DOMINIQUE NABOKOV
The World of The New York Review of Books

PHOTOGRAPHS 1980–2009
Dominique Nabokov

The World of *The New York Review of Books*

PHOTOGRAPHS 1980–2009

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Introduction

To some people *The New York Review of Books* may seem more like an exclusive club than a literary journal, a club with its own private codes and initiations: having had a Chinese meal with Susan (Sontag), or a tête-à-tête with Isaiah (Berlin), or a night downtown in the wild ’70s with Luc (Sante) or Darryl (Pinckney), or a private dinner with Lizzie (Hardwick) and Barbara (Epstein), or an intimate moment with Joseph (Brodsky), and so on.

But if there is something a little bit clubby about “the Review,” it was never a closed society, and new members have consistently found their way in, not for reasons of social glamour, but purely on the merit of their ideas and the quality of their prose. Many of them, who might have written for the Review for years, have never even met Robert Silvers, the man who has presided over the institution together with Barbara Epstein since its birth.

And I say institution, because that is what it has become. Dominique Nabokov’s photographs are of the editors and writers of the Review. But the membership of this global institution stretches much further, to the many readers, from New York to London, Paris, Rome, Moscow, Nairobi, or Hong Kong. I have met people in remote parts of Malaysia, in Estonia, and in Shanghai, who eagerly await their latest fix of the Review every two weeks or so.

Those who are spoiled for print in the great metropolises sometimes complain that it takes them a while to get round to reading their favorite journals; they pile up, creating a vague sense of guilt that gains in intensity as the piles grow higher. But in farther flung places, men and women thirst for the Review, and they often read it cover to cover. They wish to know what Colm Tóibín thinks of Edmund White’s latest novel, or what Zadie Smith makes of the social media, or what Helen Epstein says about epidemics in Africa.

This is because the Review has stimulated a worldwide conversation. Those who take part in it, readers as well as writers, are the true members of this club. And the only ticket to admission is curiosity.

How apt it is, then, that so many pictures in Nabokov’s splendid show feature people talking: Philip Roth with Milan Kundera, James Fenton with Seamus Heaney, Elizabeth Hardwick with Robert Silvers with Isaiah Berlin, or Arthur Schlesinger, or Norman Mailer.

This is a celebration of talk. And even as many of the talkers, inevitably in the course of fifty years, drop out of the conversation, others take their places. But the best talkers never really drop out, for even in their physical absence, their voices live on in print, to be reconsidered by new voices stimulated by the older ones.

The conversation never stops. And it never should. For intelligent, humane, well-informed and well-written talk in print is the life force not just of our politics, but of our common human civilization. Without it, everything of value withers and dies.

One can only hope that Nabokov’s pictures will be seen as more than a celebration of the past. Her “taking heads” should be an inspiration to keep the talk flowing, in many voices, young and old, some already well known, and some yet to be born.

—Ian Buruma
This is a short personal and professional photo essay on The New York Review of Books in the year of its fiftieth anniversary. I have approached the subject as if I were a film director making a documentary. I have tried to reveal the spirit of its founding editors and expose some of its past and present contributors. My list is far from being exhaustive, but I hope my choices have captured the uniqueness and the unmatched excellence for which the Review is known all over the world.

I have sometimes taken liberties with the technical aspect of certain pictures in favor of their revealing qualities. I believe above all in what a picture tells and I will shoot in the lowest light conditions if what is happening is worth documenting. I trust that the camera will register something and it always does. My photographs transmit a face, a scene, an atmosphere in a black-and-white gritty way and with the objective eye of a chronicler.

My camera is my pen.

—Dominique Nabokov
Robert Silvers, Norman Mailer

New York City, 1986
Robert Silvers
New York City, early 1982

Barbara Epstein
New York City, 1993
Joyce Carol Oates
Princeton, New Jersey, 1987

Daniel Mendelsohn
New York City, 2006
Barbara Epstein, Luc Sante, Darryl Pinckney, April Bernard

*New York City, 1987*
Francine du Plessix, Robert Silvers

*New York City, 1991*
Diane Johnson
San Francisco, 1987

Joan Didion
Los Angeles, 1987
Jason Epstein
*New York City, 1987*

Gore Vidal
*New York City, 1991*
Stuart Hampshire, Isaiah Berlin, Nicolas Nabokov
Jonathan Lieberson  
*New York City, early 1980s*

Grace Dudley  
*New York City, 1980s*
Rea Hederman, Angela Hederman, Barbara Epstein, Darryl Pinckney

*New York City, 1986*
John Ashbery
*New York City, early 1980s*

Stephen Spender
*Maussane, France, 1986*
Elizabeth Hardwick, Barbara Epstein

New York City, 1981
James Fenton, Seamus Heaney
*New York City, 1986*

Milan Kundera, Philip Roth
*New York City, 1981*

*(overleaf)* Maurice Grosser, Elizabeth Hardwick, Virgil Thomson, Barbara Epstein
*Chelsea Hotel, New York City, mid 1980s*
Mary McCarthy
*New York City, 1987*

Susan Sontag
*New York City, 1985*
Oliver Sacks, Roberto Calasso, Israel Rosenfield, Jonathan Spence

_Florence, Italy, 1988_

(foreground) Sarah Plimpton, Saul Steinberg
(background) Robert Silvers, John Marquand

_New York City, 1980_
Robert Silvers,
Arthur Schlesinger, Joseph Alsop
New York City, 1986
Arthur Schlesinger, Isaiah Berlin, Robert Silvers

New York City, 1980s
Edmund White
Paris, 1997

Zadie Smith
New York City, 2009
Czeslaw Milosz
*New York City, 1982*

Pankaj Mishra
*New York City, 2003*
Nadine Gordimer
*New York City, 1986*

Ronald Dworkin
*New York City, 2001*
The artist wishes to thank The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation, Olivier Bernier, Francine Goldenhar at La Maison Française, Ian Buruma, and the staff of LTI/Lightside Photographic Services.

All works silver gelatin prints
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