

00:06:14:00 WILLSDON: Okay. So let me say a little bit about how this is going to work, the structure we tried to put together here. This project really has a process that lasts over several months, really. The first step of this was to commission some short texts from our participants, sort of [?] 500-word texts, addressing a question, which we posted online. So what we wanted to do there was really, in a way, almost survey this group, all of whom have investments in photography, of quite different kinds, to get a sense of what urgency there might be in the question and in the topic.

00:06:57:00 And it's really out of those texts that we tried to kind of craft this event. So what we're going to do is, tonight is just the first session. And the job of tonight is really to come up with, collectively, the most urgent questions, aspects of this topic. And those questions are going to go forward— [sneeze in background] Bless you.

00:07:23:00 WILLSDON (Cont.): Those questions will go forward to tomorrow. There's a closed workshop in the morning. I don't know why I'm even telling you that. [laughter] There's a closed workshop in the morning. And this group will then develop that further, and then bring that back to a larger, longer session tomorrow afternoon, two p.m. till five p.m. And we want that to be a full— I mean, kind of a plenary session, involving everybody.

00:07:50:00 So tonight we have thirteen participants. We have essentially two panels within this session. And as I say, the job is really to come up with the task or tasks for tomorrow. So now I'm going to hand [it] over to my colleague Erin O'Toole, who's going to introduce this first group of speakers.

00:08:12:00 ERIN O'TOOLE: Thank you, Dominic. It's my great pleasure to introduce our first group of participants. To my far left here is Peter Galassi, who has been the chief curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York since 1991. He's organized numerous exhibitions, the most recent of which is the anticipated

O'TOOLE (Cont.): *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century*, which is now on view at MoMA, and happily, will travel here to SFMOMA in November of this year.

00:08:44:00 Next to him is Blake Stimson, who teaches art history and critical theory at UC Davis. His book *The Pivot of the World: Photography and Its Nation* was published by MIT in 2006. And in 2008, he co-edited the anthology *The Meaning of Photography* for the Clark Institute and Yale University Press.

00:09:07:00 Next to him is Joel Snyder, who is a professor and chair of the department of art history at the University of Chicago. He is co-editor of the journal *Critical Inquiry*, and writes on photography, the theory of representation, and the history and theory of perspective and optics.

00:09:24:00 Next to me is Douglas Nickel, who is the Andrea V. Rosenthal Professor of Modern Art at Brown University, where he teaches the history of photography. He was a cue here at SFMOMA for ten years, starting in 1993; and following that, was the director of the Center for Creative Photography, in Tucson.

00:09:44:00 Over here we have Vince Aletti, who was the former art editor and photography critic for the *Village Voice*, and now reviews photography exhibitions for the *New Yorker*, and photography books for *Photograph* magazine. He also has experience in the curatorial realm. In 2009, he was the co-curator of the International Center of Photography's Year in Fashion.

00:10:06:00 Next to him is my colleague Corey Keller, who is an associate curator of photography here at SFMOMA. And she has organized exhibitions on both nineteenth century and contemporary subjects for the museum, and is currently organizing retrospective surveys of the work of Francesca Woodman and J.B. Greene.

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00:10:25:00 O'TOOLE (Cont.): And last but not least, we have Philip-Lorca diCorcia, also known as P.L., who is a photographer whose work has been collected and exhibited by museums around the world. Most recently, he had monographic exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, and at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. He also holds the position of chief critic at the graduate school of art at Yale, from which he received his MFA in 1979.

00:10:56:00 And we'd like to begin the proceedings by asking Corey Keller to elaborate a little bit on the motivation behind asking this question, is photography over. Corey.

00:11:11:00 COREY KELLER: Well, the question is admittedly a blunt instrument. And it was intended as a deliberate provocation. We're aware of the sort of inflammatory of the question. But I think it's, I hope, not quite as ham-fisted as it might appear at first. We deliberately left it a little vague, and we were gratified to see how many people immediately took up the vagueness of that question by immediately saying, Well, we have to define what photography is, and we have to define what over is.

00:11:43:00 Which already sets up— And I think that those are actually really important questions, more than mere semantics. We did, I should point out, deliberately avoid the use of the word dead, although we got a lot of RSVPs for Is Photography Dead. [laughs] But we went with over, for very specific reasons. What's also appealing to me about the question is how many people I've spoken to in preparation for this and how many people assume they know exactly what we're asking.

00:12:12:00 And how few of them would agree, actually, on what that is. It really has opened up to a huge number of interests in photography, whether it's the digital versus chemical or the place of art photography within the museum or the academy. I mean, it really opens up onto a huge number of interests in photography. I also was sort of—

KELLER (Cont.): I'm not sure if I'm tickled or depressed that so many people seem to have thought that we were asking it because we thought the answer was yes. [laughter] Quite frankly, it would be much easier for me to write my two-week letter of resignation than it would be to organize a symposium like this.

00:12:49:00 But we really think it's a question worth asking. And I guess that since we started with the assumption that is a sort of blunt instrument, we might make it a little more nuanced for the purpose of this conversation. Which is to say if there's something over in photography, what is it? And really, most importantly, does it matter?

ERIN O'TOOLE: Does anyone want to start? [laughter]

00:13:14:00 JOEL SYNDER: Well, I'm not a practicing necrophiliac, [laughter] but I think it might be— The world of photography has obviously precipitated into extremes. The extremely throw-away, the extremely precious, and the rest that are waiting to figure out which one they are of the other two. And it seems that the digital part of it is the easiest thing to attack, because that's the cheap means to do something disposable. And the precious part seems to be the easy part to attack, as well because that's the part that seems to want to align itself with other mediums in order to validate itself.

00:14:10:00 So I think in a way, if we're forming questions here, it's whether or not there's any possibility that this can be integrated; that the throw-away can be precious and the precious can be thrown away.

00:14:34:00 WILLSDON: I mean, you're raising there the question of the digitization right at the beginning. And I have to say that when we looked at the texts that everyone submitted, we were rather surprised how that didn't turn out to be— didn't emerge as the central issue. It was touched upon in different ways and I think—

WILLSDON (Cont.): Not that we thought it was the central issue, but I think we thought that many people interested in this event would expect that that's what the event was about.

00:15:11:00 I mean, Joel, in what way is this— I mean, because what you described was much more to do with uses of photography and art than anything to do with how the technology might have changed.

00:15:26:00 SNYDER: Yeah. I don't know really how to grab onto this. I'll do it by way of a class I teach. If you look at the early history of photography and the language in which the inventors and the first responders to the inventors phrased their descriptions of what photography was, the word mechanical comes up over and over again. And I admit that it was a flaw in me as a reader not to have picked up, for maybe fifteen or twenty years, that by mechanical, they did not mean using a machine.

00:16:10:00 Mechanical was a way of talking about copying. And it comes out of Reynolds, Sir Joshua and Poussin and a very large number of writers and artistic pedagogy— writer of artistic pedagogy and so on. And the idea is that what a copy is, is a direct description of what you see in front of you. It's limited to the visible. As Poussin said, "Any animal can do this." And he's really tough on sketchers who are not artists. But what separates a mechanical drawing from a work of art is its incorporation of ideas. And the thing that—this is true on both sides of the North Sea—the point is that when you look at nature, you don't see ideas.

00:17:14:00 So if you're just copying, you can't get ideas into the picture and all you've got is a copy that's dumb. That could be perfectly valuable for some purposes, but not for art. And that was the initial inheritance of photography. So photography is a copying medium. And what then happens, as I read the part of the history of photography that I like reading, is that you run into a group of people who want to be

SNYDER (Cont.): artist-photographers. And that gets done by cutting and pasting and composing. Literally composing. That's what composing meant, bringing things together.

00:17:54:00 So Robinson and Rejlander and snip, snip, snip. And this goes on for quite some time, until around the time that Weston starts writing about photography seriously. And he comes up with the notion that photography's a conceptual art, and that the picture is made before it's taken; and the photographer calls the shots to the world, and not the other way around. And now he seems to be on the side of Reynolds. He seems to have finally figured out a way to get ideas into photographs.

00:18:26:00 And what I dislike about the way that a lot of people talk about digital photography is that finally, we can get our hands and minds into photographs. We do this in the same way that artists do, by cutting and pasting and pushing and pulling and merging and morphing—whatever. And that seems to me to sort of sidestep what's interesting about photography and interesting about other kinds of graphic art. The problem has been—and this is the fault of people like myself—we've not been able to explain very well how you can get ideas into pictures. Unless you believe in preconception and pre-visualization and so on. And of course, most photographers don't practice that. So when you turn to digitization, it looks like: Finally, you can get handwork in and you can get thought in, in this good old-fashioned way.

00:19:32:00 PHILIP-LORCA DiCORCIA: I thought the pictorialists were all about that. I don't know why we had to wait for Photoshop.

SNYDER: Oh, absolutely. I mean, most people think— Or let me not put thoughts in your head. A lot of people think that you couldn't take astronomical photographs until there were—

DiCORCIA: Rocket ships.

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00:19:55:00 SNYDER: And Hubble telescopes and things like that. And that you couldn't visualize with photography. But astronomers have been visualizing the world—well, not the world, outside the world—for a hundred years. And that is to say, they're representing things that nobody can see, with any kind of magnification or whatever—it's just unseeable. So why doesn't that constitute a form of an imagined universe? Not a copy of anything. Because it's not a copy of anything, it's a creative picture.

00:20:28:00 SNYDER (Cont.): But you're quite right. Except the problem, I think, goes back to the notion that if somebody can conceive of a picture as being made, throw out this, throw out that—and digitization seems to allow that—then it looks like something new. And that brings to mind—and I'll stop with this. There is a book called—don't read it, if you run into it. [laughter] I love—

MAN: Is that the title? [laughter]

MAN: It could be a long list. [laughter]

00:21:01:00 SNYDER: No, no, no, no, no, no, no. I love photographic printing processes. I truly love them. And it makes it into a commodity fetishist that I've got to tell you that in fact, there are a lot of processes I love and a lot of people I know. But in any case, this book is called *Bromoil and Transfer*. And it's about the bromoil process. And in—

WILLSDON: Doug's read it.

DOUGLAS NICKEL: It's a good book.

SNYDER: Who else would? [laughter]

DiCORCIA: It's in his bathroom. [inaudible voices]

00:21:36:00 SNYDER: In any case, there's a captioned picture, a beautiful little picture of sheep in a meadow. And the author, who also made the picture, writes, "Sheep in meadow, excess sheep removed." [laughter] And you look at it and you look it, it's absolutely seamless. It's just like Photoshop. Of course, people have been doing SNYDER (Cont.): that kind of thing with photography since the beginning of photography. And getting away with it.

DiCORCIA: Well, tableaux were the first, you know, combo prints. And when did they—I mean, I'm not a historian, but that was a while ago. I mean, it seems like the issue is mechanical—I mean, if it has no moving parts, does that make it mechanical? No, it's that it's not a process inimical to or integral to human practice.

00:22:35:00 DOUG NICKEL: technology can be a distraction, and something of a red herring, which is perhaps the reason why so many of us avoided the issue in our responses. Because ultimately, it isn't what technologies are developed and what they do, but what we value about the technologies at any particular point. As members of culture, as practicing artists or image makers, we can reject a technology just as easily as we can embrace it. So having— To reframe Joel's question, it isn't what digital does for photography now, it's why is anybody using it? If it didn't do something that was valued, it wouldn't be adopted. It would fall flat. So those specifically photographic qualities that I think he wants to identify, and which I would like to talk about also, had value, as well.

00:23:31:00 Aesthetics were drawn out of them, manifestos were written around them. The idea of medium specificity was important. And I think the word mechanical is also problematic because ultimately, for those of us that like photography, or what photography was, the mechanical doesn't quite capture what was important about the

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NICKEL (Cont.): medium. The Shroud of Turin is mechanical, in Joel's definition. But it's also miraculous. And that's what we care about. [laughter] If it were real.

SNYDER: Oh, yeah. [laughs] Okay.

MAN: Hard to compete with that one.

MAN: Yeah. [laughs]

00:24:13:00 NICKEL: And I think that's what we feel about photography, as well. That there was something— I think, in other words, the anxiety that we feel around the question being posed has something to do with a fear of this thing that we loved disappearing.

00:24:30:00 SNYDER: Disappearing? Really?

NICKEL: Being eroded.

SNYDER: It's not going away. It's just not what it used to be.

00:24:41:00 O'TOOLE: Well, I think to go back to Corey's question, is if there is something that is over, what is it then? Because obviously, there is a great deal of anxiety over something. And if photography is not over, then is there something about it that is over?

00:25:00:00 VINCE ALETTI: I have to say, I never had any sense of anxiety until I was asked this question. [laughter] And I don't actually feel very anxious about it now.

MAN: [inaudible].

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ALETTI: I think anybody who spends time with photography, there's no question that it's vital and valid and ongoing and it's not going anywhere. It may be changing, the definitions of what people look for in photography, may be changing, but the idea that photography is over is absurd.

00:25:37:00 NICKEL: If you used Kodachrome or Polaroid, you'd have anxiety.

ALETTI: [laughs] Well, yes. Now, I understand. You know, I think certain parts of the medium are certainly being taken away. And I think that's one of the things that occurred to me, too as I was trying to answer this question. The idea that the darkrooms are disappearing, I find really disturbing. But that doesn't mean that we're not going to be seeing pictures for as long as we live.

00:26:04:00 WILLSDON: So what's in that feeling of being disturbed? Corey, actually, you once actually talked about the idea of people now are talking about analog photography, as if there was just some other kind of photography, was—what did you say, horrific or something?

KELLER: Yes. [laughter]

00:26:21:00 WILLSDON: So yeah, we're saying it's disturbing, we're saying something's horrific. I mean, that points to a feeling of the loss of something valuable for you.

00:26:36:00 ALETTI: Well, yeah. The idea that the history that I still relate to—the darkroom, the process of making the photo, the whole hands-on sense of the photographer working with the medium—is changing. I mean, that in itself is not—doesn't mean it's over in any way, but people are working digitally with just the same amount of engagement and excitement that they had before. But I guess I don't like the idea of one thing displacing something else completely.

00:27:14:00 DICORCIA: But if the end product is something that is—and photography has gotten away from this—meant to elicit some sort of a response, be it aesthetic or emotional, what difference does it make how it gets there? And whether you use your iPhone Polaroid app or you actually use Polaroid, is it a significant difference? I mean, it seems like one aspect of old techniques—and it's a negative one, in my mind—is that it's nostalgic. And nostalgia is, in my mind, a negative adjective. Or nostalgic. Sorry.

WILLSDON: Corey?

00:28:11:00 KELLER: Well, from a practical point of view, I can say one of the things that I do in my job is I look at a lot of photographs, many of which come in through portfolio review. And I mean, I think that one consequence has been an incredible decline in quality, actually, I would say, in the prints that we see. Photographers who don't know how to make their own prints anymore don't know what a good one looks like. And while of course there are exceptions, we see a lot of works as jpegs, for example. We get all excited about them and we're so excited about the image; and then when we actually see the object that we might think about acquiring or putting on the wall, we're not interested anymore because what was exciting about that image is completely distracted by[?] by the quality of the print. So I know that puts me in the really old school camp, but I'm okay.

DiCORCIA: [inaudible] Ansel Adams, what are the other ones on that list? [laughter]

KELLER: Yeah. I'm alright. I'll stake my flight[?] with them. I'm alright there.

00:29:08:00 SNYDER: Corey, have you ever looked hard at some albumin prints by Julia Margaret Cameron?

KELLER: Yes.

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SNYDER: Complete with the fly pieces...

KELLER: Absolutely. Absolutely.

SNYDER: ...that she manages— Yeah, and the dust. Or Diane Arbus' incapacity, or Walker Evans' incapacity to print decently? And what of them? Why are my Walker Evans prints not worth anything, but Walker Evans' dog prints are worth something?

00:29:34:00 KELLER: I mean, it is admittedly—

SNYDER: Oh!

KELLER: I mean, it's a question— I mean, I totally hear what you're saying. But if I see one more sky with pink dots all over it, I think I'm just going to scream.

MAN: You're missing the point of the picture, obviously.

KELLER: Obviously. [laughter]

00:29:48:00 DICORCIA: There's a lot of willful amateurism in contemporary photography. And you know, it's as if you don't have to take responsibility for what you're doing because it's sloppy. I mean, it does bring up the— strangely, the more amateurish you are, the higher you aim your ambition. I mean, I bet your average— whatever you want to call them—amateur, with a digital camera, actually cares what it looks like. Your average amateurish artist is attempting to use that as a stylistic overlay to basically, I think, evade having to be clear about what they're doing. But that's beside the point.

00:30:51:00 KELLER: No, I mean, there's certainly artists who deliberately use a de-skilled approach to their work.

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DICORCIA: Well, that's a new—

KELLER: That's a new word, yeah. De-skilled. But as a conceptual approach.

DICORCIA: Is that like skill challenged? [laughter]

SNYDER: Yes. Yes. That's exactly right, yeah.

O'TOOLE: Peter, do you want to weigh on this a little bit? I have the feeling that you don't want—

00:31:12:00 PETER GALASSI: PL, I can't believe you spent all this time at Yale and you haven't heard de-skilled.

KELLER: Yeah.

[inaudible voice; laughter]

00:31:21:00 GALASSI: Well, I'm not anxious about photography. I'm not the least bit horrified or disturbed that anything is disappearing. I think photography's going to be around for a long time. I think that maybe part of the problem is that we should make a distinction between photography and talking about photography. And photography can do *really* well without being talked about. That's one of the great lessons of the rise of the great modern traditions of photography in the twentieth century. I don't mean that there wasn't a certain amount of chit-chat around the edges, some of it written even very eloquently by the photographers themselves.

00:32:14:00 But essentially, this was a great artistic tradition that evolved without requiring...

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MAN: Theory.

GALASSI: ...cultural institutions or theory. It was a very rich tradition. And it was all mixed up with where artistic character and worldly practical function were so completely wrapped into each other. You know, you could make a decent case that the best photographer we've had so far still is Atget, and he wasn't an artist. So I think that maybe part of the problem that raises anxieties and so forth with panels like all of this, is that there's no problem that you can solve by talking. [laughter]

00:33:08:00 You have to make something. And we don't do that. Well, P.L. does, very well.

WILLSDON: We could feel the problem more deeply by talking. [laughter]

00:33:21:00 GALASSI: No, no, you can *make* the problem deeper by talking about it. [laughter]

WILLSDON: [inaudible]

00:33:28:00 KELLER: Then the discussion is over.

STIMSON: Clearly not a believer in the talking cure.

WILLSDON: So Blake, can I ask you, because in the text that you wrote for us, on one hand, you talk about photography being actually at a new beginning; but that's partly because you're talking about a quite fundamental shift in, I guess, the place of photography in the world. So something's over and something is beginning for you.

BLAKE STIMSON: Yeah, I guess so. I mean, I was thinking about what Joel was saying about teaching the history of photography. And this is something I do on a

STIMSON (Cont.): regular basis. And of course, one of the things that most people who teach the history of photography do is they, maybe early on in the course, they'll show pictures of enthusiasm about photography in its first decade. So there's a great cartoon called Daguerreotypomanie, right? Which shows throngs of people crowding the streets of Paris and lining up at photographers' shops because they all want to get their photograph taken.

00:34:34:00 Or you talk about the carte de visite phenomenon a decade or so later, where it became a real social phenomenon for people to have these multiple pictures of themselves taken and then to share them with their friends. And of course, one of the ways this gets talked about in a classroom these days is to say, well, this was nineteenth century Facebook. This was a social medium of its day. So one of the thing that interests me most and that I tried to focus on in my little piece here was just that we can think about the technology in two ways.

00:35:13:00 So one way to think about it is it's like the Shroud of Turin. It does this magical thing. And that was what was so fabulous about it, this magical image. But another key element, a central element and part of what's *always* been part of photography, since the very beginning, is that it's an amazing social medium. Right? It's an amazing way to have more people have more pictures, to share those pictures; and it has a very substantial effect, as such.

00:35:48:00 So I guess my interest in thinking about whether photography is over now is more to think about that social medium quality of it. Well, first of all, before I say that, we might think about the Shroud of Turin quality of it to be something like a contested site now. One of the things I talk about in my class, also is the way in which these days, of course, we all have our photographs taken probably thousands of times a day. Every time you go into a shop, every time you go through an intersection, you have your photograph taken. And presumably, all those photographs are out there

STIMSON (Cont.): circulating in the world somewhere, circulating on the internet, and they're part of what photography is now.

00:36:32:00 So we could think about that technology—if we think of that as a form of surveillance, for good or bad, however we feel about that—as being something that we want to attend to. And we want to contest, we want to push it in the direction of good, whatever that direction is. So the same thing might be said about its social quality, the way it exists as a Facebook-like phenomenon, a social medium. And the social life of photography is something that can sort of spin in different directions. It can spin in a way that's in our control, that we have a sense of autonomy in relationship to it, or it can spin in other directions that we might feel like we have less of a control.

00:37:17:0 So if we think about the idea of photography now, and we're thinking about it largely, on this panel, at least, it seems, thinking about it in the context of art, what art photography would be. One of the ways to think about what art can do is to attend to those contests. Right? The contest over the surveillance issue, for example, or the contest over what photography as a social medium now might mean. And I ended in my little piece by, in a very unsatisfying way, even to me, making some reference to Facebook and suggesting something like, Well, there's something that's a little bit—even though Facebook's so fabulous in so many ways, there's something that's a little unsatisfying about it.

00:38:02:00 There's a way in which it sort of feels like a consumer experience. Right? It doesn't quite feel like a family photo album. Right? It doesn't have that same kind of social life to it, quite in the same way. It feels a little bit more like shopping. Or it feels a little bit more like a Hallmark card version, where you have a prefab card that you write your personal note in, but it's still a Hallmark card. Right? And so my idea was, well, this is maybe something that art photography or photography as an art form can attend to, is that social dimension that has always been so central to the meaning of

STIMSON (Cont.): photography. So that doesn't really answer the question of whether or not it's over, but that's my piece.

00:38:51:00 MAN: Is somebody just choking or about to say something?

DICORCIA: I think that the jargon part, it has sur— To address what Peter said, kind of— I mean, I get the point that the whole language, the lexicon that got taken from philosophy, was a way, I think, of legitimizing ideas. But you know, it's sort of like this— I know I'm going to get this wrong. Ideas about thoughts are different than thoughts about ideas. And you can just cut it so many times, you know. Supposedly, whatever they— What do they call it? Circling a square?

GALASSI: Squaring a circle.

00:39:45:00 DiCORCIA: You know? It's supposedly infinite. But it's doing the same thing, and the end result is kind of the same. And I guess it was a kind of way of intellectually sexing up photography. And unfortunately, it seemed to wind up sounding like a gynecology manual or something, and it didn't really do it. I mean, I find that it's a distancing— It may have helped to understand issues that were either directly or peripherally related to photography and its consumption. But in the end, I don't think it did something which furthered what could be considered nobler ambitions for a media[sic].

00:40:31:00 And in my mind, this idea of social interaction has very much to do with the fact that it is a realistic medium, and it does, in some way, affect you on a personal, emotional level, often, which other mediums do not. And to overly abstract it sometimes allows, in my mind, the eclipse of what is— You know, I don't think people pass around paintings, I don't care how good they are, and weep about them. But they do that with photographs. And they're very affecting. And I don't think the word affect is often brought up in art. But it is *always* brought up in photography. And I think that

DiCORCIA (Cont.): will never end, and it will be to its— you know, it'll energize it forever, whether it be on Facebook or whatever.

00:41:35:00 NICKEL: I'm a little worried about the sweeping generalizations that we're already making here. I mean, picking out a bad digital print as representative of what's wrong with digital photography or— I think that we could have an interesting discussion about what qualifies as a good image, a successful image; we could have an interesting discussion about what qualifies as a good and interesting thought; but I wouldn't want to sit here and make a proposal that we not share those thoughts and talk about whether they're good ones or not so good, anymore than suggest that because some photographs are bad, photography's bad. That just doesn't seem very productive as a line of reasoning.

00:42:27:00 SNYDER: I feel it's harder to— [laughter] I feel like an exotic up here. [laughter] Gee. I spit on your thought. [laughter] Well, I spit on your lack of thought. I mean, the two of you; it's quite extraordinary. [laughter]

GALASSI: I didn't do any spitting.

SNYDER: Or I saw the French sneer on your face, Peter.

00:42:58:00 Snyder: You guys are romantics. You're Hemingways. You get too close to it, you start talking about it, the next thing you know you're going to think you understand it; but it really grips you by the guts. And it's at the level of the guts that you just don't need to talk about it.

DiCORCIA: That doesn't look like my guts. [laughter]

Snyder: Wherever you grab. [laughter] And the rank anti-intellectuality of it is disturbing. I'm a teacher, I'm sorry.

DiCORCIA: Rank?

SNYDER: Rank.

DiCORCIA: Come on.

00:43:34:00 SNYDER: It's sort of bargain basement level. I mean, it's quite extraordinary. It's not so easy to think. Thinking is a form of doing. It really is. Talking is a form of doing. You can get people to do all kinds of things by talking to them. You can explain things to them. If I didn't think that, I'd get out of the business. [inaudible voice] Well, thank you. One vote. [laughter]

00:44:01:00 But look, let me just come back to a couple of facts about me. I grew up in Brooklyn. My parents wanted me to know Manhattan very well. We learned Brooklyn just by walking through it every day. And so I used to go to the Museum of Modern Art and to the Met. And I fell in love with photography at, not the Met, but the Museum of Modern Art, when old Captain Eddie, I think, was still in charge of the operation. [laughter] And one of the things that I fell in love with—and I'm an unreconstructable Modernist—is that in looking at a photograph that someone's calling to your attention because that person is teaching you something about what you ought to be looking at and thinking about—you could reject it, but it was up on the wall and followed a thoughtful decision for putting it up on the wall—one of the things that you could do is to look at a photograph and see people.

00:45:02:00 See people you hated, see people you love, the forces— Whatever. You could guess. Realistic— But one of the things that you were *supposed* to get out of it, or at least *I* got out of it, was that at the same time you were learning something from the picture about the world, you were learning something about photography. So that— And this is what I take Modernism and photography to be about. It's that every picture that belongs in the tradition, the canon, up on a wall, is itself there because it's teaching

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SNYDER (Cont.): you something about photography. And something, if the photographer's really good—Robert Frank—you didn't even know was possible until you saw those photographs. That's dead. I believe that's what's over. That's what I argued in—

00:45:51:00 GALASSI: Why? Why is that dead? What's the punctum[?]?

MAN: Where's the punctum?

MAN: Why is it over?

[inaudible voices over each other]

GALASSI: Joel, why is that dead?

NICKEL: I mean, it's not dead, it's swamped.

GALASSI: Why is it swamped?

SNYDER: Look, I first met Dominic at the Tate Modern. I went to give a talk there. And it was in honor of the first photographic show that the Tate Modern had ever put up. So in a certain way, it was a wonderful show, because I got to see things that I adore, or didn't know I was going to adore, and that's always a wonderful reason for going to a museum and seeing an exhibit. The name of the exhibit, as I call, was *Cruel and Tender*. It sounds like an Elvis Presley song, but in fact, it's something that Lincoln Kirstein said about Walker Evans' photographs, they're cruel and tender.

00:46:43:00 The show began with a set of small photographs—and they were looking more and more precious to me as the show went on—by August Sander and Walker Evans. And they're among my favorite of all photographs. And then it went through, all

SNYDER (Cont.): the way up to the 2003's? Was that the year of the show? And the pictures got bigger and bigger and bigger. And what the curator of the show, or curators, were telling us is that all of these things are from the same medium, and they're all about—get this—reality. Hm. Now, there's a way to make an art. So what we're to do is forget everything that's changed in photography, everything that's changed in the world, and to recognize that August Sander needed real people in front of him, and Martin Parr, Rineke Dykstra also need real people in front of them.

00:47:46:00 And to miss the blatant truth of it, that when you look at these small pictures that were made to be published in books, it was a dream that they get published in books. There was no other place to exhibit them. So they're small, they're intimate, they're meant to be seen that far away. And imagine that those pictures answer to the same purposes, that the pictures—and I'm not putting them down—by Parr and Dijkstra and so on, answer to— is just— It completely boggles me. It boggles me at every level. Those pictures *aren't* connected. Some thoughtful historian may come around and figure out how you put these two things together, but right now the whole thing looks ruptured to me.

00:48:36:00 To think that something that is a work of photography, in the photographic medium, simply because it's made with cameras and film— It was never true before and it's not true now. Or with digital cameras or whatever. Just the—

GALASSI: Because some are made for the page and some are made for the wall?

00:48:59:00 SNYDER: No. Because what's made now for the wall is very different from what was being made in the twenties and the thirties and the forties, not for the wall.

GALASSI: Well, actually you mentioned Rineke Dijkstra. If you go to Andy Pilara's new place and you see Rineke Dijkstra's string up now, I think there're thirteen

GALASSI (Cont.): pictures of Almerisa from a little girl; now she's a mother. It's exactly the same vocabulary as Sander.

SNYDER: Exactly.

SNYDER: Okay, well, then we just [inaudible]

00:49:26:00 GALSSI: [over other] It's the vocabulary. They're in color, they're this big.

SNYDER: And talk about a social setting for photographs, you've just thrown it out. You've thrown out the history, you've thrown out—I mean, the world's changed, Peter.

GALASSI: I said the same vocabulary. Just the way—

SNYDER: Vocabulary. The same ands, these, is, buts, but what do you mean? You can't—

DiCORCIA: What does this have to do with morbidity?

00:49:53:00 SNYDER: I was arguing, just very briefly, that what people, young people, go to photographs for today is very different from what I went for when I was sixteen or eighteen. And that my students—I do one film course—adore *Spider-Man*—the films, not the cartoons—is an absolute astonishment to me, because these films are made both to dabble in what we used to think of as reality—Tobey Maguire is really there—and in cartoons. And they're going on simultaneously. And nobody who was thinking about films in the teens, twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, sixties thought that these two things could possibly live together.

00:50:44:00 SNYDER (Cont.): Cartoons are over there, and fiction films are over there, and trying to join them— Every now and then it was done as a stunt. But what the students today are looking for is something very different from what I was looking for. I could not have seen— I'm not old enough to have seen *Casablanca* in first release; but believe me, I did not want to see Bugs Bunny in there. It would've killed the whole point of the film. I think that sensibilities have changed remarkably, and I think the history has got to be taken into account, as well. The enterprise—

00:51:20:00 GALASSI: Let me respond, actually. Well, of course things change. I mean, culture changes.

SNYDER: But the vocabulary's stayed the same, you said.

GALASSI: Well, just the way somebody can write a novel now that uses the same English language as— But when Doug says swamped, I think that relates to a point. In 1890, Van Gogh dies; theoretically, by legend, having only sold one picture [inaudible]. Forty years later, MoMA is founded; forty-five years after that, [laughs] San Francisco MOMA is founded; institutions around the world are eventually founded to make sure that this never happens again. And what happens is that you have, for the first time, a huge institutional culture and machine, including all the universities and all the rest of that, that is devoted to the expectation that a new Van Gogh is going to arrive every two and a half weeks. So of course—

SNYDER: Not in my university.

00:52:28:00 GALASSI: And that machine— No, it's true. Chicago hasn't heard about this yet, but— [laughter; inaudible voices] But so that machine is going to run, no matter what you put in it. And so of course, there's a huge amount more— And there are all the schools that teach art to people, so that they get the degree so that they can

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GALASSI (Cont.): teach art to people. I'm just describing, I'm not saying this is a good or a bad thing. But it means that there's a lot more stuff in the pipeline.

MAN: Sounds like that[?]. I mean, it[?] doesn't sound happy.

00:53:08:00 WILLSDON: So here's a thought. We're going to—

MAN: [inaudible]

WILLSDON: No, not yet. We have another ten minutes, and we'll go to the next group. But I have a feeling that in this exchange, there's a kind of point of contention that we might want to take forward to tomorrow. I guess I wonder whether, in the account that you gave, Joel, in your remarks, the thing that's changed is the relationship between photography and art. That the photographs that you were talking about at the end of that show, *Cruel and Tender*, are photographs made as art, and just made as art with photographic techniques of one kind; but that previously, those earlier images were images that were made as photography, and without that relationship to art.

00:53:54:00 GALASSI: No. Walker Evans' great pictures were all made as works of art.

O'TOOLE: I think what he means is—and I don't mean to put words into your mouth—but that without a sense of the history of photography— would that be fair to say?

NICKEL: Working out of a tradition.

O'TOOLE: A tradition and that it's either blind to that or ignoring that or using photography to serve a conceptual end?

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00:54:22:00 ?: Well, certainly, Rineke Dijkstra is not blind to her history. So I'm not sure what—I totally don't understand.

SNYDER: Well, then I'll try and explain.

MAN: Uh-oh.

SNYDER: Well. [laughter] But [inaudible] examples, and I'm sure you've got plenty. When I go to art schools and talk to students studying now, either at the undergraduate or graduate level—and I'm slumming, of course, because we don't do this at the University of Chicago; very well, we don't, at any rate—I'm speaking to these young people, I ask them, first of all, are they photographers or are they artists? And they tell me very clearly, very quickly. The first photo class they have, they're asked exactly that question. Do you want to be photographers or do you want to be artists? Photographers over there, the artists over there. That's a distinction that they're living with, and we need to understand. Or begin to understand. When I ask these students who are artists—

00:55:20:00 MAN: That's [inaudible] and educator should do. He just wipe question off the map right away. I mean, that's your job.

GALASSI: [over other] It's a false distinction. It's a totally false distinction.

SNYDER: How many times do you think Edward Weston referred to himself as an artist? How many times do you—

MAN: And not a photographer?

00:55:33:00 GALASSI: Oh. Oh, Joel. Edward Weston knew he was an artist.

SYNDER: Alright, then we've got nothing to talk about. [laughter]

NICKEL: Well, I think the nomenclature's confusing us here. But I think there is something valid to suggest that Edward Weston was looking at a group of people around him who were interested in a set of what they would argue, purely photographic issues. And that other photographers came around and responded to what they did, feeling that they were part of a community working on a set of visual problems that had a kind of specificity to the medium. That's what they believed. I think that the Reineke Dykstras and more recent practitioners certainly are aware of that tradition. How can they not be aware of that tradition, as well? But they have a different investment in it. It's not the same as, say, Robert Frank's investment would have been.

00:56:26:00 SNYDER: What I was going to say—thanks, Doug—to finish the thought that I started with, was that if I ask the same people who line themselves up in terms of artist or photographer and ask them, How many of you look at books of photographs? How many of you know who Walker Evans is? You don't know how many shrugs I get. They're not interested. What they're interested in is what was done three weeks ago. Now, this may be true of artists for all time, I don't— The point is that to be a photographer in the old days meant something very different from what it means SNYDER (Cont.): now. And that's the only— I'm not saying good, bad; I'm just saying that a certain kind of photography is over.

00:57:07:00 And that's the photography in which was you did was pay attention to your tradition. And today we're without a tradition. The tradition was cooked to death. You needed a tradition, so you invented one. And there's nothing wrong with that, either. But that's gone.

DiCORCIA: So grad school killed its mother? Like it's an oedipal thing or something? I don't know, I mean, the argument seems to be something like, you know, the first guy to accidentally rub two sticks together and made fire, which was very useful and he gets a lot of history, you know, had it right; and everybody after him is a pyromaniac.
[laughter]

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00:57:53:00 KELLER: I don't like sitting next to you; you're very hard to follow.
[inaudible voices] But I would say, Joel, that I think there are people sitting in this audience who would disagree with you...

SNYDER: I would hope so.

KELLER: ...that that kind of photography is over. And I—

NICKEL: One of them has his hand up right now.

O'TOOLE: Yeah, right? [laughter] Yeah.

00:58:08:00 WILLSDON: I know this wasn't the idea for this evening, but for tomorrow; but let's take [inaudible]— Yeah.

NICHOLAS NIXON: It just seems—

SNYDER: Wait, artist or photographer? [laughter]

MAN: Digital or chemical?

NIXON: It seems to me that kind of what's in the air, but nobody's kind of at the[?] point yet—and I'm sure will—is that what makes [inaudible] as the Sanders is that we both trust that there's something [inaudible] person or event actually happened. No matter what the hijinks the photographer might [inaudible], we believe it [inaudible]. And I think part of [inaudible]. Every picture, A[?], before [inaudible] before five years ago because we trusted that some part of it actually happened. You know, and all my pictures [inaudible] need to trust that people were there, the event actually happened. I might have said [inaudible], but I didn't. I didn't put them the scanner and change the shape of their eyes, and therefore change the emotion of the picture. I can do that now if

NIXON (Cont.): I want to. And I don't think there's anything wrong with it. But I don't want to, because I think the picture [inaudible] it's too interesting a game to play when the subject's matter so much. And bringing something about the actor[?] that's authentic is part of the game.

00:59:29:00 GALASSI: Did you all hear that? [inaudible voices] Then, Erin, why don't you repeat for—

KELLER: Do you mind if we identify you? [inaudible voice] It's the photographer Nicholas Nixon, whose *Brown Sisters* series is on view on the second floor.

GALASSI: Yeah, but tell them all what he said. Otherwise it's not— No, it's not my—

O'TOOLE: You want to try?

00:59:47:00 GALASSI: Well, alright. The point is that— [laughter] no, that the power of the photography that we're talking about—Sander or Rineke Dijkstra—is the conviction that there was something there in front of the camera that wasn't invented, and that the picture is connected directly to that thing. I think that you're actually— that feeling, that visceral feeling, it's more of a feeling than a fact, because it turns out that, you know, a lot of the great Brassai pictures, for example, they're staged pictures. So it's not about— It's not a thing about are you lying or are you telling the truth; it's: are you making an effective picture? And I agree with you that— I mean, I don't know what everybody else thinks, but I agree with you about the feeling of your connection to the thing that was there. But that there are a lot of complicated— It isn't always so clear that it was just there.

01:00:56:00 NICKEL: And it's not technical. I mean, people could manipulate images since the get-go, so again, we're going to be distracted by that issue. The real question is, why did we believe that these pictures had an unimpeachable veridical

NICKEL (Cont.): relationship to their subject matter, ever? And why do we not believe that in the same way anymore? What's changed? It isn't the technology that's changed anything. If we didn't like the technology, we wouldn't have adopted the technology. So the technology's doing something that's useful now.

01:01:32:00 SNYDER: I mean, it seems to me it's also, why do we care about photography? I mean, it keeps coming back to that, in a way. Why do pictures mean something to us? And what do they mean? And for me, it's really, I think, you know, also to go to P.L., there is something important about the emotional content of pictures that I think is sort of disappearing, to some degree, these days. But it's some sense of connection to the work that really has some meaning. I don't know.

01:02:15:00 O'TOOLE: So I think we need to draw this panel to a close. And the idea was that we were going to come up with a question [laughter] that we were going to bring to—which seems very difficult at this moment—that we could agree upon for further discussion tomorrow; and the next panel is going to do the same thing, and that we're going to talk about both of those questions. So you feel like you have an idea?

01:02:45:00 WILLSDON: Well, myself? I thought there was something in the whole question of the continuity or discontinuity of photography as a tradition; and whether, or to what extent, the whole field of photography, as might be represented in an institution like this or an institution like Peter's, is being held together by a sort of institutional system reproducing itself. You know, even if there is no sort of— still some coherence in the medium itself.

01:03:17:00 O'TOOLE: What do members of the panel think, and what would you like to talk about tomorrow?

SNYDER: What I'm going to remember most is fire just isn't what it used to be; discuss. [laughter]

KELLER: Joel, one of the things you wrote to me in the email was a question, was: is there a narrative to be drawn that connects the history of photography; that as you, I think, put it together, was cobbled together by these sort of pioneers of the history of photography, to contemporary practice? Is there a story that makes sense, that can be drawn— Or is it worth even trying to construct such a story? I mean, you answered in your text differently than I would have anticipated from the way you wrote to me, actually. Which is interesting. But I think that that's a question worth asking. I mean, I think when you talked about this idea of tradition, and I said to you there are photographers in the room who would disagree that that kind of photography is dead. I think that there's really just not a story right now that works, that makes place for that kind of work.

01:04:26:00 While I would think everybody at this table thinks it's probably essential, otherwise we wouldn't be doing what we're doing. But there's not a narrative that's working right now, that makes sense of that kind of photography, along with what we would call sort of contemporary art practice.

01:04:45:00 NICKEL: So the question is why?

KELLER: Why?

NICKEL: And two proposals would be, one, there's some sort of a discrepancy of power. I mean, the traditional photographic camp that's always sold their pictures for \$200 apiece has been—

KELLER: Not anymore.

NICKEL: Well, now they're \$500 or \$1,000, but they're not \$5 million. So there's a perceived market/marketing aspect to this, where art that uses photography is seen as

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NICKEL (Cont.): more valuable and vital and contemporary than photographers addressing a photographic tradition. [inaudible].

01:05:25:00 GALASSI: But don't use the passive voice, Doug, "is seen as." You've got to say who's doing the seeing. I mean, if we're going to get into all this institutional money stuff and all the rest of that, then you've got to say who's who. Because otherwise, it doesn't— There's always somebody out there whose fault it is.

01:05:45:00 NICKEL: So one proposal would be, is there a two-class gallery system? Is that better? And another proposal would be that those who feel romantic or nostalgic about this thing that is over, that Joel's identifying, maybe they just need to live with that because there's a reason it's over; that it's defunct, it's exhausted.

01:06:11:00 WILLSDON: Okay, we're going to— [laughter; inaudible voices over each other]

WOMAN: Next. Next group. [laughter; applause; inaudible voices; comments between them as they break]