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Piepenbring, Dan. "Alec Soth's *Niagara*, Annotated," *The Paris Review*, November 26, 2014.

the PARIS REVIEW 

Alec Soth's *Niagara*, Annotated



WHY DO THE FALLS SIMULTANEOUSLY ATTRACT LOVERS AND SUICIDALS?

"Why do the falls simultaneously attract lovers and suicides?"

As we mentioned on Monday, next week PEN American Center presents "First Editions, Second Thoughts," an auction of seventy-five annotated first editions at Christie's New York, including work by Philip Roth, Don DeLillo, and Jane Smiley, among others. The proceeds will benefit PEN, a writers' association dedicated to protecting free expression.

PEN shared with us a few of the annotated pages from the photographer Alec Soth's second monograph, *Niagara* (2006), which features pictures of the falls and the people who visit them: newlyweds and lovers in a milieu of motels, parking lots, and pawnshops, the unlikely venues for human desire. The prolific Soth has appeared on the *Daily* in many forms over the years; there are few photographers whose work is so consistently compelling, so intimate. (*Art in America* has a smarter take: "Perhaps more than any other contemporary photographer, Soth understands the tension between art and document inherent in the photographic medium. Situating his work between these two tendencies, he has created surprisingly personal metaphors for the collective hopes and anxieties governing post-9/11 America.")

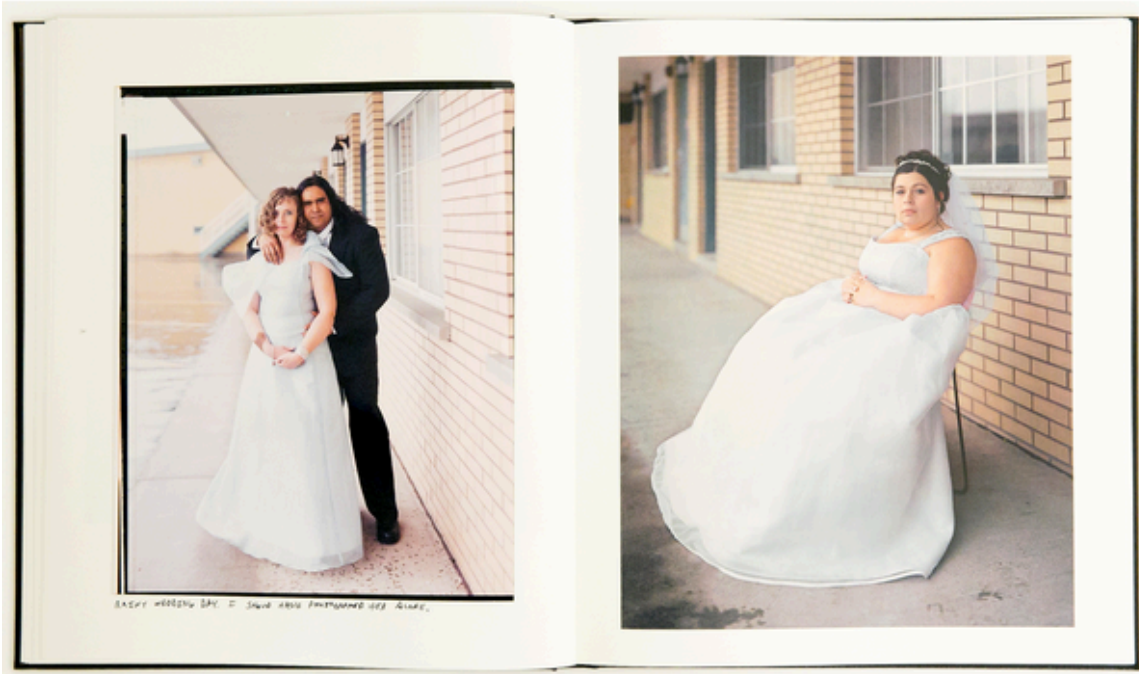
The annotated edition of *Niagara* finds Soth captioning his photos with canny asides, some contemplative and some rueful. ("I should've photographed her alone," he writes below a picture of a newlywed couple at a motel.) He's also supplied—and glued onto the book's blank pages—several unseen photos from the same sessions, usually with notes as to why they were left out of the monograph; it adds up to an engaging look at his composition and selection process. Here are a few more photos of the edition:



“Chantelle had a giant portrait of herself over her bed.”



“My primary interest when photographing couples is to see how they hold each other.”



“Rainy wedding day. I should’ve photographed her alone.”