

A Ghost with a Camera

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Candace Chen recognizes the photograph immediately. It's one of the best-known portraits from Nan Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1980–1986), and its two figures are drenched in a yellow-orange that seems to throb, to radiate about the room, bouncing off the rails of the headboard, slicking in waves against the exposed brick (Fig. 1). Smudged in light, a dirty watercolor.



Fig. 1 Nan Goldin, *Greer and Robert in Bed, NYC, 1982*. © Nan Goldin. Courtesy of the artist and [Marian Goodman Gallery](#).

The woman, Greer, is curled up on the bed in her wrinkled clothes, slips of satiny material in bruised half-colors — pinkish, sageish — that fade into, are enervated by, the brilliant cast of the room — a color that corresponds to the rusty tumble of her hair. The man, Robert, appears relatively solid and separate from the scene. He's sitting up, looking away, pulling

his hand through his hair in a preoccupied gesture; and the dense black of his shirt becomes the dark mass at the image's edge, as if he's being pulled out of the frame.

"They were bathed in the warm, yellow light of the room," Candace, the narrator of Ling Ma's *Severance*, tells us. "She was in love with him; he didn't seem to care." ¹ Finding the photograph laid out on a colleague's desk at the publishing company where she works, Candace interprets it in the light of her failing relationship with her boyfriend, Jonathan. A month earlier, Jonathan had told her he was leaving New York City and, by implication, her. Seeing herself and Jonathan in Greer and Robert, Candace responds to the defining theme in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*: what Goldin called "the difficulty of coupling." ²

Yet Candace, as a lonely teenager, is first drawn to Goldin's work for the sense of community it evokes. Made in Boston and New York in the 1970s and 1980s, the photographer's early pictures are, as Candace observes, "all of her friends; they existed on highly emotive planes, socializing in cars and on beaches, posturing at good-bad parties, picnicking chaotically, cleansing themselves in milky baths, sexing and masturbating and visiting each other in hospitals." ³ Goldin's grungy snapshots of her friends and fellow artists in the cities' LGBTQ and outsider communities produce a form of "affective documentary," as Sarah Ruddy suggests, which not only proceeds from Goldin's relationships with her subjects but also enacts and facilitates those relationships. ⁴ In an interview in 1986, Goldin stated, "The camera connects me to the experience and clarifies what is going on between me and the subject. Some people believe that the photographer is always the last one invited to the party, but this is my party. I threw it." ⁵

In Goldin's hands, the camera isn't a voyeur's aid but instead a tool of intimacy, care, pleasure. "[T]aking a picture of someone," she suggests in a later photobook, "is a way of touching them." ⁶ Greer and Robert mightn't exactly be together in the portrait, but the orange room is still suffused with the erotic energy of the photographic scenario, the photographer's presence as palpable and ungraspable as the streaking, diffusing light.

It makes sense that Candace would be fascinated by Goldin's world. *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, a copy of which Candace hides beneath her mattress as a teenager, is a family album reconstructed in service of queer kinship. As Goldin writes in the book's introduction, "In my family of friends there is a desire for the intimacy of the blood family, but also a desire for something more open-ended." ⁷ Candace moves to New York City in 2006, after her mother's death leaves her an orphan, compounding the feelings of rootlessness and estrangement that have chased her, the daughter of Chinese immigrants, since childhood. Though she can identify Greer and Robert, Candace can't name the "ancestral relatives" whose photographs she finds in a box of her mother's belongings. ⁸ Later, as the Shen Fever becomes a global pandemic and the US government enacts a travel ban on visitors from Asia, Candace will sense more acutely the "dimming" of already "distant genealogical lines." ⁹

This is, **as Amy Wong points out**, one of several kinds of severance implied by the title of Ma's novel. Candace's move to New York is a move to insinuate herself into an open-ended family such as Goldin's — or into Goldin's family specifically. "So many of the people depicted seemed freakish or other in some way; they didn't fit in," Candace says of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. "But that didn't matter, the photographs seemed to say. What mattered was, they . . . inhabited themselves fully. They made me want to move to New York. Then I'd really be somewhere, I had thought, inhabiting myself." ¹⁰ *If I were somewhere (there), I'd be someone (them, us)*. Slipping from one form of **inhabiting** to another, she imagines the photograph as a space to be occupied, a paper-thin dwelling — as if she might live in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, falling, with relief, into an unmade bed in one of those cluttered East Village studio apartments.

During her first summer in the city, Candace spends long days walking and taking photographs with her Canon Elph. Shoulders sunburnt, heels blistered, she returns to her apartment in the evening and selects the best of the day's images to upload to her blog.

There are some points of continuity between Candace's photographic practice and Goldin's a couple of decades earlier. Candace's use of a small point-and-shoot digital camera sits with Goldin's snapshot aesthetic — its sense of immediacy and contingency, its deliberate amateurism. ¹¹ And Candace's sharing of her photographs via her personal blog isn't wholly unlike the nontraditional means of exhibition Goldin adopted for her New York work, which she first presented in variable slideshows in Lower East Side punk clubs. "It's the diary I let people read," Goldin said of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* — a description that speaks quite directly to the public-private functions of personal blogging in the early years of Web 2.0. ¹²

Whereas Goldin's diaristic approach has led some viewers to accuse her of narcissism, Candace's New York photographs studiously avoid self-disclosure. She posts her images online anonymously — reaching out to other people by sharing them, pulling back by refusing to sign her name — and calls the blog *NY Ghost*: "The ghost was me. Walking around aimlessly . . . I was just a specter haunting the scene." ¹³ Wearing her mother's old dresses — clothed as her revenant — Candace casts herself as a ghost with a camera, an apparition that fails to appear. In the opposite way to Goldin, she puts pressure on the structuring relation of photographer to scene: her images take her non-presence as their theme.

Not only that, but the images themselves are ghosted by other images. Candace intends "to show new, undiscovered aspects of New York from an outsider's perspective," but she's disappointed when her pictures end up replicating "preexisting New York iconography that permeates calendars, rom-coms, souvenirs, stock art" — or, at their best, looking like "[William] Eggleston knockoffs, Stephen Shore derivatives," high-color photographs of America via its objects, unsentimental but dramatic. ¹⁴

Is it that Candace wants to inhabit herself by inhabiting Goldin's photographic city, an outsider among outsiders? Or is it that she fears being inhabited by others, being a woman possessed: a body after other bodies, photographing after others' photographs? She does and doesn't want to find herself in other people's images, just as she does and doesn't want to expose herself to, or connect with, the viewers of her blog (or with Jonathan, for that matter). Goldin boasted of being the life of the party, but Candace's eighties nostalgia party — described by Summer Kim Lee — is only another instance when she feels her isolation. "I was enjoying myself, but it was an insulated enjoyment," Candace admits. "I was alone inside of it." ¹⁵ Goldin's party, Goldin's New York, ended long ago, and Candace must find a place for herself in its aftermath.

Reading Candace's disparaging of her photography as "clichéd and trope-y," I was reminded of a discussion in *Aperture*, in 2017, of the marginal place of Asian American photographers in the medium's history and current practice. ¹⁶ Tommy Kha, a Memphis-born photographer now based in New York, described a time when a "well-known photographer" learned about his project, *A Real Imitation* (2011-2015), and "immediately dismissed [it] . . . because he said William Eggleston already photographed Memphis and the South. He thought that no one else could do it." Eggleston's existing work is seen as universal and definitive — a valuation predicated on and upholding the supremacy (and neutrality) of whiteness — whereas Kha's perspective is dismissed, as he says, as "a very specific voice," a "kind of work" that no one is "really asking for."



Fig. 2 Tommy Kha, Home (1), Memphis, 2015. From the series *Imitation of Life*. © Tommy Kha. Courtesy of the artist

What lies behind *A Real Imitation*, as [Jon Feinstein](#) explains, are Kha's experiences of being mistaken for a foreigner or tourist in Memphis. Presenting himself in various states of disguise and disappearance, Kha's images disclose his sense of alienation in the town of his birth as they confront the supposed illegitimacy of his photographic practice (see Fig. 2). Tourist photography is overtly associated with Asian subjects, but Candace, for her part, leans in to the trope. "Periodically I'd take pictures . . . I used to feel sheepish about it, fishing around in my purse for the camera discreetly, as if for a lipstick or a compact. But then I would keep the Canon Elph on me openly, dangling from my hand by a wristlet. I preferred if people thought I was a tourist. It looked less weird that way."¹⁷ Candace's concerns over the spuriousness of her practice — over her imitation of the real, to use Kha's terms — lead her to retreat to type, appropriating it as a disguise.

Most of the photographers Candace cites as influences or reference points for her work are white, and none of them are Asian American. What she worries is the supplementary quality of her body and work is patently racialized. The "yellow woman" is she/it, *perihuman*: less and more than human, dematerialized and excessively material, ornamentalized, in Anne Anlin Cheng's terms.¹⁸ Candace, with her camera on her wrist, is a striking example of this figure. She's an absence attached to an apparatus, a phantasm with a technological appendage; an imitation of life making imitations of life.

Yet Candace's imitative photography is also reconstitutive. Like Kha, she adapts existing genres toward a meditation of her dissociated, denaturalized experience of America. It's precisely in remodeling the work of others that she's able to meet her ambition to picture a "new, undiscovered" New York.¹⁹ After a break of several years, Candace starts photographing and posting to *NY Ghost* as the Shen Fever is spreading rapidly across the US. One day, alone in her office building, she looks out the window and realizes that Times Square is deserted. She sees a former carriage horse making its way down Broadway and whips out her iPhone to take a photograph. "I wanted to show someone, for someone to marvel at this with me, but there was no one left in the office. There was no one left in sight." She posts the image online with a caption: "If New York is breaking down and no one documents it, is it actually happening?"²⁰

NY Ghost becomes a substitute for the comforting routine of Candace's now-defunct office job: it's habit in the absence of habitation, as [Dora Zhang](#) and [Danielle Wong](#) each suggest. But it's also a means of finding others to marvel with over the changing cityscape. Candace is New York's last tourist and its last journalist, sharing its sights with an audience of strangers in places as yet untouched by the Shen Fever. Significantly, too, before he leaves

the city Jonathan asks Candace to start updating the blog again. "I'm going to be checking it after I leave," he tells her. "I want to see new work." ²¹

The pandemic phase of Candace's blog is a bid for human contact in the form of human absence; it marks an attempt at communion even as it concretizes its loss. The decaying, empty city reminds Candace of "the Robert Polidori photographs of Chernobyl and Pripyat, a ghost town that formerly housed the nuclear-plant workers. Or the Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre images of Detroit, the images of abandoned auto plants and once-grand theaters. And the **Seph Lawless** images of the vacant, decrepit shopping malls that closed after the 2008 crash." ²² Her new photographs, then, take after ruins or urban decay photography (see Figs. 3-6).



Fig. 3 Robert Polidori, Gymnasium, Pripyat, 2001. From the series *Zones of Exclusion: Pripyat and Chernobyl*. © Robert Polidori. Courtesy of the artist

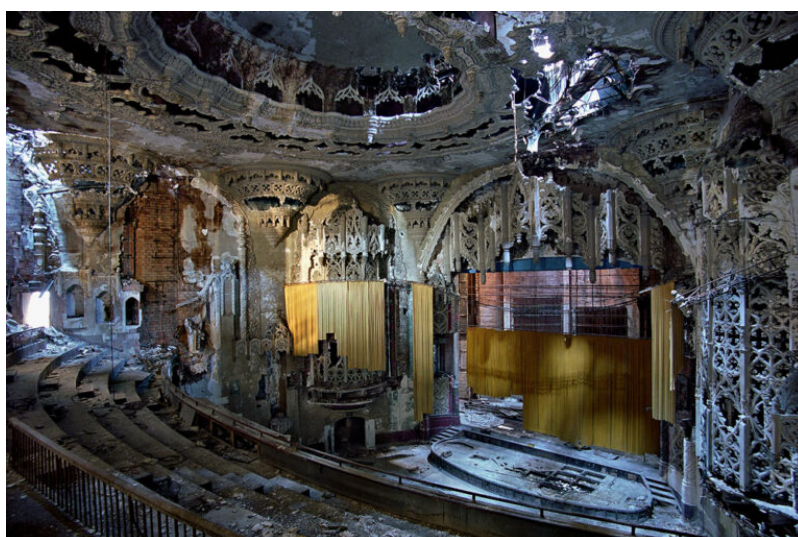


Fig. 4 Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, *The ruined Spanish-Gothic interior of the United Artists Theater, Detroit*, 2005. From the series ***The Ruins of Detroit***. © Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre. Courtesy of the artists

Printed for the gallery wall or in glossy art books, ruins photography presents a sublime aesthetic with a contradictory power. The irrepressible forces of destruction — which,

whether through technological or ecological catastrophe or postindustrial decline, slowly soften piles of books, molder furnishings, strip walls of paint — are counterbalanced by the scale and solidity of built environments, standing tall amid the rubble as if in mockery of human activity. The first is rendered in the moody palette — blue-grey, bronze, gold, splashes of teal and mint — and the intricate detail of (usually) large-format analog view cameras; the second is emphasized through expansive views of cavernous spaces or aerial ones of city blocks.

Ruins photography is often accused of fetishizing urban decay and producing nostalgia for industrial development. ²³ When some of the readers of Candace's blog call her work "disaster porn," they criticize her in just this way. ²⁴ But it's in New York's creeping decrepitude, not in spite of it, that the city becomes Candace's own — made in her image, made for ghosts. At a basic level, anything other than landscape photography is precluded by the evacuation of the city's inhabitants, yet Candace's turn to landscape is actually a return, not only to her 2006 posts but also to her college honors project, a series documenting old steel towns in the Rust Belt. The project, intended as the first of several on America's declining industries, never eventuated because of Candace's mother's illness and death. Candace's documentation of post-pandemic New York is the next installment of that formative project — and it celebrates rather than laments the city's "haunted look." ²⁵



Fig. 5 Robert Polidori, View over Chernobyl, 2001. From the series Zones of Exclusion: Pripyat and Chernobyl. © Robert Polidori. Courtesy of the artist

It's as if Candace's feelings of alienation have taken root in the city, like [the ghetto palms](#) she sees springing up around her, "so-called because they exploded in prolific waves across urban areas, seemingly growing from concrete." Googling the plants, Candace discovers that they originated in China and were introduced to America late in the seventeenth century. "They have lived on this land," she notes, "almost since the formation of this country." ²⁶ This fact inspires in her a reverie that works as a theory for her ruins photography: as an ode to the unmaking of empire, to civilizational collapse. We read,

Looking out the windows, I imagined the future as a time-lapse video, spanning the years it takes for Times Square to be overrun by ghetto palms, wetland vegetation, and wildlife. Or maybe I was actually conjuring up the past, the pine- and hickory-forested island that the Dutch first glimpsed upon ar-

living, populated with black bears and wolves, foxes and weasels, bobcats and mountain lions. ²⁷

Candace rewrites the ending of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), in which the narrator Nick Carraway sees modern New York "melt away" to reveal "the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes — a fresh, green breast of the new world." Carraway's vision is "enchanted" because it is "transitory," poised to yield to an "orgastic future." ²⁸ But Candace's dream of the past in the present, codified in her ruins photography, refuses nostalgic attachments to imperialist and economic expansion. Speeding forward and backward, the city's future and past are sealed together in a temporal melt — given a ready symbol in Marchand and Meffre's quotidian version of Salvador Dalí's *The Persistence of Memory* (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6 Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, Melted clock, Cass Technical High School, Detroit, 2008. From the series **The Ruins of Detroit**. © Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre. Courtesy of the artists

At once, Candace's images claim her right to live on this ghost island. As the passage about the time-lapse video continues, Candace locates herself in a prelapsarian Manhattan, alongside — or in the place of — the colonizing Dutch: "Initial European explorers had viewed Manhattan as a paradise. Here, I would lead a horse to drink. There, I would build a fire. And there still, I would seek refuge from the sun and rest in the shade." ²⁹ Her fantasy of belonging might adopt the colonial model, but the America in which Candace finds refuge is still an America undone, its order unmade.

For a while, at least, Candace isn't totally alone in the city. At one point she meets a taxi driver who's seen her blog, and he suggests she should post "about how New York belongs to the immigrants, how it was once the first point of entry for foreigners." ³⁰ He discerns, perhaps, how Candace's photography makes visible the city's return to its immigrant origins: in her images, New York shows its bones. "The places you post about — I would've never thought about," he tells her. "Like that one inside the subway. I don't even want to ask how you got down there." ³¹

The taxi driver's remark highlights the risks involved in Candace's ruins photography — a genre that's closely associated with the (masculinized, middle-class) practice of **urban ex-**

ploration. But when Candace goes to the mouth of the flooded subway station, "pushing aside the caution tape" and taking pictures at the sucking lip of the black water, it brought to my mind a different context for understanding her photography.³² Forcing her way down the steps, Candace makes the opposite journey to Margaret Bourke-White, who, in the late 1920s and 1930s, scaled the heights of the growing city with her camera.



Fig. 7 Oscar Grauber, Margaret Bourke-White on the Chrysler Building, Manhattan, 1935. © Oscar Graubner/The LIFE Images Collection via Getty Images/Getty Images

Having begun her career making stately renderings of industrial architecture in the Midwest — images that form the modernist standard for contemporary ruins photography — Bourke-White moved to New York in 1929 to work for *Fortune* magazine. Once there, she photographed skyscrapers with extreme daring, crawling into gargoyles or perching on scaffolding some 800 feet above street level (see Fig. 7).

Much as Candace, during her last months in the city, uses her 31st-floor office as the headquarters of *NY Ghost*, Bourke-White leased a studio on the 61st floor of the Chrysler building.³³ She was one of a number of women who, in the early twentieth century, used the camera to stake their claim on — their place in — New York. Of these photographers, Candace finds an even closer antecedent in Berenice Abbott, especially her project *Changing New York*, made between 1935 and 1938 under the aegis of the Federal Arts Project of the Works Progress Administration (see Figs. 8-10).



Fig. 8 Berenice Abbott, Central Park Plaza: Hotel Sherry-Netherland (center), Hotel Savoy Plaza (right), from 58th Street and Fifth Avenue, Manhattan, 1937. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, [The New York Public Library](#).



Fig. 9 Berenice Abbott, Fifth Avenue, Nos. 4, 6, 8, Manhattan, 1936. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, [The New York Public Library](#).

Abbott's large format camera allowed for sharp, textural detail, but it made photographing people and moving objects difficult. So, for different reasons to Candace, Abbott's New York is mostly empty, sharing something of the eerie effect of Eugène Atget's [photographs of Paris](#) or the paintings of Edward Hopper. Hopper's work has become the default [art-historical referent](#) for the experience of isolation in the age of COVID-19 — and its tone of lonely disquiet also inflects the widely shared [photographs](#) of New York in the months when it was an epicenter of the virus. But when Abbott was told, in 1938, that her "Fifth Avenue" (Fig. 9) resembled a Hopper painting, she responded that she "was doing this sort of thing before Hopper, and what artists like him are attempting is better done in photography anyway." ³⁴

Abbott's photography sets the terms of the visual language of the pandemic, in our world and in the world of *Severance*. With *Changing New York*, Abbott recorded the city at another moment of crisis, during the Great Depression — which was also a moment of stasis, as building and demolition projects ground to a halt. Hers was a city, like Candace's, suspended between past and future; and she makes a similar critique of its expansionist (and consumer capitalist) imperatives. The first image in the book version of *Changing New York* (1939) features a Bowling Green statue of Abraham de Peyster, a prominent political figure in Dutch colonial days (Fig. 10). By opening the book in this way, as John Raeburn notes, Abbott invites us to contemplate the city "as an outpost of imperial colonizing and to contrast what it had been at the end of the seventeenth century with what it had since become — the leading city of a major world power, symbolized by the solidity and mass of those buildings of the financial district that surrounded the statue." ³⁵ Eschewing the city's tourist attractions and undermining romantic and ahistorical conceptions of the city, Abbott's book reflects ambivalence about New York's function in the modern world order.



Fig. 10 Berenice Abbott, De Peyster Statue, Bowling Green, looking north on Broadway, Manhattan, 1936. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, [The New York Public Library](#).

Like Abbott's *Changing New York*, the photographs of New York during COVID-19, taken earlier this year, are striking for their denuded sense of movement and dynamism. On rain-slicked streets, gutters lined with limp blue vinyl gloves, solitary figures stand in for — and underscore the absence of — the city's crowds. A security guard. A city worker. A pedestrian, head down and face masked. At once, these images carry an implicit critique of the structures and conditions of the life they fail to depict: the city's aging infrastructure, its housing unaffordability, its implication in a grossly unequal and ecologically devastating system of global capitalism, which will, sooner rather than later, ring Manhattan with rising waters. The visual language of the pandemic tells of a city already in crisis.

Still, these images, and Abbott's before them, illustrate a fondness for and pleasure in the city. Like "an artist painting portraits of his beloved": this is how one critic described Abbott's New York photographs. ³⁶ And so it's Abbott who emerges, above all, as Candace's predecessor, as *Severance* moves toward Candace's habituation not of the "myth of New York" — glowing orange like Goldin's portrait of Greer and Robert — but its "reality." "[T]oward the end, in those weeks of walking and taking pictures I came to know and love the thing itself," Candace tells us. ³⁷ Like the "single-woman-in-Manhattan movies" she used to watch with Jonathan, which pose the city as the woman's "ultimate consolation," she is the single woman falling in love with the city — through her practice of photography. ³⁸ Even if it's only for a season — even if she'll soon realize she must leave New York, take her chances beyond its limits — she inhabits the city, and herself, as fully as she's able to.

There's a **real NY Ghost**. From September 2006 to April 2009, the writer Ed Park produced a PDF newsletter called *The New-York Ghost* that was sent to subscribers via email. The "mysterious little periodical," as it was called in the **New York Times**, was packed with "stream-of-consciousness prose, whimsical poems, dream transcripts and archival illustrations."

In the acknowledgments to *Severance*, Ma thanks Park for allowing her to "steal NY Ghost (RIP the New-York Ghost!)." But Park's newsletter, dormant for over a decade, has been **re-vived** in the wake of *Severance*'s publication — and in the wake of COVID-19. Imitation of life, life in imitation: Ma uses Park's title for Candace's blog in her book, and then Park — by restarting his newsletter, as Candace restarts her blog, after a long hiatus and in response to a global pandemic — essentially repeats the actions of Ma's novel.

This relay is only emphasized by the fact that the **first edition** of Park's returned *Ghost*, published on April 8, 2020, features an article by Ma — accompanied, in fact, by Ma's own photographs of Chicago during COVID-19 (Figs. 11 and 12). ³⁹ Though they're very simply composed, Ma's smartphone images resemble Abbott's New York photographs: taken from street level, framed in parallel with the buildings to accentuate their height and the dramatic shadows they throw over the empty pavements, and reproduced in black and white.



Fig. 11 Ling Ma, Chicago, 2020. © Ling Ma. Courtesy of the artist and Ed Park



Fig. 12 Ling Ma, Chicago, 2020. © Ling Ma. Courtesy of the artist and Ed Park

Ma photographs the area where she once worked as a fact-checker at *Playboy* magazine — which is also where she first conceived of *Severance*. As she explains in the article,

Though *Severance* was later set in New York, it was on my lunchtime walks that I had first imagined the buildings around me deadened. This was the neighborhood I had first 'practiced' on, imagining what it would look like devoid of pedestrians, the luxury goods stores like Louis Vuitton and Gucci shut down. That I found myself, years later, wandering these same streets emptied due to an actual pandemic, with these exact storefronts closed, was almost obscene. [40](#)

Severance ends with Candace walking in a "deadened" Chicago, a path already tread by an author practicing for apocalypse. But where Ma once led now she follows, ghostlike, in her character's footsteps. Taking photographs pitched between fascination and dread, she too captures a city with a haunted look.

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References

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[1] Ling Ma, *Severance* (Melbourne and London: Text Publishing, 2018), 194. [↗]

2. Mark Holborn, "Nan Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*," interview with Nan Goldin, *Aperture* 103 (Summer 1986): 38-47, 42. [↗]
3. Ma, *Severance*, 194. [↗]
4. Sarah Ruddy, "A Radiant Eye Yearns from Me': Figuring Documentary in the Photography of Nan Goldin," *Feminist Studies* 35, no. 2 (2009): 347-380, 349. [↗]
5. Holborn, "Nan Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*," 42. [↗]
6. Nan Goldin, *Couples and Loneliness*, ed. Nan Goldin and Taka Kawachi (Kyoto, Japan: Korinsha Press, 1998), 58. [↗]
7. Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (New York: Aperture, 1986), 6. [↗]
8. Ma, *Severance*, 38. [↗]
9. *Ibid.*, 213. [↗]
10. *Ibid.*, 195. [↗]
11. As Goldin said in 1991, "[W]e used to call ourselves the scratch and dust school. Unfortunately, now that somebody is printing my early black-and-white work, it's a bit of a problem because my negatives are so fucked up. My students are still shocked by how little I know technically." See Stephen Westfall, "The Ballad of Nan Goldin," interview with Nan Goldin, *BOMB* 37 (Fall 1991): 27-31, 29. [↗]
12. Holborn, "Nan Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*," 38. [↗]
13. Ma, *Severance*, 41. [↗]
14. *Ibid.*, 14. [↗]
15. *Ibid.*, 54. [↗]
16. *Ibid.*, 14. [↗]
17. *Ibid.*, 40. [↗]
18. See Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). [↗]
19. Ma, *Severance*, 14. [↗]

20. Ibid., 253, 254. [↗]
21. Ibid., 207. [↗]
22. Ibid., 255. [↗]
23. Also at issue is the right of "outsiders" to shape the visual identity of a city not their own, and to mystify, by excluding from view, the social realities and working-class histories of those cities. For different approaches to the ethics of ruins photography, see Sarah Arnold, "Urban Decay Photography and Film: Fetishism and the Apocalyptic Imagination," *Journal of Urban History* 41.2 (2015): 326–39, and Tim Strangeman, "'Smokestack Nostalgia,' 'Ruin Porn' or Working-Class Obituary: The Role and Meaning of Deindustrial Representation," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 84 (Fall 2013): 23–37. [↗]
24. Ma, *Severance*, 259. [↗]
25. Ibid., 255. [↗]
26. Ibid., 252. [↗]
27. Ibid., 252–53. [↗]
28. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York and London: Scribner, 2004), 180. [↗]
29. Ma, *Severance*, 253. [↗]
30. Ibid., 261. [↗]
31. Ibid., 260. [↗]
32. Ibid., 256. [↗]
33. My account of Bourke-White's career follows Mary Woods, *Beyond the Architect's Eye: Photographs and the American Built Environment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 40–48. [↗]
34. "A Woman Photographs the City," *Life* 4 (January 1938): 40, cited in John Raeburn, "'Culture Morphology' and Cultural History in Berenice Abbott's *Changing New York*," *Prospects* 9 (October 1984): 255–291, 286. [↗]
35. Raeburn, "'Culture Morphology,'" 259. [↗]
36. Elliot Arnold, "The Way Berenice Abbott Feels About Cities and Photography, Her Exhibit is Like an Artist Painting Portraits of His Beloved," *NY World-Telegram* (October 1937), cited in Woods, *Beyond the Architect's Eye*, 47. [↗]
37. Ma, *Severance*, 257. [↗]
38. Ibid., 158. [↗]
39. Actually, Ma's photographs were instrumental to the relay between the two *Ghosts*. Ed Park told me via email on July 1st, 2020 that he'd commissioned Ma's article for the newsletter after seeing the photographs she'd taken of Chicago during the pandemic. [↗]
40. Ling Ma, "Crown," *The New-York Ghost* 15, no. 1 (April 2020): 1–4, 4. [↗]