Introduction from *Blue Nights:* by Norman Mailer

I had an agreeable return of memory when I looked at thesephotographs. They brought back an exceptional walk on a night in Provincetownduring my first visit in June of 1943, an occasion that was right after Ifinished senior year at Harvard. Having heard now and again about a uniquevillage of fishermen at the tip of Cape Cod, I decided to celebrate there for aweekend. The town was near to deserted, and what I recall most clearly is thedarkness of the streets after twilight.

TheSecond World War was on us then with all of the shadow it could cast overnocturnal activities. Many of us shared an intensified sense then of events tocome. We anticipated thepossibility of air raids and German landings, conceivably, on the shores ofCape Cod with its open beaches and lack of fortifications. Of course we werethree thousand miles away from Europe, and the U.S. and British Navies werethere to protect us from U-boats, but that offered no certainty in those days.Everyones experience then was existential. No one knew yet how the war wouldturn out, and as a corollary of these various forebodings and cautions, thetowns of Cape Cod shut down all outdoor lighting. The streets were dark. So,too, were shades drawn on the windows of every house.

Inthe evening, therefore, one had to make ones way in Provincetown down thenarrow thoroughfare of Commercial Street, then called Front Street, with nomore guidance than was offered by the moon. That faint glow lay on theparchment of the window shades in those houses not completely unlit within.What prominence that gave to the pale illumination overhead. I do not know thatI have ever been more aware of the presence of the moon. Ones sense of timenow seemed more sensitive to the past, so much so, indeed, that one couldsuppose oneself returned in some small measure to events gone long before onehad entered ones own life.

So,as I took these steps through the dark dimensionalities of the subtle lightprovided, I had a rare pleasure. It took no leap of the imagination to thinkthat I was walking down the long lonely street of a Cape Cod town in the yearsbefore the American Revolution. Each small house I passed now stood out like amid-eighteenth-century abode. For an hour or more I was returned to the past.It was as if a tangible element of those long-elapsed years had just seasonedmy psyche. I was endowed with a close intimation of what it might have beenlike to live in New England then. I had received a gift. I now had some livingidea of that colonial era when the roots of my country were first readyingthemselves for a mighty future.

Letme offer here a weightier example of this kind of experience. On one now famousliterary moment, Marcel Proust dipped a madeleine into his tea. The taste ofthe wafer brought back floods of memory sufficient to liberate *larecherche du temps perdu (Remembrance of Things Past*), his seven researches into time that was lost to him, yetnow was never lost.

Obviously,my moment on first encountering George Hiroses photographs is not to be compared in intensity or magnitude. Nonetheless, hisprints offered an epiphany. I was brought back to that night in Provincetownsome sixty-four years ago, and Hiroses collection soon stimulated my friends,Michael Lennon and Christopher Busa. They, too, agreed that the work is mostspecial and should be put out as a book. These prints have so much to say aboutthe quality of nights in Provincetown today. Indeed, such a book might yet be seenas its own kind of counterpart to Joel Meyerowitzs remarkable daytime shots inhis book *Cape Light*. We certainly had no doubt that this work could bring pleasure to allthe year-rounders, summer inhabitants, and first-time day-trippers who fellunder the legitimate spell of our streets.

Letme offer, then, my praise to these photographs. If they offer, as I haveindicated,

a magical recall of a night back in 1943 that provided me inturn with a sense of an eighteenth-century evening, this is not to suggest thatthat is how the town appears today. However, it is true that Provincetownhasnt changed as shamelessly and as corporately as other American small townsin these last decades; it did not go along with their conscience- less devotionto stucco office buildings, parking malls, and condominiums with in-builtmonotonies. Nor do we have new glitzy hotelsghastly in their lack ofimagination. High-rises and supermarkets do not dominate the core of the town.Our place is still unique, and late at night, in quiet off-season time it canstill stimulate some reminiscence of our past.

Nonetheless,George Hiroses photographs are contemporary. After midnight, many lamps arestill on in town, and one can often see in his prints a line of light etched bya car as it comes around a turn. The composer of these photographs was ready toaccept whatever unforeseen changes occurred after opening his camera shutter,as his pictures often required a many-second exposure. Hirose works only with available light;he illuminates none of his settings with auxiliary aids. Like Joel Meyerowitz,he is a photographer with the instincts of a hunter. One stalks the desiredresult, one waits, one does not dictate the given, one looks rather to meet it.

Ithink these photographs are exceptional. They capture Provincetown at night,and each occasion is there in all its privacy, its mystery, its pastfor, yes,some of these photographs do retain echoes of how the town looked then in1943and yet they are always contemporary. Rare,

then, is the print in thiscollection that does not speak of years gone by as well as of the present.

BlueNights. The blue of night spans past and present. How fine is George Hiroses work.

NORMANMAILER, 2007

Blue Nights: Photographs by George Hirose Provincetown Arts Press 2008

Blue Nights: Project Art Statement

When I first visited Provincetown several years ago, I felt immediately that it was an exceptional place; a complex integration of social, political, and artistic communities set in one of the oldest, and most beautiful European settlements in North America. I became fascinated by its strong connection to the past, its enduring and historic architecture, and the energy of its contemporary society.

Although I've been traveling to Provincetown since the 90's, I first began photographing the town at night in 2003. Provincetown became a visual magnet, and I came to know its streets and homes as identified by the darkness. I would sometimes feel surreally transported as I walked through the town late at night, searching for quiet signs of life; houses with lit windows or open doors, ghostly figures, streaks of headlights, and other mysteries that emerge after dark. History seems omnipresent in this town, and in the clash between new and old, the ghosts of the past persist - especially at night.

George Hirose 5/07