experience, styles and modes of self-invention. The project as a whole has been informed by various questions and perspectives that have been forwarded by queer theory.[14] This project started with Mark Morrisroe, whose work had appeared in a number of exhibitions at The ICA including *Boston Now: Photography* in 1985, and the tenth anniversary of *Boston Now* in 1991, two years after his death. My questions about his importance to other artists working in Boston came up during research for an exhibition organized for World AIDS Day in 1993, in which his work was included. It was the first time I thought about the kinds of communities that have formed and exist (but are not talked about as such) around AIDS. How are the bonds between people who have been damaged by their circumstances, who have addictions as well as obsessions, defined in relation to "community," a word which is becoming more narrowly understood all the time? Mark's was a strange kind of community often endowed with exotic and underworldly qualities, but not often with the attributes of closeness and love that were necessary to support it. These attributes, however, unfold in the work of each of the artists in *Boston School*. They can be seen in Mark's hazy documentation of lovers, friends, and the ordinary things (still lifes and landscapes), in which he found belonging. His sometimes playful, sometimes romantic portraits of Jack Pierson (Jonathan) and Tabboo!, for example, show that a kind of family was formed out of the desire to record their lives. The impact of AIDS on this particular extended family is reflected in their work as a continuation of the story, and this is where (in the discussion of *Boston School*) the documentation of a movement necessarily intersects with the documentation of a broader history.

Notes

[1] Conversation with Shellburne Thurber, Summer 1995.

[2] An interesting model for this type of exhibition is *The Presence of Walker Evans* (1978, at The ICA, Boston). It included Diane Arbus, William Christenberry, Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, Helen Levitt, Alston Purvis, John Szarkowski, and Jerry Thompson and was organized around both personal (albeit intergenerational) and stylistic influences. This exhibition and catalog were brought to my attention by David Bonetti.

[3] Liz Kotz, "The Body You Want; Liz Kotz Interviews Judith Butler," *ArtForum* (November 1992): 84.

[4] Conversation with Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Fall 1995.

[5] Conversation with Shellburne Thurber, Summer 1995.

[6] By masculine I mean to imply making the self transparent in the power relation between a scrutinizing author and his/her subject.

[7] Conversation with Lisa Sawlit, Fall 1995.

[8] Conversation with Jane Hudson, Fall 1995.

[9] Ann Wilson Lloyd, "The Sadness of Abstract Art: An Interview with Jack Pierson," *Provincetown Arts* (1994): 49.

[10] Conversation with Jack Pierson, Summer 1995.

[11] Collier Schorr, "Mark Morrisroe," *Frieze* (March/April 1994): 50.

[12] Reva Wolf, "Collaboration as Social Exchange: *Screen Tests/A Diary* by Gerard Malanga and Andy Warhol," *Art Journal* Vol. 52 No. 4 (Winter 1993): 59; see also Reva Wolf's "Portraiture as Gossip: Andy Warhol's 1963 Cover Design for *C: A Journal of Poetry*," *Harvard Library Bulletin* Vol. 5 No. 3 (Summer 1994): 31-50.

[13] This point was articulated by Jill Casid and Maria DeGuzman in their talk, *Working Intimacy: Contracts, Exposures, and Making Pictures of Others,* November 1995 at The ICA.

[14] Sheila Pepe raised this point at a panel discussion held at the Museum School, November 1995, in response to the suggestion that this work is more experiential than theoretical. Queer theory is one important way to understand how much of this work has gained access into contemporary discourse.

for Jill Casid and Maria DeGuzman

BOSTON SCHOOL

NORMAN BRYSON

Boston School is about breaking the spell of impersonality that from its earliest beginnings photography has cast over our visual field. For most of this century the camera's authority and its powers of visual fascination have undoubtedly stemmed from its capacity to separate human vision from its basis in the human body. The vision of bodies is always locked onto the world; bodies cannot stop seeing, and cannot see from any other point of view than their own lived horizon. For the first time in history the camera showed a way to detach vision from the human subject and to lift the visual field out of the stream of organic experience, and desire. The ways of seeing that the camera offered were pristine, anonymous, disembodied. In Atget's Paris there are no people, and if we look for Atget himself, in his photographer's mantle of invisibility, we cannot find him. With Moholy-Nagy, this disincarnated vision goes futurist, and angelic: unlike physical persons, condemned to see from their lowly creatural viewpoint, the camera can now soar aloft, can look down from radio towers, fly through space, its eye open to 360 degrees. In Walker Evans, impersonality becomes a political virtue: to see from inside bodies is to remain blinded by private vision at a time when the pressures of history morally require us to see publicly, collectively, to see as Everyman. In so many versions of modern photography, the camera seeks kinds of knowledge that begin where private consciousness ends: total knowledge of the social field, the urban world, the machine world, the Family of Man. The model might be Mount Palomar: the lens that faithfully records what our limited organic state prevents us from seeing. It is hard to know at what point the powers of the camera, conceived as those of a disembodied eye, began to weaken. By the time of the work of *Boston School*, impersonality as the basis for photography gives way to a different model, autobiography: photography is for recording your own life. It is work that argues, by implication, that establishing photography as the site of vision's disembodiment was achieved at a terrible cost, the cost

of carnality itself. For in situating vision on the side of the camera, away from and against the human subject, photography had effectively taken sides with all those other, numberless forces that sought to contain and discipline the body in the name of modernity, rationality, and the public good. Photography's new paradigm called for nothing less than a re-humanization of the ways the body had come to be represented by the camera. Instead of the city as the place of anonymity, the city becomes the place of personal life at its most intense. Instead of the view from the social center and the eye of power, the view would necessarily be from the margins. Above all, the camera would no longer be used as an instrument severing sight from its housing in the body. What the camera had sundered it could also, perhaps, reunite.

Permission to Exist

There had always been a photography of private life: cameras for home use are still the mainstay of the industry. Why was that not enough? Because, for photography, two standards had come to exist: high and low. Domestic photography might be made of the same photochemicals as high photography, but as an aesthetic category it was closer to social ritual or a kind of industrial folk art than to the highly evolved and sophisticated work of photography's modern masters.

A stranger asks me to look at a photograph of his or her partner or parents or child. I fully understand the gesture: he or she is inviting me nearer. The photograph means everything that is closest to this person, and I am being briefly touched by that closeness. Such photographs can speak of the greatest tenderness in the world, the most precious flesh of this life. But they do so by association, not representation. I know the feelings likely to attach to such a photograph, and by analogy with my own experience, I value the photograph the stranger shows me. But in the photograph itself I can see nothing of what its owner sees. In its complexity of expression, the family album tends to be barely one step above the passport photograph. Conventions rule inflexibly: the occasions, the groupings, the clothes, the poses, the expressions, the lighting, the print size. We are prepared to believe that private life is a place of the greatest subtlety and nuance (what

else do novels tell us?), and yet the visual language available to express this whole domain remains as rigid as Byzantine icons.

So what? Does it matter much if the people who mean the most to us are represented in this way? Aren't icons powerful *because* of their rigidity of form? Of course—but what if the representations are formulaic to the point of opacity? What if the ritual of poses and smiles and family albums leaves out who you actually are? In Boston, at an undisclosed location, there exists a safe house for women battered by their husbands or boyfriends. To keep the refuge safe, its address is a closely guarded secret. Careful watch is kept on the street outside in case the husbands or boyfriends find the place. But how are those men to be recognized? From photographs, the ones we always take of those closest to us: friendly, smiling, happy to be together. Inevitably, these are the photographs posted when watching the street outside.

Icons are rigid because they express—and instill—respect for norms and for the law. What passport photographs are to the state, photographs of the kind used at the safe house are to the couple and the family. The orthodoxy and stiffness of such images works, but there has to be something else.

There is a story that one night in 1970 Nan Goldin and David Armstrong were staying overnight at Nan's brother's Harvard dorm. As Nan Goldin tells it, she crawled into the narrow bed with David, hoping to seduce him, and he moved out on to the floor. She asked him if he was afraid she'd rape him and then asked him if he was gay. "That night sealed our friendship irrevocably, from then on we were confidantes."[1] As David Armstrong tells it, "I had still never had sex with a man, and the idea still had a lot of fear and shame around it. The way I remember it [Nan's] reaction went from accepting to encouraging to ecstatic. It was the first and most important instance of Nan giving me permission to be who I was and one of the great liberating experiences of my life."[2]

What is great about the work in *Boston School* is that it is based on just this kind of generosity: it lets people be who they are by letting them occupy representation *as* the people they are. They are photographs that extend this permission in the first place to the ones being pho-

tographed, and then the same permission is extended to the viewer: if these people are allowed to exist as they are, then so are you, even you. The force of this work is its sheer moral encouragement and example. There is nothing *small* about it.

GESTURE, SENTIMENT

One quality that is fascinating in the work in *Boston School* concerns the special conditions of legibility that operate in the images. It is a matter of the fit between the people being photographed and the environments they inhabit. A comparison that may seem highly inappropriate may nonetheless clarify the point: it is with August Sander, the German photographer who, in *Citizens of the Twentieth Century*, attempted a total survey of the Germany of his time, dividing the social field into categories of occupation: farmers, lawyers, bakers, nuns, clockmakers, janitors, and so on.

In every image it is clear that Sander is drawn to sitters who look the part two hundred per cent. A Sander baker is all baker: the way he holds the instruments of his profession, the pleasure in accomplishment, the stance that speaks of long hours of standing, the corpulence, the sense of plenty that emanates from his very flesh. Every detail suggests a body that, over time, has adapted to its habitat or niche in the material and social world. The conservative political message—that in modern Germany there is a place for everyone and everyone is in place—is not the interest of these works. Rather it is their material understanding of the body and the body's interaction with its surrounding world, their knowledge of the ways that a particular material environment shapes the body through habit and adaptation and their sense that the human being cannot be understood outside the context of a particular life and central activity.

It is an insight much like that of Brecht or Eisenstein: that there are gestures and postures in which an entire social milieu can be read as sedimentations of experiences repeated and repeated over time. The way the canteen-woman Mother Courage bites the coin offered her, or the way (in *The General Line*) a peasant woman lets her skirt be ripped to help in repairing the tractor, are gestures in this sense: as Barthes says, they make evident a whole history.[3] In the same way that canyons are formed from

rivers and valleys from glaciers, such gestures reveal the great forces that shape body and spirit over the briefer span of one lifetime.

IN MEDIA RES

In Sander, Brecht, or Eisenstein the forces revealed in such gestures are, of course, economic and political. In Nan Goldin they are emotional. All her work exists *in media res*, and the scene is captured at the moment of greatest feeling, when the current of emotion born of the situation is at its height. At such moments there must be some internal barometer that tells her now, exactly now, is the time to press the shutter. At that moment a number of things light up. The gestures of those being photographed connect with their personal history: the forms of emotion that over time have exerted the greatest shaping pressure on them, in all their particularity. How someone sits, laughs, holds a cigarette, or puts on their face in the mirror appears in such a way that the emotional forms that have been active in shaping a whole life seem to become transparent.

August Sander, Secretary at a radio station. 1931. Courtesy of Schirmer/Mosel Verlag.

The invitation to read for gesture, in this sense of personal revelation, can be irresistible. Abandoning oneself to it is always pleasurable; but in my own

experience of living with Goldin's images (they are fixtures in my mind, perhaps substitutes for visualizations of my friends that I am unable to make on my own) sooner or later the viewer comes to doubt the whole process: how can I possibly know what individuals x and y and z are really like? At this point you realize that part of the success of Goldin's work is the way it invites or elicits projection: it seduces you to project elements from your own history on to her scenographies. The connections made through revealing gesture are not only, then, to the lives of the people being photographed, but to the emotional forms and needs which over time have been shaping one's own existence. Who does not enjoy reading faces and bodies—on the subway, at a party, in the club, on the beach? But who does not also entertain severe doubts about the kinds of knowledge and feeling at work in this process? And when doubt sets in it can lead to a quite different stage of face and body reading, when you realize that what motivates your excitement in such reading is your own desire to make a narrative of your experience. Goldin's world has a narrative clarity and shape that my own life, anyway, lacks and sometimes feels it could do with. Among their other permissions, the photographs allow one to imagine and almost to experience a life re-ordered, enhanced, and strengthened by a coherence that I also know (on more suspicious levels of reading) is very likely impossible and illusory. Which touches closely on the issue of sentiment. One way of distinguishing emotion from sentiment may be the admixture, in sentiment, of something like a feeling of fabrication: that the feeling doesn't have enough to go on and needs to be built up. Sentiment makes use of whatever shreds and patches come its way. There is a line in a Kate Bush song that I always stop to listen to: "Maybe he doesn't really love me/ Maybe I was just taking a trip on my love for him/ The man with the child in his eyes." Why do I listen to it every time? Because I can take that line and let it spread through my feelings; I can *do* something with it, and it lets the process happen. Perhaps the power of lyric is always like this: in itself the line is too abbreviated or banal to state and enclose the feeling in its own language, but

what it can do is to act as a magnet for projected feeling. Nan Goldin's work, for me, is lyrical in that sense. I intend no negative judgment here—though I can imagine some impossibly high-minded moralism that would say it is wrong to give oneself over to projection in this way: it is not reading "correctly." Yet in certain circumstances, incorrect readings can be invaluable—and necessary. If you have been generally excluded from history, pouring yourself into fragments may be just about all you can do. You take what you can from a culture that pretends you don't exist, and you use it, and project on to it for all you are worth. For a century lesbians and gay men have been inhabiting a culture intent on pretending they weren't there; reading and viewing "laterally" across shreds and patches has presumably been a principal means of relating to the given forms of writing and art. There has been no choice but to read and view sideways, against the grain, taking the text or image that never catered to you and then filling it in, inhabiting it, making it one's own. Of course this is fabrication, and from a certain point of view something very like sentimentality. I find it difficult to resist idealizing the world Nan Goldin portrays: where else in photography have I seen such a sense of passionate life, with gay people included on equal terms? For a while I thought I was falling into the same trap of sentimentality that idealizes underworlds, making them seem more passionately alive than the places of official culture: underworlds from *The Rake's Progress* to *The Beggars' Opera* to *La Bohème* to Damon Runyon to film noir. But I wonder whether the feeling of sentimentality (the feeling that fabrication and projection are busily at work) and the socio-historical fact of belonging to an excluded culture, are directly connected. If sentimentality, projection, and historical exclusion are all intertwined, here is one more permission: to see and feel in Nan Goldin's work exactly what is it is you need to be there. Her "extended family" may not be mine, but it helps me to visualize, and recognize, my equivalent family. PICTURES TO LEAD YOU ASTRAY

Boston School is diverse at the level of form and style, but this may not be the best level for understanding the different kinds of work in the exhibi-

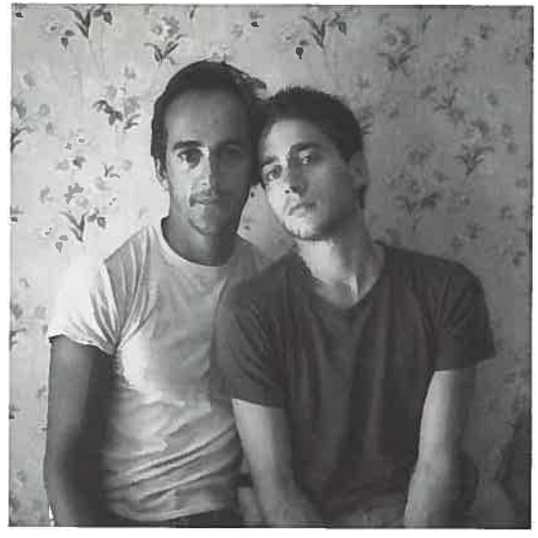
tion. Compare, for example, almost any two photographs by Nan Goldin and David Armstrong. There is no way of confusing them—despite the fact that they share so much: the same commitment to autobiography as the basis for photography, the same focus on the intensities of private life; sometimes they even portray the same people. With Nan Goldin the visual field is crammed with incident, is garrulous with details. You have to spend time with her pictures because there is so much going on: a whole inventory of cigarette packs, beer cans, books, packing cases, mattresses, pillows, newspapers, shelves and tables crammed to capacity. The figures exist in the heart of particular places and cannot be thought of apart from their exact milieu—this kitchen, bedroom, train, car, beach. With David Armstrong the opposite is true: the photographs lift the sitters out of their surrounding world, or at least simplify and downplay the environment. The image comes together as an intensification of the sitter's presence quite apart from his or her setting. Though Nan Goldin's work is so often fascinating at the level of design, the design seems more accidental than intended, and in any case what guides the picture is time and timing—the *in media res*—rather than space and spacing. Their timing in turn depends on the idea of peripeteia, the moment when all the forces in a dramatic situation reach the surface and can be read there. With David Armstrong, the conditions of time are otherwise. One is hardly conscious of it; time is suspended, movement is expelled. The image follows what look like quite familiar conventions of composition, with masses and lighting arranged and balanced inside the force-field established by the four sides of the frame. Photographing the same friend at the beach, Nan Goldin takes in a whole tribe of sunbathers and their towels, beach shoes, sun oil, shades, groupings, conversations. David Armstrong places a single figure alone against empty sea and sky, leaving the eye with nothing but the details of his face. There is no suggestion of the particular conditions of light at sea—no heat in the sunlight, no glare; the face is modelled out of gradations and attenuations of direct and indirect light, as if the beach were a studio. Though

such formal differences abound, what they really amount to are different descriptions of friendship, intimacy, and desire. Nan Goldin's people are the most gregarious in the world; they need to have others around all the time. With David Armstrong the scene invokes both independence—the figure alone, with all else falling away—and the emotional bond between the figure and the one taking the photograph. Nan's tribe is caught up in operatic flows of emotion and circumstance; hence the feeling in her work of epic sweep, where personal emotion exists always in a wider constellation of objects, material situations, and other people. David Armstrong's photography exactly breaks the material links between persons and their situations

Nan Goldin, Richard at the Boatslip beach, Provincetown, *1977*, c-print.

and material surroundings. What the camera seeks is a certain embellishment and sublimation; but it may be more accurate to think in terms of seduction. Seduction leads you away from the path you were on, or thought you were on; you are pulled away, pulled out of the context you were in before, pulled precisely *out* of context. What pulls you is an appearance heightened by desire, and this draws you away from your usual place in the world; the intensity decontextualises everything. When life is ticking over in context, each movement is a response to everything in the surrounding field; one's gestures and way of being are totally inflected by all the other persons, objects, and situations. With Nan Goldin, when emotion and

desire appear, they come from the heart of things, from mundanity itself. With Armstrong, emotion is marked by a break in this continuum. The surrounding world recedes, is eclipsed by *this* presence which, for now, is all that matters. Some people, when you are with them, take you out of your mundanity: that is what is special about them. What kind of image could possibly correspond to this special quality? An imagery whose subject is the interconnecting flows of vitality across people and things stays immersed; this is the case with Nan Goldin. In comparison, David Armstrong's photographs can easily be misread as oddly and unaccountably classical and immobile. To be sure, Armstrong uses traditional codes of portrait



David Armstrong, Bruce and George, Provincetown, 1977, silver gelatin print.

photography (lighting, composition, depth of field) but he uses them against the grain, a queering of portrait conventions that appropriates those conventions as *equivalents* for kinds of personal and interpersonal intensity for which there may be, as yet, no more direct means of expression. The studio itself, with its screening out of the rest of the world, and studio conventions (their concentration of the gaze) become tokens or metaphors for the visual fascination that personal intensity brings into play. Works by David Armstrong such as *Bruce and George* and *Andrew at the Bowery* make it clear: there are times, alone with certain people, when nothing else really

exists in this world and there is no other context of being, but being with them. PRE-EMPTIVE USES OF PAIN There are a number of early photographs by Mark Morrisroe which, in their relatively unqualified lyricism, stand somewhat apart from the rest of his work. Images such as *Fascination* (1982), *Jonathan, May 1, 1982*, and *I Dream of Jeanne* (1983) share a similar mood: lazy, gentle, spacious, with a rather post-coital tenderness and delicacy. It's interesting to compare these images with photographs by Mapplethorpe from the same date, just to gauge how completely different Morrisroe's aims were—and to see how diverse the practices of gay photography can be. Mapplethorpe did everything to maximize the sexual impact of his images and fix attention relentlessly on acts and organs; the lighting, the cropping, the focus, the composition are all so tight that nothing is allowed to stray away from the sexual urgency that motivates the image. In this group of photographs by Morrisroe, the erotic charge dissipates into everything else; it loses focus and center, it escapes into the surrounding air. Mapplethorpe gives his viewer no chance to let attention wander; you are under orders to look at exactly this, and this, and this. Morrisroe asks your attention to drift, to float, to dream. In music, some sounds are said to possess "attack," in that the first arrival of the sound involves a jolt, a violence. The works by Morrisroe are without this attack, while Mapplethorpe is full of it; rather they prolong the sound until it fades, and trace the fading of the sound close to its point of disappearance. If Morrisroe's works suggest fragility, it is because on some level the scene is already vanishing, even in its moment of appearance. Something is corroding it, a foreknowledge of the passing away of the scene into time and memory. Nan Goldin once said that she made photographs because she wanted time to be able to take nothing from her.[4] Here, time has already taken the scene away, or is eroding it from within. The deterioration of colors, forms, and surface suggest that the scene is ebbing away from the world and from consciousness, and this drifting is part of its beauty. Where does *Fascination* stand in time? Somewhere rather mysterious. *Fascination* seems to be dreaming of

Mark Morrisroe, Fascination, 1982, c-print. Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Barbara and Eugene Schwartz.

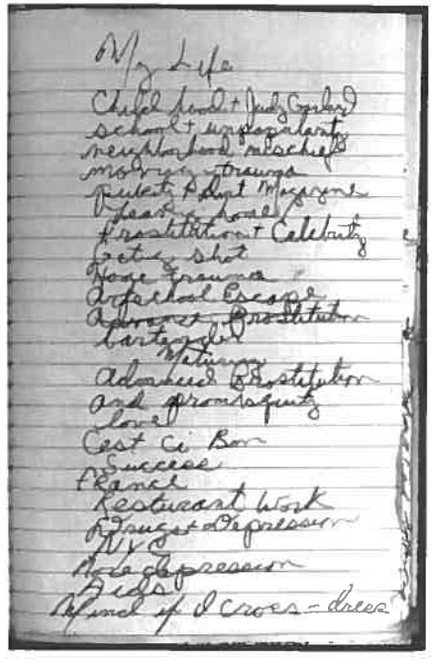
the later nineteenth century. Where else does one see a nude with a bird, or colors keyed to tonality (the range of black-and-white) as much as to color, or vignettes like the scene of the bird watched by three cats? The photograph seems like a flight from 1982 to a world re-imagined in terms of beaux-arts and academic painting—one has scarcely seen nudes like this since Courbet's *Woman with a Parrot* (1866) or Seiki Kuroda's *Woman with Mandolin* (1893). And yet this is not the only temporal layer. The pictures are also post-Factory; they follow on from Paul Morrissey's *Heat* and *Trash*, with Jonathan (Jack) Pierson in the Joe Dallesandro role. Looking back at *Fascination*, made when he and Morrisroe were still together, Pierson recalls: "I was a wreck and Mark seemed like he'd be the next Warhol if we could just get to New York."[5] These may be the last unreservedly lyrical works Morrisroe would make. Afterwards the feeling of deterioration would be much greater, not confined to a neo-romantic register as here, but let loose as a sense of damage, the self damaged, the world damaged, and art as a kind of strategic damage control. So many stories about Morrisroe concern

this question, especially the ones he himself recounted, in their endless versions. But if the facts of his life remain hazy, what is more certain is the connection between the desire to create a spectacular identity for himself and the sense of having been damaged beyond repair. Both in the corpus of stories about Morrisroe and in his work, there is a constant tug-of-war between the need for a grand personal myth and a surrounding world relentless in its hostility and persecution. What is distinctive is the relation between these two impulses, the hunger for grandeur of the self (art star, movie star, the Morrisroe legend) and the feeling of underlying victimhood. It is not simply a question of escapism, of retreating à la Blanche DuBois

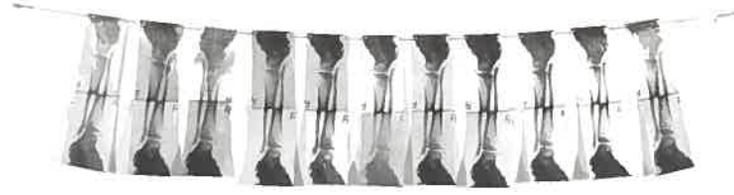
Mark Morrisroe, Sweet 16, Little me as a Child Prostitute, 1984, from c-print.

into the fantasy of a personal myth while the actual world is sensed as falling apart. Rather, grandeur and victimhood are strangely entangled and mutually defining. In a self-portrait in cross-dress from 1986, *Sweet Raspberry/Spanish Madonna*, Morrisroe is dressed to the nines in evening gown, pearl necklace and black wig—but the scene he steps into seems wrecked by a fire-storm or urban conflagration. In Morrisroe's expression, glamour and suffering are mixed in equal measure, as though putting on the glad rags were the same as a displaying of wounds. In Morrisroe's "sand-

wiching technique" (which superimposes two negatives, one color and one black-and-white) each layer undermines the other: the black-and-white transparency robs its counterpart of color, bleaching the lighter hues into a muted pastel range while dragging the darker colors toward black. On other photographs, graffiti scrawled around the borders rewrites the image in a language of bitter humor and self-lacerating irony: "Sweet 16, Little Me as a Child Prostitute," "The SHE-thing from Hell." It is as if every move "up" toward beauty and self-expression were shadowed by a move "down" into black comedy and pain. Jack Pierson once described Morrisroe's work as "Caspar David Friedrich in a donut shop,"[6] and the comment pinpoints exactly the double bind in his photographs: the tendency that aspires to romance or beauty is immediately *punished* for its aspiration and made to drag its way through suffering, as though any attempt of the prisoner to escape his condition at once provoked malevolent forces to come crashing down with a vengeance. One result of this agonized emotional economy is the primacy—verbally and visually—of the cliché, as though in circumstances like these, the very means of expression were too impoverished or damaged by fate to permit any kind of fluency. In the "My Life" page from Morrisroe's diary (1988) language is reduced to the bare minimum: "...Success/ France/ Rest[a]urant Work/ Drugs and depression/ NYC/ More depression/ Aids/ Mind if I cross-dress?" What is so incredible in this self-reduction is its avoidance of any further elaboration or development. In part the reduction of his life to these flat, bare-bones phrases is a capitulation to death: I am dying, and my language is dying also: dying words, words dying. And in part the self-reduction is pre-emptive and to that extent, defiant: *I can reduce myself faster than death can.* Morrisroe's visual equivalent of the "My Life" page is his series of photographs from 1988, the x-rays of teeth and lungs, and his photographs of strands of hair. They are like a race run against death, with Morrisroe just in the lead. If death's action is to reduce the body to teeth and hair and bones, he can mime that action in art, take hold of it, appropriate to himself what death does, and cheat death by turning its force into a pre-emptive self-reduction under the sign of (posthumous) fame. Perhaps the pre-emptive use of pain was always there, always the basis of Morrisroe's way with the image: if I occupy the position of pain in advance, the blow cannot be delivered, I ward it off. Pictures are already corroded from within, and by superimposing two versions of the same scene in such a way, the image is sublimated and degraded. Pictures defaced—or should one say, protected?—by writing around them in the voice of damage and break-your-heart sarcasm; pictures made by dying ahead of time (Ramsey McPhillips' biography of Morrisroe bears the title



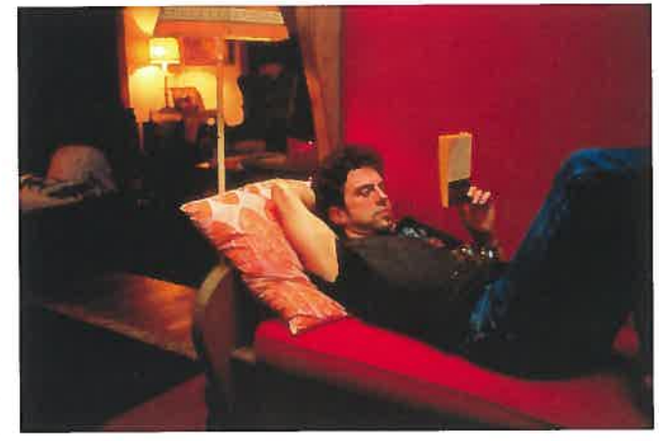
Mark Morrisroe, My Life, *journal page from* Learning from Life, a Fool's Errand, *1988.*



Mark Morrisroe, Untitled, *X-rays colored with dye, with string and thread, 1988.*

Am I Dead Yet?). Perhaps it is only those early works that seem not to require this protective, pre-emptive exposure to pain. Placing them against the "My Life" page, they go with the one line of happiness that stands out there: "Cest ci Bon." IN THE HOUSE It is much more difficult to view Shellburne Thurber's domestic scenes in a gallery space than work by Mark Morrisroe. The gallery can never altogether escape its associations with the idea of the view from the social center, sight as it unfolds in the public domain. No matter how close its ties to local constituencies (the gallery in its incarnation as community center) or, at the other end of the spectrum (to exclusive circles of wealthy patrons) the gallery never quite sheds its Enlightenment status as a viewing space for Everyman: for who we are when we leave behind our private roles and specialized occupations, and come together as a public. To the extent that this is true, it is relatively easy to turn the gallery's view from the center toward social margins of all sorts, and to summon those margins to appear before the center in order to display all the insignia of their marginality—the more colorful, the better. In the case of *Boston School,* the margin in question is varied, and one risk of the exhibition (worth taking, anyway) is that the latter will be cast as exotic and picturesque—just as one gain of the exhibition would be if it helped to dissolve the notion that the people depicted in the work intrinsically belong to some social margin. Thurber's photographs of family gatherings send out few such obvious signals of marginality; her spaces are settled, not nomadic, and in part her work measures the consequences of a settled existence: how the world looks and feels when its center has become a house or household. One consequence is the sense of tautology: why should the center look at itself? The gallery has taught visitors to look at what is other—decked out, if possible, in feathers and paint. Turning the view *from* the center onto people *of* the center goes against the gallery's grain. Another consequence is discomfort in viewing things this close—the feeling that one hasn't earned the right to view these people so intimately. The photographer knows every corner of the family's house, and knows all about these rel-

atives and friends—but the viewer in public space cannot share this familiar knowledge. If part of the pleasure of looking at Thurber's family gatherings is like that of staying over, being a guest in someone else's house and life, there is also an attendant awkwardness, the feeling of not having the correct vantage point, as though you were a total stranger at a party of people who have known each other all their lives. At the same time, this introduction of a principle of strangeness shifts everything around: instead of just accepting the easy familiarity between people and things, as those inside the photographs seem to do, the viewer is invited to reflect on this familiarity, and to decipher its nature. Thurber's people are hard to read, and this has everything to do with the spaces they occupy, and the



Shellburne Thurber, Matt reading John O'Hara, *1993, cibachrome print.*

economy of households. The Greek word for household, *oikos*, is where "economy" comes from, and built into households are conceptions of balancing and stabilizing all the accounts (material, social, sexual, spiritual): households are machines that constantly seek the point of greatest balance. The issues in Thurber's domestic spaces concern emotional accommodation, a commitment to finding and furthering harmony between people and things. The exact inverse of such harmony is what one sees in her series of motel interiors. There, the environment is completely untouched by personal use; the motel room is an intractable, immovable block that stays the same whoever checks in. The motels are nightmare versions of the

household, in which *people* and *things* remain strangers to each other, permanently. By contrast, in Thurber's households there is an underlying concord between the world of objects and human use: neither ugly nor ostentatiously beautiful, things are there to be used; they can be moved around, they adapt to situations, they supply a milieu where people can be at home and at ease. In the interactions of Thurber's subjects, a similar concord reigns. Kids and oldsters (*Dave and Aunt Anna on Xmas Eve*, 1983) share the household space and they have to get along. The same goes for everyone, gay and straight, and the question becomes one of capaciousness—how to fill the household with as much life as possible, and still keep the peace. Thurber's work (if you will allow the comparison) is like Jane Austen's in that both realize the household's potential for claustrophobia; both know just how important and difficult it is to create an ethos in which people are not crushing one another, crowding each other out. The matter of having enough space here is identical with ethics. To put this another way, the question of households is always one of compromise, of giving way when necessary, but without letting compromise become strangulation. It is an ethics that seeks to keep at bay the very homeostasis the household always produces, so that because of it and in spite of it, persons can come into their own. ON THE ROAD The question of space, and how much space is enough to maintain the feeling of personal freedom, is equally central to the work of Jack Pierson. The difference is that Pierson's space is more likely to be the open road. For Pierson freedom seems to demand being on the move, and motels—hellish, vacant places for Shellburne Thurber—are for Pierson natural, variously promising perches along the way. The cities in his work are those you pass through, nodes of transience where everyone has come from somewhere else (Palm Springs, Miami, Provincetown); many of the figures convey the same feeling of temporary ties and pleasures taken lightly (for instance the portraits of Camilio Docimo, Emiliano Vitale and Pasquale Esposito). The negative side of this concerns the issue of too much space, with too little internal differentiation.

One of Pierson's strongest images is his 1991 shot of a highway without end, empty to the desert horizon; its title—*The lawn could stand another mowing (funny, I don't even care)*—suggests something more nihilistic than just poking fun at the sedentary life. Being on the road may open the mind to felicities and serendipities simply unavailable to the world of the household, but by the same token it also exposes the mind to levels of eventlessness and drift that domestic bustle normally screens out. In Pierson's photographs the world is seen from an unanchored, unattached viewpoint which, because it settles nowhere, is alert and open on all sides. Precisely because the space is centerless and the traveling is endless, it is a viewpoint that

Jack Pierson, The lawn could stand another mowing (funny, I don't even care), *1991, from ektacolor print.*

finds it difficult to fixate, to move in on people closely, or to take the time needed to find out the secrets of places and things. Staying with what is obvious is important in Pierson's work, as though making statements that were too intricate or qualified would compromise his right to leave whenever he needed to. "Certain words aren't good when you describe artwork—like 'sentimental,' 'romantic,' 'poetic' and 'pretty'," he has said. "But those are my favorite qualities of anything." For certain photographers the goal is to find an image of something never seen before, and this requires perseverance, an investigative turn of mind, and a horror at what is stereotypical. For Pierson, the goal is rather to stay *with* the stereotype, resisting the urge to make further elaborations and involutions. When Pierson pho-

tographs palm trees, they are kept to a minimal schema; what interests him is exactly the basic threshold of recognition—that a few lines in silhouette are enough to establish the form. Figures are held within strong, yet unelaborated situations and frameworks. His Italian guys don't look alike, but they are all photographed in the same, cool, slightly generic style. Sometimes the photographs refer to melodrama, with melodrama's rather formulaic way with the emotions, as in *Et Maintenant?* (1993/4), or in the torchsong fragments that make up Pierson's lyrical album *Caught in the Rain/ Broken in the Stardust* (the album is made up of fragmentary phrases like "Just a Fool Again," "In the Rain on 2nd Ave," "Regrets I mistook for roses"). Similarly, in Pierson's still lifes, the flowers or the fruit or the table are chosen because they are beautiful, without complication. This amounts to a highly sophisticated avoidance of sophistication, like pastoral; value is found in what is usually overlooked or regarded as just too straightforward or banal to count as art. It is a kind of beauty that you can recognize without being captured by it; you are free to move on. What counts is that vision travels light.

INTIMATE STRANGERS

Though Philip-Lorca diCorcia is grouped here with other photographers of the *Boston School*, there are ways in which his work amounts to a critique and rejection of many of the latter's leading assumptions.[11] At first sight his Los Angeles hustler series seems continuous with work by Jack Pierson: a world of transient emotions and desires, motels and parking lots, with an emphasis on imperfection, vulnerability, damage. What makes diCorcia's series altogether different, however, is that it is *staged*. The viewer is told in advance exactly how the photographs were made: various hustlers, for a certain sum, agreed to be photographed in locations and poses devised by diCorcia, with each man's name, age, place of birth, and the amount they were paid given in the title. This breaks with a cardinal rule in work, for example, by Thurber and Goldin: that nothing may appear *contrived*. In the second place, the hustlers are not chosen because they are diCorcia's friends, but precisely because they are strangers. This departs from another key convention, the rule of

intimacy: in *Boston School* there are no outsiders, only friends. And the series raises (almost for the first time) the question of money: the hustlers pose not in the name of friendship but for a price. The determinations of the image are economic, and this contradicts—and reveals—a further protocol of *Boston School*, that money is just not a factor. Part of the utopian quality of work by Armstrong and Pierson, for example, is that this milieu has found a way to turn its back on the bourgeois reality principle of gain, it has freed itself from material ambition. And yet on some level we know that money must be a force, even here. Photographs are in fact quite expensive things to make. A single Cibachrome print can cost up to two hundred

Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Mike Miller; 24 years old; Allentown, Pennsylvania; $25, 1990-92, *ektacolor print*.

and fifty dollars from the lab. With diCorcia one can begin to see a correlation between such a dollar amount, and the sums each hustler was paid. Finally, a vital convention of the *Boston School* aesthetic is identification, closeness, empathy. The hustler contract breaks out of the circuit of empathy that binds the viewer to the subject. Empathy is clearly not the only force in the social world—nor is it a necessary precondition for desire. Hustlers may or may not empathize with their customers, and vice versa: the contract between them does not take empathy as its basis, nor as the basis for pleasure. The Hustler series raises a number of critical questions that may in some sense always have to be passed over if the conven-

tions of *Boston School*—spontaneity, intimacy, emotional life transcending all material considerations—are to work their magic. For instance, at present works by David Armstrong and Nan Goldin are often shown side by side. Why? Because they are friends; their lives are connected. This connection at the level of biography makes it difficult to see how much David Armstrong breaks with Nan Goldin's paradigm, and reflects upon it in critical terms. Photographs by Armstrong, too, are highly staged: it takes a great deal of work adjusting lighting, meter readings and depth of field. It is as though in Armstrong, the staging that is never allowed to become evident in Nan Goldin in some way rises to the surface. The elaborate work required to produce and safeguard the feeling of spontaneity by Nan Goldin is never acknowledged *in* the work. Belief in the authenticity of friendship and the emotions that are part of friendship makes it hard to receive the images as what images must always remain: constructions elaborated within visual conventions and codes. DiCorcia forces one to reflect on how much one is prepared to believe that photographs well up spontaneously from the heart. One could go further: you surrender to the magic the moment you stop remembering that a photograph can never be transparent to the real. And if you *have* surrendered in this way, to think of photographs as works with material signifiers—rather than as transparent to the heart—is almost tantamount to *betraying the heart*. Which is one of the things that diCorcia's Hustler series is intent upon doing: it was never an affair of the heart that lay behind the cash transactions or the staged tableaux. Instead of placing desire within the framework of intimacy, diCorcia makes it work across an interval. Literally, the figures stand away from the camera. And yet desire is evidently quite capable of operating at these greater distances. There may be an analogy with cruising: if you cruise a street, what you are waiting for is a moment when the distance that strangers maintain is suddenly filled with eros. This interval amounts to a distancing device applied to the value of intimacy in work such as Thurber's or Goldin's. Is it really the case that desire must be earned by intimacy, that intimacy always accompanies desire, that the two always perfectly fuse? Do we really think that it is our feeling of intimacy with Goldin's people that permits us to snoop through their lives and packing cases and sheets? Or could it be that this intimacy is the cover that hides our snooping from ourselves—and that we have to believe in this intimacy to keep at bay the knowledge that we actually know nothing about these people, except what the photographs tell us? Is our feeling of intimacy (with these total strangers) in fact the very same mystification that prevents us from apprehending the photographs as material work with signification, and converts signification into the transparent idiom of the heart? DiCorcia inverts such intimacy into its opposite: uncanniness. Though the hustlers are certainly flesh and blood, many of them are presented as apparitions, phantoms, doubles of themselves. Next to some of the figures there appears a shadow that seems almost independent of the body, a *Doppelgänger*. A man standing in a doorway is twinned with his counterpart on a TV screen. The figures beckon from behind windows, spectral presences that are somehow as much like photographs of figures as they are actual flesh-and-blood. Uncanniness is intimacy's opposite because it finds strangeness *in the place of the familiar*. The German word, Freud's word, spells it out—*Unheimlichkeit*: uncanniness is when what we thought was home turns out not to be home after all. In *Boston School* the photograph is always about home, and where the heart is: everything that is not redeemable in the name of home, and our extended family, is removed. And yet *Boston School* is uncanny. Its basis is autobiography—but this is not like written memoirs, where the writer is the central character, on stage the whole time. The *I*, the one taking the photographs, is always absent, never visible; or, if s/he becomes visible, it is in the same way that a director may assume a walk-on part on stage. Everything is centered on this autobiographical I, and viewpointed from there: this is how "my world" and "my friends" appear—and yet they appear without my being there. This vacant center of the I is where the viewer is supposed to stand, in picture after picture; the viewer is engaged and assumed

as a further empty center whose only *raison d'être* is to stand in another's place. Standing there can be an altogether uncanny experience, since although everyone in the scene knows everyone else from way back, they are complete strangers to me. *Boston School* is already premised on an uncanny contract in which I, the total stranger, enter into spaces of total intimacy. As if to cover this uncanniness built into my viewing situation, I release the force of empathy to bind me, against all odds and against my own actual ignorance, to these intimate strangers. DiCorcia's hustlers (intimate strangers, indeed) and uncanny apparitions break the empathetic spell that holds me willingly in thrall to *Boston School*. And if I am still swayed by the old empathetic magic, it can feel, when I doubt the School's underlying assumptions, that I have debased something precious, as hustlers and their clients are supposed to have done (they have abandoned love). COMMITMENT TO FABLE Next to diCorcia I would place Tabboo! (Stephen Tashjian). Tabboo!'s work is critical in a different sense, in its commitment to artifice over *vérité*. Tabboo!'s paintings of the Manhattan skyline, for example, are fabrications, confections of sheer prettiness, glamour incarnated as a place. With none of the city's grit, they seem to be made more of sentiment and sparkle than of the real. They stand to the actuality of the city as the gorgeousness of drag queens stands to actual male and female bodies. At night, Tashjian, who also goes by the name Tabboo!, performs in drag. The ways in which he transforms the city into a realm of mystical and artificial beauty is akin to the process of remaking himself: the masculinity of the city, its hard lines, rough exteriors, and daunting size, is made smaller and less caustic. Day, mid-morning or night. Muggy before a thunderstorm or bright and electric. He paints his city on top of skies that come from deserts or hang above oceans like scrims from Broadway shows.[9] What is amazing about Tabboo!'s paintings is that they dare to stay with what is pretty and unreal; they make no effort to become substantial, complicated, serious. As a result, they are hard to understand, since they refuse our expectations that art look real, that it be backed by lived experience, with all of the qualifications and ambivalences imputed to the real. To that extent,

Tabboo!'s commitment to artifice raises the question of whether the values I have come to love in looking at *Boston School*—intimacy, vitality, permission to exist, freedom, love of life—may be more fabulous than realistic. Literally a fable, however dressed in the garb of the real and the true, its value may not lie in its truth so much as its courage.

Tabboo!, Downtown New York Sky, *1994*, acrylic on canvas.

Notes

1 Nan Goldin, Introduction to *Nan Goldin/David Armstrong: A Double Life*, (New York: Scalo, 1994): 9.

2 David Armstrong, Introduction to *Nan Goldin/David Armstrong: A Double Life*, (New York: Scalo, 1994): 6.

3 See Roland Barthes' essay "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," in *Image–Music–Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday Press, 1977): 73-5.

4 "I don't ever want to lose the real memory of anyone again"; Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (New York: Aperture, 1986): 9.

5 Jack Pierson, *"Sometimes I think I'd Rather Be a Movie Star than an Artist*–Mark Morrisroe; *Most Days I Think I'd Rather Be a Photograph than a Human Being*–Jack Pierson" *Artforum* (January 1994): 66.

6 Pierson: 68.

7 Linda Yablonsky, "Jack Pierson: Bold Bricolage," *Interview* (January 1992): 30.

8 I am grateful to Jill Casid and Maria DeGuzman for an extremely helpful discussion of the "negativity" in Philip-Lorca diCorcia's work.

9 Collier Schorr, "Tabboo! The Art of Stephen Tashjian," *Artforum* (December 1993): 54-5.