

# The Pain of Rejection: Using Photography to Prevent Erasure and Find Self-Acceptance

Abigail Gillespie, Dr. María DeGuzmán

Department of English and Comparative Literature, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
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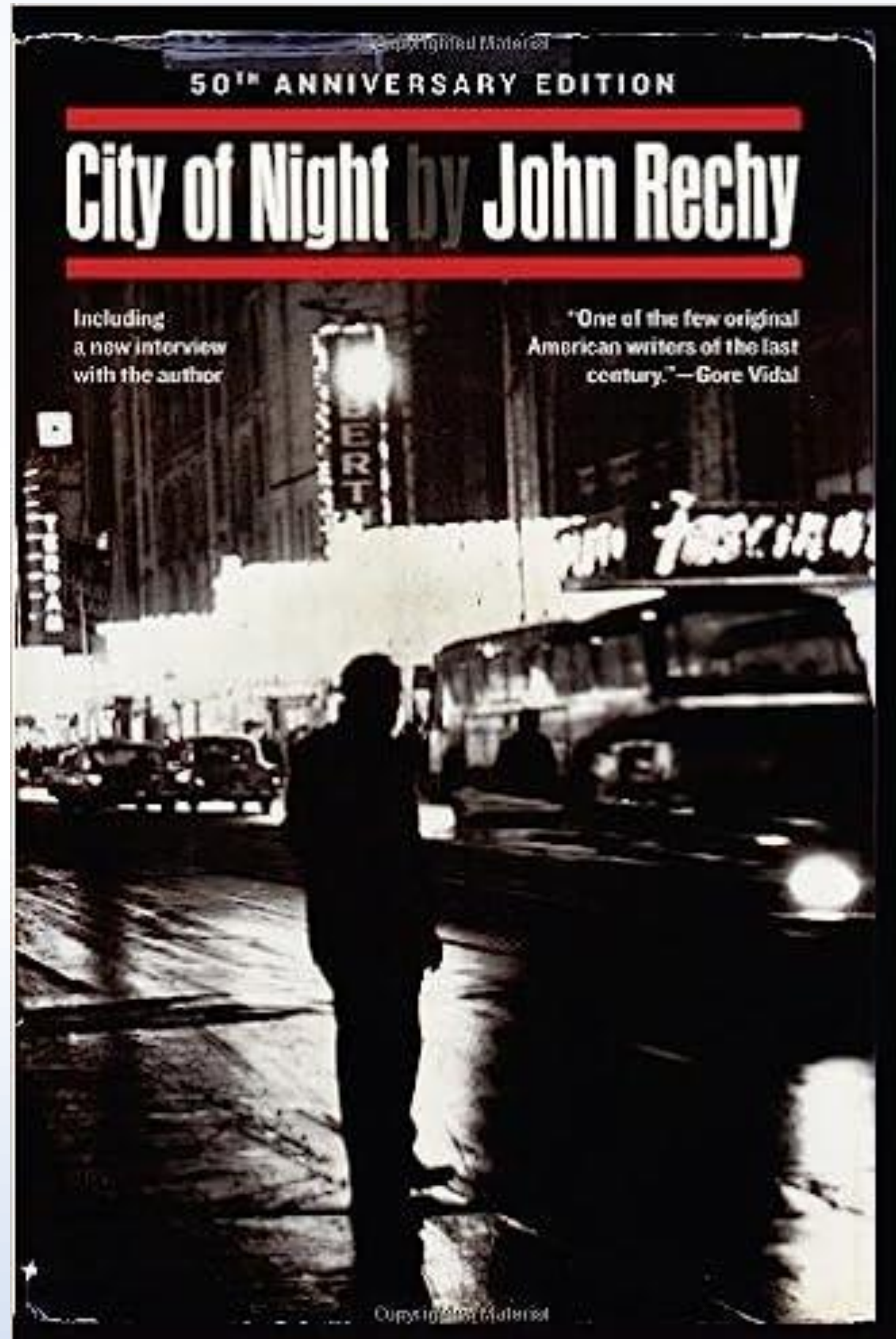
## Abstract

Most people are guilty of worrying about what others think of them, seeking approval, and finding comfort when accepted, their lives validated. In "City of Night," John Rechy suggests that these behaviors are characteristic of most people but also contribute to pain in those who feel rejected by others. Rechy says the marginalized characters exist as a culture separate from the dominant culture, the night distinct from the day, with people resisting, and advocating for visibility. In "NEIL: Masquerade", the unnamed narrator and Neil try to find acceptance from one another through photography and dressing up, but neither can validate the other, causing both to feel rejected, with both behaving aggressively in response. Neil fails to understand that the narrator is interested in dressing up to appear more attractive and valued and inadvertently invalidates the narrator's desires, making them feel unaccepted. Similarly, the narrator invalidates Neil for his desire to be perceived by others as someone strong and dominant. The narrator refers to dressing up as "costuming" and feels Neil's desire to find acceptance by photographing people with similar sexual preferences is an attempt to rationalize socially unacceptable sexual fantasies. Neil feels rejected for his gender and sexual identity, and when their shared interest in finding acceptance through photography brings them together again, they lash out violently, furthering the already existing harm. They cannot recognize that they are both a product of their place within society, and grow to resent each other when they could have worked together.

## Introduction

While first published in 1963, Rechy describes hustling in New York and later other cities around the United States of America during the 1950s.

City of Night, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, by John Rechy



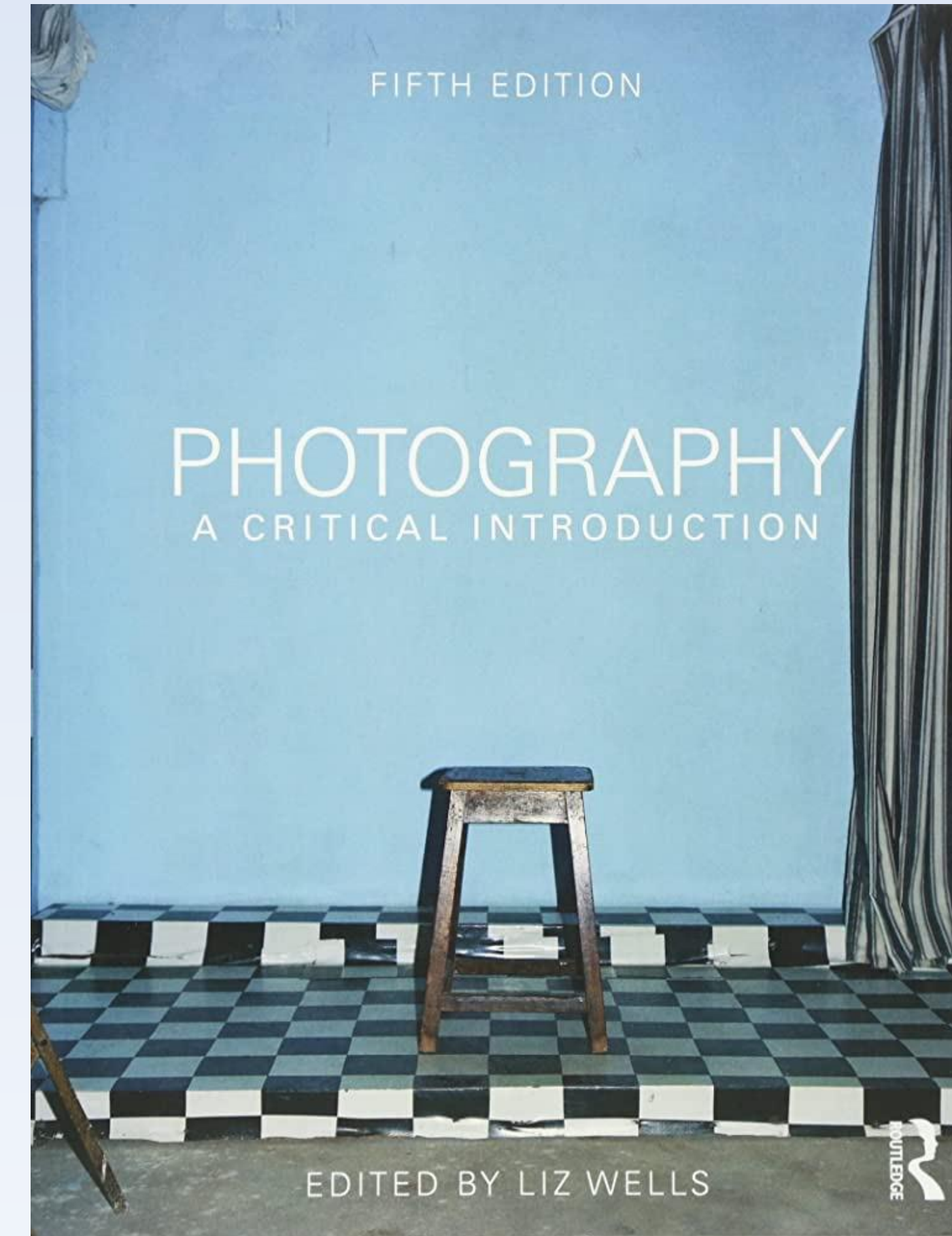
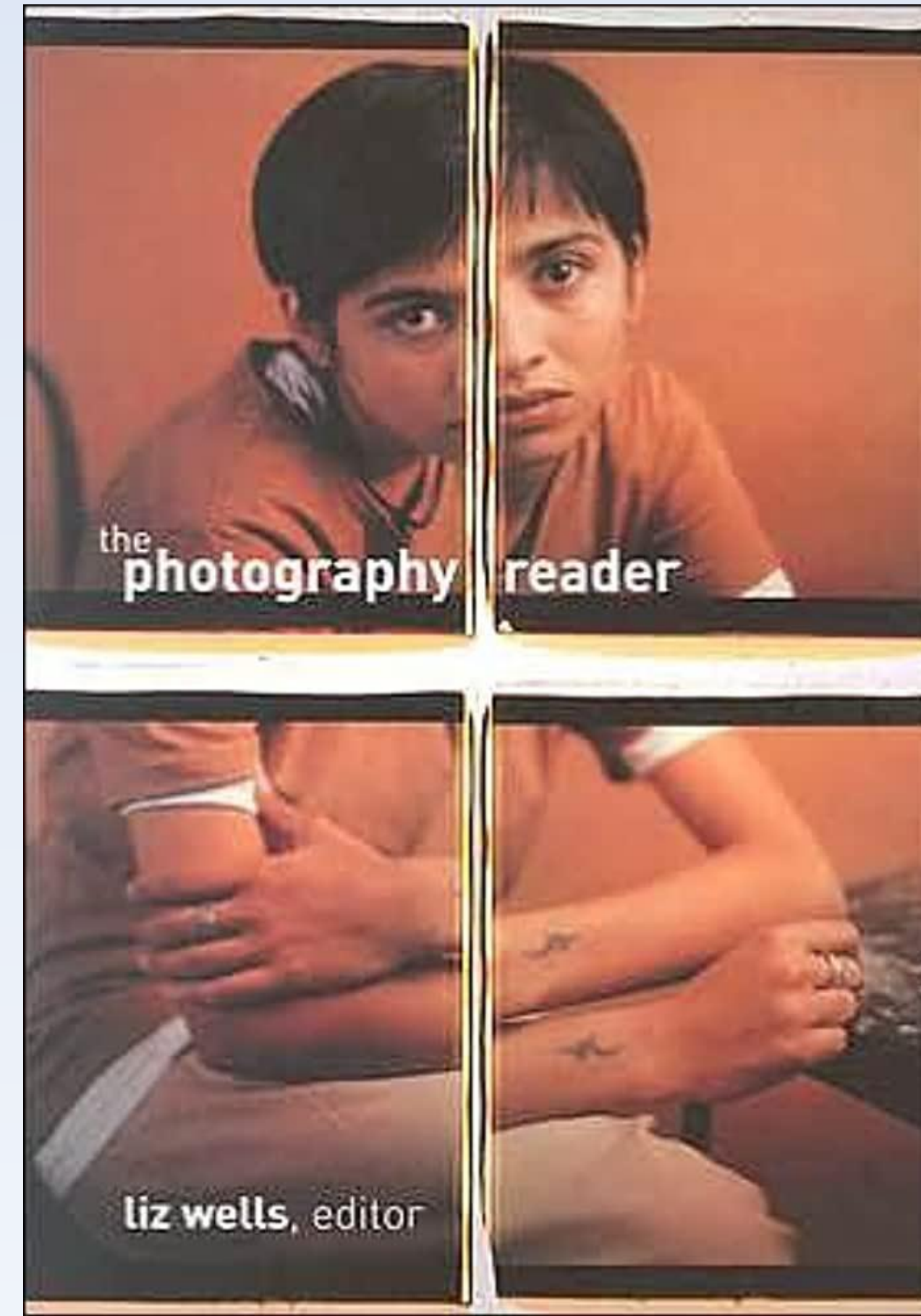
Protesters in Manhattan during the summer of 1969

Many currently existing queer rights organizations in New York, like the Human Rights Campaign or GLAAD did not exist at the time of the 1950s as the 1969 Stonewall Riots had not yet occurred.

## Materials and Methods

The Photography Reader, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, edited by Liz Wells

Photography: A Critical Introduction, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, edited by Liz Wells



## Quotations

"The camera does not tolerate props, and mercilessly exposes any cardboard theatrically offered instead of the real thing" – Ossip Brik

"They are there to be seen, not so much in the pictures, but in the encounter, in the relationship, in the gap between artist and object, a gap which neither an art history nor a technological history can bridge" – Roberta McGrath

"But it was not only the way that photography described things that were new, it was also the things it chose to describe" – John Szarkowski

"While it is true that in the 1950s gay men and lesbians had little access to images or media representations which represented homosexuality, and those which were available usually portrayed it in a negative light, some writers have argued that homoerotic desire was addressed, but in highly coded ways to avoid censorship" – Michelle Henning

"They have described the world of spectacle as a hyperreality, as a form of representation in which mediated images appears more real than reality itself" – Anandi Ramamurthy

"Photographic images – both still and moving – are crucial in supporting the society of spectacle" – Anandi Ramamurthy

"Yet, photography produces a here and now that can resist structures of heteronormativity and patriarchy through politicized feelings" – Steph Rogerson

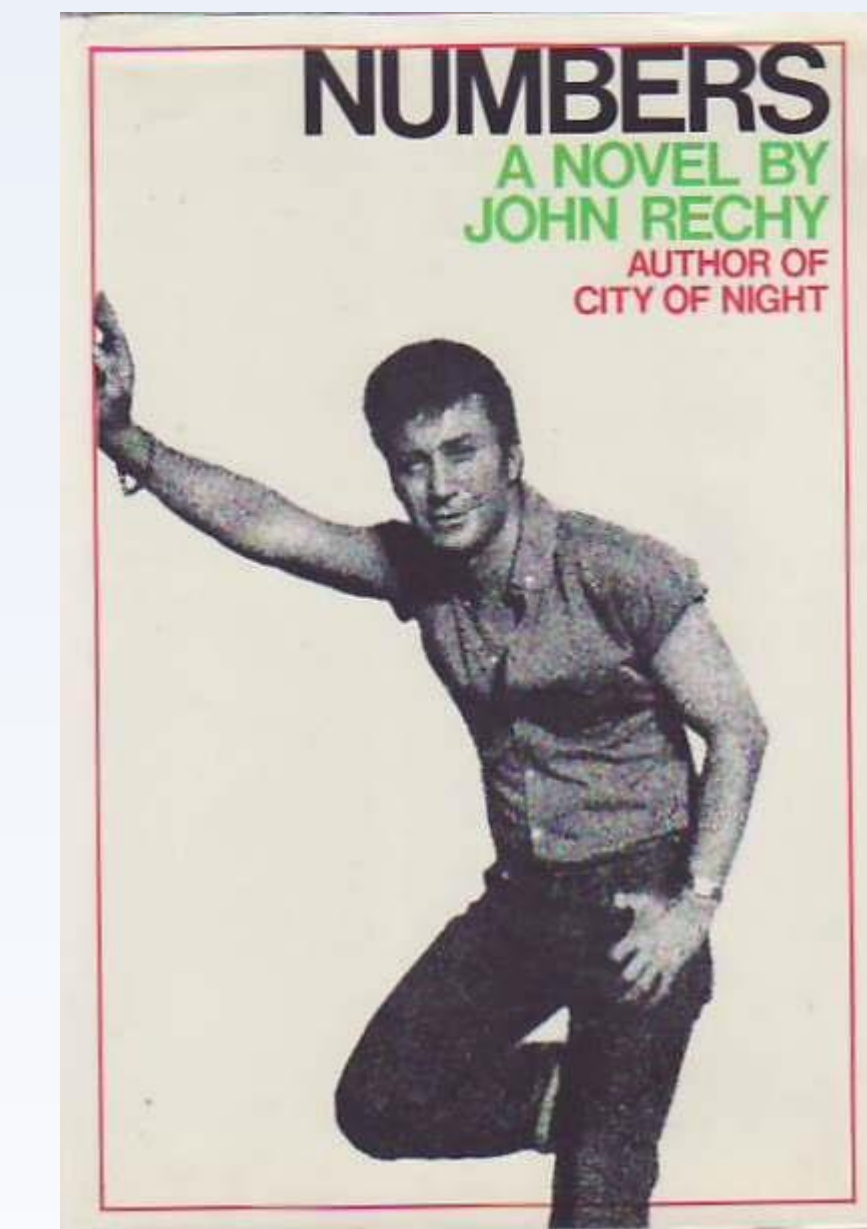
## Definitions

- Dominant Culture: the culture with the most people and power
- Marginalized Characters: those people who face discrimination and are considered unwanted for not belonging to the dominant culture
- Queerness: hard to define, being a term that different people identify with for varying reasons

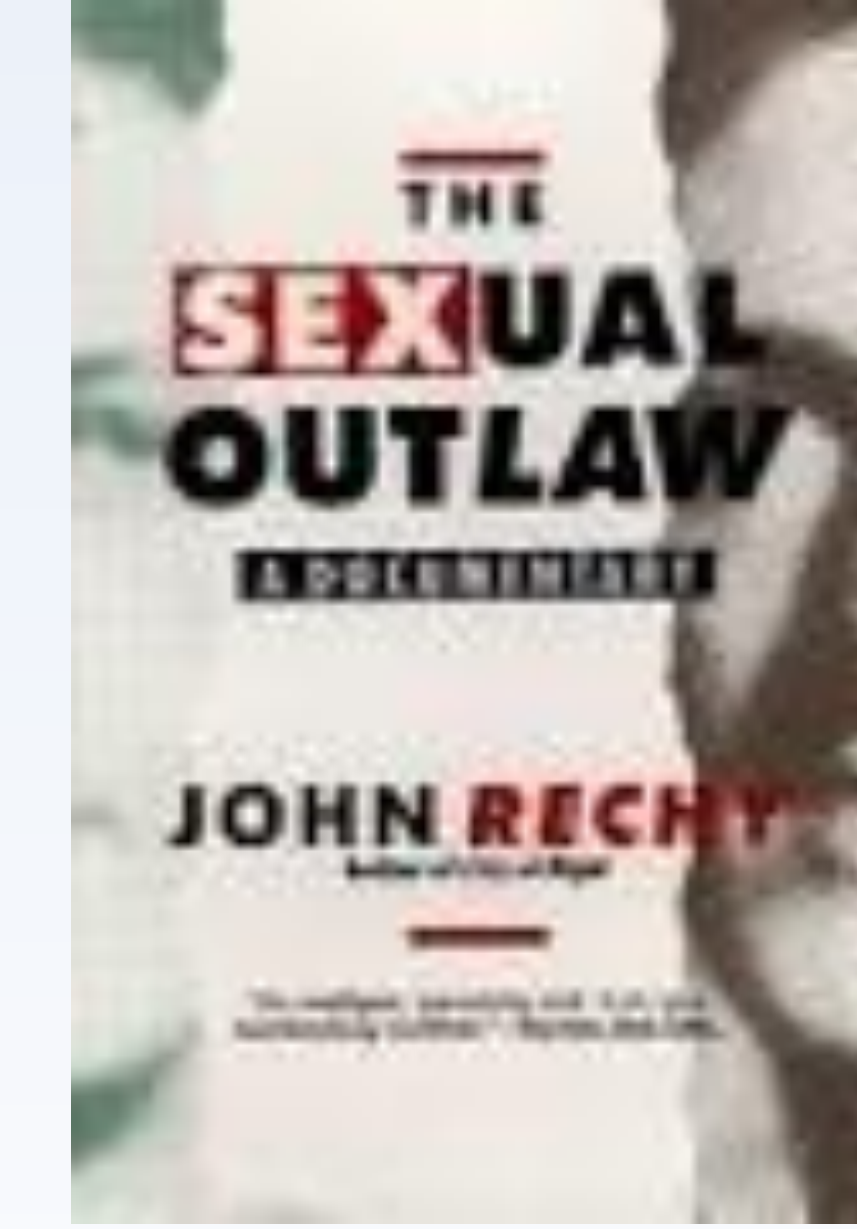
## Conclusions

- Characters search for self-acceptance when not within the dominant culture and try to resist cultural erasure, showing the pain associated with doing so, especially when unsuccessful
- The unnamed narrator and Neil cannot recognize that they, along with the other, are both a product of their place within society, and grow to resent each other when they could have worked together

## Other Works



Published in 1967



Published in 1977



Published in 1999

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