In a newly discovered cache of photographs, Norma Jeane morphs into an enduring American icon. Here is an exclusive first look.

**BY DAVID GATES**

In some alternate universe, Marilyn Monroe, who did not die 40 years ago this week, remains a contemporary and relevant—if reclusive—figure. Saved by an “It’s a Wonderful Life” intervention as she sat staring at the pill bottle (Bobby Kennedy was her Clarence), she went on Prozac and swore off men. In 1965, she won the Oscar for best supporting actress, playing Gertrude in Roman Polanski’s still-edgy “Hamlet,” with James Dean as the Prince, Humphrey Bogart as Claudius.
and Sal Mineo as Ophelia; in her acceptance speech, she announced her retirement.

Now 76, she continues to run her home for abused children, and the only photographs of herself she permits are snap-shots with Norma’s Kids.

But the real Marilyn Monroe (now there’s an oxymoron for you) belongs ineradicably to the post-World War II world, like the H-bomb and the tail fin. Starting in 1943, when she was 19 and unknown, a photographer named Andre de Dienes took thousands of pictures of her; many—including those in this issue of NEWSWEEK—have rarely been seen by anyone. And what once were cheesecake shots have taken on documentary weight: these images, catching Norma Jean as she mutates to “Marilyn,” make her seem as remote and historical as a Gibson Girl. We still have versions of the Marilyn syndrome—women living up to, even parodying, men’s bizarre and contradictory perceptions of them—but nowhere in a form so pure and naive. The sweetly corrupt style of self-representation to which she aspired now seems both too coy and too raw. In an essay from a new collection, “All the Available Light: A Marilyn Monroe Reader,” the novelist Catherine O’Connor writes that American men “long to lose control and be seduced by a voluptuous and gloriously curvy goddess, pillow soft and squishy, vulnerable and innocent, yet bursting with female magnetism, who will dominate them and initiate them into the mysteries of sex.” But what American man wants to cop to that anymore?

Today, that scene in “Some Like It Hot” where Monroe crawls all over Tony Curtis makes you wince and squirm in a way that honest, businesslike pornography no longer does. We like it cold: a triple-X DVD “starring” pseu-
Almost everyone who writes about Norma Jeane points out that "Marilyn" was a constructed persona: the overtight clothes, the breathy voice, the bleached hair, the very body: as essayist Dennis Grunes notes in "All the Available Light," her iconic breasts "were no more than average size ... but generous padding made Marilyn seem 'better' endowed—enormous even."

This thoroughgoing self-invention is what endures. Who doesn't project a constructed persona? Not just "Regis Philbin," "Britney Spears" and "George W. Bush," but you and me, putting something plausible together for colleagues, friends, spouses, airport security. Our own impersonations, those largely incoherent works in progress, are what connect us to Norma Jeane. Humans can't stop Marilynizing any more than they can stop breathing. Is there any real difference between our compulsion for self-impersonation and hers? Maybe one. In the end, it made her sick to death.

For more Marilyn photographs, go to Newsweek.MSNBC.com

**TEN ESSENTIAL MONROE MOVIES**

Her blondes were bad or sweet, funny or dumb, but always stunners.

1. All About Eve (1950)
2. Don't Bother to Knock (1952)
3. Clash by Night (1952)
4. Niagara (1953)
5. Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1953)
6. How to Marry a Millionaire (1953)
7. The Seven Year Itch (1955)
8. Bus Stop (1956)
9. Some Like It Hot (1959)
10. The Misfits (1961)