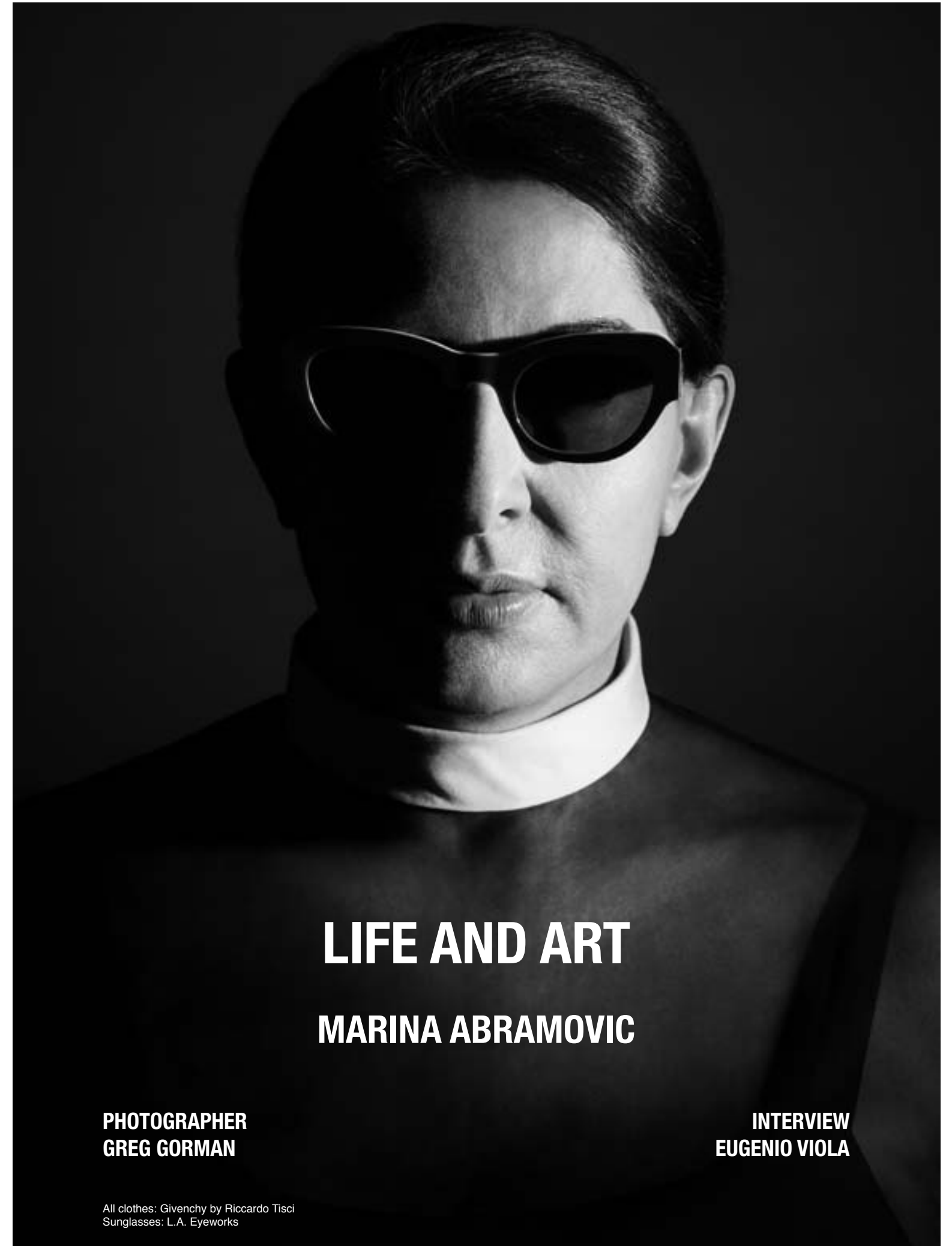




GIVENCHY



LIFE AND ART

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OUT

AESTHETIC STAGE

PART I

A day spent not adjusting your direction is a day not lived, she liked to say, counting the days on her fingers. At night, however, I felt legitimate not listening to her. What she meant by direction, only she understood. Nobody needs to think much when they have what they need, I would reply, but I'm not sure if she ever got it. Thinking is about remedies. Remedies are about problems and in there, I couldn't see any. Why would I have? From the moment we were closing the world out of the door, we were alone and safe. Everything surrounding the two of us was just ours and familiar. Not that I felt attached to any of the stuff in the flat, but those objects like our habits were always standing there with the same shadow, facing the same direction, somehow defining the shape of the room and, in a way, our own. That night, if she had to imagine our shapes, she would have drawn them on the back of the pizza box starting from two different vanishing points. She would have done it probably just to get me angry, because it was clear that our perspectives were always coinciding on the same point that, drunk on excuses, she just saw blurred and doubled. We'd always been on the same line, she just liked to trick herself, claiming she was different.

Me, having always been the more practical one, I would have known how to draw our two figures, one fitting inside the other with all the lines going in the same direction. Cause that's what we were. We could have smiled about it, and rested in peace. But no, she had to point out every little difference in the perimeter, every little deformation.

That night, as always was the case when she was talking nonsense, all I could do was sit still on the couch and stare at a fixed point in the middle of the room, waiting for her to stop complaining. I could see the dust falling like snow above those objects, and above us. I could see the dust covering everything in the room. When I'd stared long enough at that midair point, everything surrounding it turned into an abstraction, and gave me an entirely different perception of the room and my presence within it. The dust was falling like snow, as all the objects below and the shadows behind them were melting together, becoming a compact silhouette; lines with different directions, heading nowhere. That static blurry line at the periphery of my vision was a confused and oblivious boundary between shadow and light that was laying there giving me a sense of silence and peace. I felt it belonged to me, it belonged to my personal perception generated by that midair fixed point. It was my peace because, in a way, I felt life was generated by a similar point, and at the end the day, the vision we had of it didn't really matter. It was just part of a larger illusion.

That night the dust was covering silently all the forms and all the differences like snow in winter. The borders of myself weren't the borders of anything other than my silences. And I wanted to remain in silence, but she liked to complicate the situation, inventing words to put a sense to her sadness. I never found any other explanations.

That's why that night she had to pain me with the story of directions; she was talking as if there were other directions besides our goals. What was there to fix? Who cares about the rest of it? Life's direction is determined through the things we do, the opportunities we have, the casual occurrences. We are not really choosing it, but rather, the direction chooses us. If we really needed to talk about direction, fine, that would have described what we were doing, and what we should have cared about: being okay, having money, not being bothered, and being able to take from situations and people what we needed. She was always trying to convince me that there's much more to ask for. But who cares? She didn't realize we can't really choose the direction of our characters, cause we are what we are for a reason. We must live with it, and try at least to enjoy it.

She was saying that her direction was different, that she had to listen to her deepest feelings as if it was a solution. The fact that she couldn't appreciate the pleasure of the moment and just go for it had been the germ that infected every single thought she had, slowly day by day, till that night when she stood up, told me to fuck off, and slammed the door behind her. She never came back. After all I had done for her, she left me there without any pity. Her irrational problems were the germs that had grown into a sickness that pushed her to loose touch with reality and convenience, the germs that ruined all the empathy and all the fun. They grew like a disease, making her unable to take life for what it was. We had everything. We had each other, we had no need to depress ourselves thinking what everything was all about. But she, she was a fucking idiot that never listened to me. I've loved her forever but that night she made her decision. The door got slammed with her behind it, while the dust like thick snow kept falling faintly upon all the forms, upon all the shadows, upon all the lights. From that moment on in the room, dust was all that was left.

Luigi V.



Hl. Kilian, 1945 im Neumünster zu Würzburg verbrannt

These different loves—love as duty, love as inclination, and love as urge—might be best illustrated by imagining scenarios of their declarations. “I love you,” in all three modes. It is an important point in Kierkegaard that the language of love is literally the same as the language of the law. That is to say, you would use the same word on the side of love as on the side of law. But there are qualities in each of them, tones, forms of address, that set them apart from one another. “I love you.” You could pronounce these words because it is the law to do so, Christian or otherwise. Or, as the convention and the standards of Hollywood proscribes, they could be said over a romantic candle-light dinner. They could also be pronounced in defiant passion – literature has given us such examples: the Romeos and Juliets declaring love to each other their love in spite of family prohibition, or the troubadour declaring his love to the lady who is forbidden to him. And then there is the true expression of love, the only thing to say in a certain moment, which has very much to do with timing.

Another opposition dissolved in Kierkegaard’s philosophy of love is the opposition between “eros” and “agape.” Kierkegaard does not distinguish love of the neighbour from love that involves erotic love. What is at stake is a difference in the quality of love, and if this difference occurs it will change not only the way in which you love your neighbour but also the way in which you love your partner (and yourself).

So who is this neighbour that we should love?

By reference to the parable of the holy Samaritan, Kierkegaard points to the fact that the neighbour in this parable is not the man who has been assaulted, but the Samaritan himself. The Samaritan who was in the time of Jesus a stranger, representing a strange and disrespected people. The neighbour is the one who has the love of his neighbour inside him. This is why Kierkegaard can write that it is not the beggar who should ask the rich man to be merciful, it is the other way round:

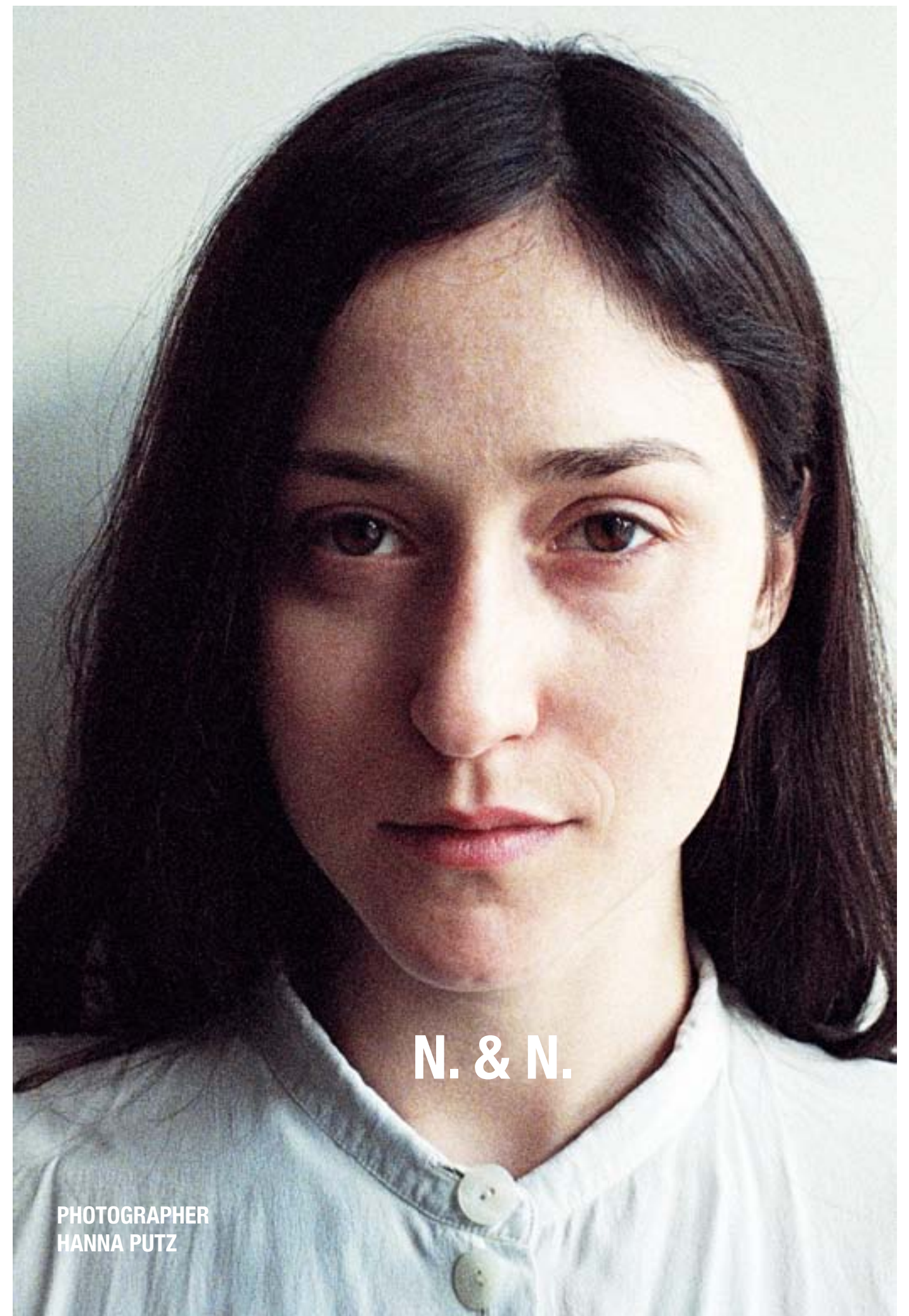
“Oh, be merciful! See, here it is again, and who does not immediately and involuntarily think of the poor, of the cry of the beggars to the rich, ‘Be merciful?’ However incorrect this expression is, since it is charity which is asked for. And therefore we speak correctly, we who say to the poor, to the poorest of all: ‘Oh, be merciful! [...] Be merciful, be merciful toward the rich! Remember, you have mercy in your power, while he has money!’”

Kierkegaard stresses that the neighbour is not the one with whom I identify myself. This is the case in romantic love, but that is not the kind of love that Kierkegaard wants to talk about. In romantic love, Kierkegaard writes, the love is directed at “another me”, the other person as my mirror image. This kind of love is a kind of narcissism. Kierkegaard’s love, on the contrary, is directed at “the first you,” that is a person who is obviously different from myself. The first you is not the second me. The neighbourly love, as Kierkegaard understands it, is not based on recognition as identification, but on the recognition of the other as a stranger.

To Kierkegaard, the neighbour is a stranger, even a provocation. If you reduce this provocation you stay inside the logic of the Law: “You are naturally annoyed by your neighbour, but you have to control this and look upon him with kindness.” Then we have the decent superego telling us to be nice to our neighbour – and its obscene echo whispering: “actually he is an annoying bastard, why don’t you just treat him as such?” If we repress the monstrous side of the neighbour, it will be all the more affirmed in xenophobia and chauvinism. To be able to contain the neighbour, the trauma of the neighbour, implies being able to contain his strangeness. Thus it is not necessarily true, this philanthropic attitude stating that beneath his strange and provoking appearance, the neighbour is really a nice and normal person. Rather, the fundamental attitude to the neighbour might be: You are very strange, in deed, even monstrous – but so am I.

Kierkegaard’s “love” must be understood in a very precise way, as something different from sentimental, romantic, narcissist, and even conventional humanist love. Kierkegaard’s love is what you need in order to transgress what he calls the vicious circle of love and sin, and what I would call the deadlock of duty and enjoyment. The moments or visions in our lives when we are liberated from that duty which in today’s consumerist society is first and foremost the duty to enjoy.

Today’s society is not a society that has abandoned duty in the favour of enjoyment, but rather a society in which it has become our duty to enjoy - a duty that seems very often to lead to depression rather than happiness. If you do not enjoy life, you can have some anti-depressives. If you do not feel lust, you can have some Viagra. Kierkegaard neither proscribes enjoyment nor duty, but rather love, as an antidote to the vicious circle of both.



N. & N.

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