

SFMOMA
Is Photography Over? – Unedited Transcript
Day Two, Part Three, Friday, April 23, 2010

Transcriber's note: Numbers are from transcription program; no time code on audio files. This session is recorded as Part THREE of the audio file that Parts One & Two were on, so numbers on this transcript do not start at zero. The last number on transcript of session one was 02:00:48:00.

O'TOOLE: We'll take the question in the back, back there.

02:01:59:00 AUDIENCE: Yeah. As far as process goes, what do you think of— Cameras now, a lot of digital cameras can shoot video, as well. And that's new. And then the difference between, like going backwards and you can take old 35mm movies and scan those and make stills. So is it really about the stillness of it that's a photograph? And about printing, like is that the problem, is that it doesn't end[?] to print? Because like sometimes I'll scan film and just put it on the web, but I shot film. So is it the question about the final object, and also about the motion?

02:02:35:00 GALASSI: I think that's a great question. And my own sense is that there's a real big difference between still and moving. You know, they both make fabulous things, but they're very different, even when they're both photographic.

AUDIENCE: But now cameras make— I mean, the high end SLR cameras now do HD video. I mean, they all do little QuickTimes or whatever.

GALASSI: But they're— One little test case, for example, is the famous Vietnam Eddie Adams picture of the guy shooting the guy in the head. There are other cases. But that's a case where that also exists on film. And it's much more powerful in the still form, partly because it doesn't go away. But also, in P.L.'s terms, there's an inexplicable visceral power to the still picture that isn't there in the film version, even though in a basic literal sense, it's maybe more shocking in the film version, because it's more like you're standing there. But however you interpret it, they're very different.

02:03:57:00 AUDIENCE: Right. No, I agree. But what I'm saying then is if stillness equates a photograph, and therefore photography, that's not over. We're still [inaudible].

GALASSI: Yeah, I agree with you.

SNYDER: I have a hunch about this. My hunch is that ten to twenty years from now, you're not going to buy a still camera and a video movie camera; you're going to buy one camera which does both.

COTTON: You can already.

02:04:21:00 SNYDER: Well, okay, fine. [laughter] You can't get tiffs out of the current variety.

COTTON: You can, but you probably know if you work in the commercial world rather than being an artist, because it hasn't hit art schools yet.

SNYDER: Okay, well, so now today, what you can do is take stills and movies simultaneously. And it seems to me that Fiona Tan, who works in Amsterdam[?], did a really remarkable set of pictures which address exactly what you were talking about. What he did was to set up people in various occupations, a la August Sander's photographs of people—for example, the baker with his stuff—shot them with a video camera, and asked them to stand still for three minutes, in this kind of Sander pose, and shot him in video. And the presentation in the museum was a projected movie of this thing, in which you're looking at somebody trying to make himself into a still picture and failing.

02:05:30:00 SNYDER (Cont.): And there's a very curious kind of push-pull between the motion that the person can't avoid doing and your knowledge of the setup of this picture as being a still picture. And I thought just looking at it, almost pre-critically, [it] suggested that there's something very strange going on between the capacity to make still pictures, and the capacity at the same time, to be making motion pictures. And my guess is that that's going to get problematized by artists very soon. I mean—

02:06:05:00 COTTON: But that's the classic what a photographer does with their new video kit, is make a still that moves for about three minutes.

SNYDER: I'm sorry, I—

COTTON: I mean, it's interesting, but—

SNYDER Excuse me. I want to thank you for pointing that out. Okay, go ahead. It's classic. And?

02:06:23:00 COTTON: Yeah. And the other thing is, is I think this would be better if you had an arm wrestling competition between experimental filmmakers who feel very passionately about their territory, with photographers who want to move over to video. I mean, it's like there're niches everywhere. I mean, it's—

MAN: And they're just as disgruntled.

COTTON: Yeah, and they're just as fed up. And they're worrying if it's over.

[inaudible voice; laughter]

02:06:47:00 BESHTY: The silent majority of disgruntled photographers sort of like wondering about their disenfranchisement from the halls of the institution. And it's absolutely perplexing to me— And Vince, you said something earlier that was kind of interesting when you were talking about digital versus analog. And you said that it's funny, you can get a quality of print that's just about the same, and so what's the issue? And I almost— And it was also this discussion about Sander and the persistence of certain kinds of conventionalized forms from the twenties still persisting. Like if people were making Neue Sachlichkeit painting right now, wouldn't someone go, like, Why is this pictorial form still persisting in such a pantomime manner? And at the same time, isn't the problem with digital prints that they look just—

02:07:40:00 And people aspire to make them look just like photographic prints? I mean, this kind of stasis— And it's a lot like the avant-garde cinema thing. You know, those sort of like grumpy burrowing in in some hillside, and then complaining about what's going on outside. And it's so unfathomable to me that one would want to continue to perform a mythologized history, a history that doesn't fully exist, or usually wasn't actually even experienced by the people who persist to pretend it's there. Because I mean, I care a lot about that history and I care a lot about that work. And I don't want to remake it. I mean, what was great about that work is that it was sensitive to its time and place, and it understood it and it reacted to it. And it's accountable to such a complex set of questions that is not shut down by saying it's not art or that it's just photography or it's photography and that's a different set of questions. But it's accountable to a wealth of those questions. And to artificially lop that off— I'm sorry, I was just sort of *percolating*. [laughter] And I'm just kind of stunned. But I'm glad—

02:08:53:00 ALETTI: So do you think to— I'm sorry. Do you think that there's—

MAN: Yeah. [inaudible voices over each other]

ALETTI —that there is the possibility of a whole completely different way of looking and creating a digital work that has nothing, no relationship to the kind of historical look of photography, and that that would be an important development?

02:09:20:00 BESHTY I think there's something interesting in the possibility, yeah, that there is—

ALETTI: I'm wondering what it would look like. But that's—

BESHTY: That's why it has the campaign[?]. [they laugh] You know, but yeah.

O'TOOLE: Okay, [inaudible]—

DICORCIA: Sounds like we're talking about drag queens.

02:09:35:00 AUDIENCE: I guess I want to re-ask[?] everybody about something that Geoff said last night, which I kind of almost fell out of my chair, when you were like, Wolfgang Tillmans is sort of a footnote in kind of the history of photography or—

O'TOOLE: Could you [inaudible] just a little.

AUDIENCE: [over O'Toole] Can you hear that? Okay. No, it was something that Geoff said last night about Wolfgang Tillmans being like a footnote in the history of photography or just in photographic practice, I suppose. And I started thinking about him and I starting thinking, like, Well, you know, could you really think of him as a footnote? And I really can't. And one reason—

BESHTY: I think he said irrelevant.

AUDIENCE: Irrelevant? Well, I think he said footnote, too. Irrelevant, footnote, maybe, I don't know. [laughter] So one thing about his practice that I've always enjoyed, and I think a lot of people enjoy, is his fluidity that he has between moving through abstraction and these things that are medium-specific— You know, he couldn't make some of the work that he's making without the fact that photography does certain things and chemical photography does certain things that it does, in relationship to the other images or pictures that he makes. So I think in that case alone that he's a very important practitioner.

02:10:47:00 And then that got me thinking about somebody like Walead, who part of your work, you couldn't make if it wasn't a certain set of reasons of these things that are inherent to photography. Or somebody like Marco Breuer, who— you know, his work is sort of based in these things that photography is and does. And I don't want to like, fetishize the sort of material aspects of the medium, but—

MAN: Go ahead. Go ahead.

02:11:14:00 MAN: What's that? Okay.

MAN: That's just fine. [laughter]

AUDIENCE: Okay. But you know— and I don't want to sort of like put a lot of emphasis on the nostalgia of these material processes. Or if someone is making a contemporary daguerreotype or someone's making a contemporary tintype, a lot of times I think that work is looked at as like, Well, why the hell are they doing that? And you know, someone would be doing that because it does something that nothing else in the history of the world has done. It looks very different, and it sort of adds a set of conceptual framework to the object that nothing else can. So I guess we've been talking about this, but can we talk about some of that? Or Wolfgang Tillmans or something?

02:11:55:00 DYER: I mean, just very, very quickly, that was probably just me rashly plucking some sort of name out of a bag, really. On the other hand, it does seem to me surprising that people could be more interested in looking at those pictures than those by any number of kind of photojournalists, all of whose names now escape me, as sometimes happens.

02:12:26:00 BESHTY Well, maybe—and I ask this in private, somewhat—but you both touched on Wolfgang’s work, Joel, Geoff; that it indicated a kind of stopping point, where the conversation got uninteresting for you. And I’m curious. I mean, it tacitly sort of asserted an idea of what the parameters were or the boundaries of this discussion were for you, what photography represented. And I was curious if you might articulate—I mean, his work is not interchangeable with photojournalistic work. I mean, you couldn’t confuse one for the other. So it’s not a question of which flavor soda you like better. But it’s something about the role of that and what you find uninteresting or what it’s doing that seems to seem distinct from— what one aspect of photography that you’re engaged with, like how you define it. I’m more curious how you define that boundary, I guess, than whether or not it’s interesting or not. I’m curious about that boundary and what the significance is. I think it has a lot to do with your particular vantage points. I mean, I don’t know, either of you, if—

02:13:50:00 SNYDER: My voice is giving out so it’s going to be difficult. In this thing, the photographers on my list in the 500 words I produced, I was not taking sides or saying these were the good guys or these were the bad guys. I was asking a very different question. And that is, what kind of story might one have to come up with to connect the blue-chip canonical figures of Beaumont Newhall certified photography and contemporary artists? And my suggestion was—and this reflects on my own poverty as a narrative maker—my suggestion is that it can’t be done without screwing up the history of the earlier stuff.

02:14:50:00 SNYDER (Cont.): If you can show—somebody actually tried to do this—Ansel Adams made four-by-five blowups, four-foot by five-foot blowups of a moonrise over Hernandez, which were used to advertise his shows, one at a collection that I helped curate. I did curate. A private one. And that was pointed to by people who needed to find an anchor in the old practice, for the new practice of making four-foot by five-foot enlargements. And it just struck me as kind of silly. Adams, when I asked him about what I should do with this four-by-five-foot print, said, “Throw the damn thing out.” It was not the kind of thing that was ever accessioned or whatever; it was a stunt to draw attention to, actually, bank windows.

02:15:56:00 So my point in the written thing is— I actually like some of Tillmans’ work very much. I love Walid Raad’s work. I think it’s sensational. I frankly didn’t think you could do that, what he’s doing. All that I’m saying is that if you’re going to try to connect Walid Raad to Paul Strand, you’re a better storyteller than I am.

02:16:27:00 DICORCIA: Too many[?] photographers. That’s the real problem.
[laughter]

O’TOOLE: Next question, down here.

AUDIENCE: [inaudible].

02:16:35:00 AUDIENCE: Hi. I came from London for this, and I was kind of worried that photography was over and that nobody would be here. [laughter] So I’m pleased to see that it isn’t over. A, because none of you seem to be able to agree what photography is; and secondly, there are a lot of people here. But I wanted to just add some things to that. That that disagreement, or the lack of certainty about what photography is right now, seems to be right. And I think your three topics, your three questions hit the spot, really. Although I noticed you wriggled out of the

AUDIENCE (Cont.): artist/photographer dichotomy around the language of art, in terms of art photography. So digital domain, changing things technologically, notions of photography becoming much more dominant in the art institution globally—not just in Europe, but globally—and thirdly, kind of social attitudes changing. And I think those three things together are producing a kind of uncertainty.

02:17:46:00 And I don't know, some of you are probably familiar already with a book by Janet Wolff, written about three years ago, called *Aesthetics of Uncertainty*, which define our own time; which I suspect is actually a constant because I think it's very easy for us to look back now at narratives of the twentieth century photography nostalgically, which is— You know, nostalgia is looking back to a thing that never existed. And the narratives we write about the past, culturally or our own families, are always kind of selected memories. So in that sense, I think it's easy to imagine that there was always much more certainty in the twentieth century than there actually was, in photography and it's story. So I think uncertainty is probably crucial right now.

02:18:34:00 And I see this in Europe, too. I'm going a big conference in Germany that's set up by Essen school, in relation to the gallery there, simply called *Teaching Photography*, with a question mark. And it has people from all over Europe going to it; I don't think any invitations were thrown out to North or South America. But it's quite a big gathering. And also in London in a couple of weeks, there's a conference called— a big conference organized by the Hayward called *Deschooling Art*. And there's a whole sense, I think, that there's a kind of, if not a crisis, but a kind of uncertainty about what the values are. And I've just heard that echoed today, on this panel, with the— And I can kind of feel a—critics are saying this in London, as well—a kind of congealing of art photography around a certain set of values that seem to be slightly over. Like big prints are just embarrassing now, after the sort of recession, and it's easy to get a laugh out of them because of that, in a sense. But no one speaks about the underlying sense of the extravagance of that.

02:19:54:00 AUDIENCE (Cont.): And the technological changes, too seem to have had quite a big impact on students. And so just one more thing. What's really interesting about the young British artists who made it in the nineties in photography is that I think there's only one of them who was actually ever anywhere near a photography department. Most of them came out of fine art courses that don't teach photography. They might have somebody with a studio or something, but they don't have anyone teaching photography. Most of them came out of art courses, of which there are thirty in the UK, and there are 150 photography courses. Now, all of those 150 photography courses are now referring to those YBA artists who made it doing fine art, who were not taught photography, and when they had like, hideously magenta prints, thought they were great because they didn't know that was a bad print, like the photography students. And that whole kind of collapse, in a sense, of a certain specific value system for photographers, I think has precipitated a kind of question and— maybe not a crisis, but a questioning about what to teach.

02:21:02:00 And that echoes all the way through, I think, through museums, about what kind of narratives— I hear people here asking, as well. And so in a sense, I feel that the uncertainty is actually quite exciting, in a sense. And I see a lot of exciting work that comes from students from the Middle East, from the Orient, as we used to call it, and so on. And I see great work [inaudible], too. I love grain, I love pixels, as a photographer; but I also love fine prints. And that sense of openness, I think, is part of our contemporary condition. So I guess that's sort of more a comment, rather than a question. [laughter; applause]

O'TOOLE: In the back, there.

02:21:48:00 AUDIENCE: Yeah. The first thing, I was just curious if we could restate the fourth dialogue that was not really on the table today, before I pose my question.

WILLSDON: No.

AUDIENCE: I'm sorry.

WILLSDON: It's a secret.

AUDIENCE: I don't want to get it wrong.

WILLSDON: Okay, the fourth one, if you want to ask, I was[?]
— There were some questions about, I guess— well, the market has now come up. That's an institutional factor. It's about institutional context, and I guess certain kind of relations of power and differences of status and different contexts.

02:22:25:00 AUDIENCE: Okay. So I had heard that, and then I really attached more to somewhere a few minutes later, where you were discussing—well, I guess it's interwoven—policing the boundaries of art. And I think maybe there was a lot of heads shaking yes, that it's happening more now than ever. I don't know. I'm twenty-six. To me, the last decade would seem very much that case. So really, I guess there's a concern that I have that two of the topics today seem to be more about observing the state of where we are with photography, art photography; and then the other two things are less about observing, and actually are things that we dictate, if I can just put you all in a blanket. I'm really sorry to do that; I actually appreciate everything everyone's saying. But maybe we're saying that the ontological relationship between the viewer and photography— we're discussing that. But that's really something we observe. We're not really going to determine if black and white photography disappears. If our children see an image and feel some sort of relationship to an object or not, that's going to be without us.

02:23:26:00 AUDIENCE (Cont.): But at the same time we're discussing that, we also seem to be— To me as a photographer, I'm a little scared that it seems to me we almost are policing what photography is. That this whole process isn't just about is photography over, but what aspects of photography are we calling over. I feel like there's a lot of interfighting about what that looks like. But all I can say is from my perspective, once upon a time I was an artist. And people put that hat on me, and I had one group of people emailing me and calling me and showing my work. And then I got really frustrated with the last decade, as I think a lot of people did, and I started to make work about war actually happening. And so suddenly, those people that emailed and called me don't anymore. And there's a certain amount of identity to this, where it seems like art is defined by what— These dialogues we'll have, and some things that we won't. And I guess that fourth dialogue about policing more than ever, it's very real to me. It's not ho-hum, it's actually— I have felt as though I have been policed out. By photographing war, I'm now nowhere, because I'm not a war photographer per se, and I'm not an artist per se.

02:24:31:00 And these different camps are divided. Another point in time, someone like Gustave Courbet; we can all call that art. That's serious work. And yet he is dealing with issues of the time. It's not— I love Walid Raad; not to pick on him but we are comfortable in the art context dealing with work that deals with the Lebanon War, '82. I mean, he really deals with that a lot. But contemporaneous work, this is a ghetto, photojournalism, if you're dealing with war. So I guess I want to introduce that to kind of problematize what I do feel is happening here. We are kind of determining, not is photography over, but what aspects are over and what identities we get to have for art photography. And if you're not there, well, that's another thing we're kind of, it seems to me, we're saying. I think that might've been vague; I hope you guys and inform me a little bit.

02:25:16:00 DICORCIA: You seem to be saying that we didn't say enough and then we said too much. I don't know. Maybe I got something wrong there. I mean, I don't think this panel is in accord about more than one thing, maybe. And that's that our asses hurt. [laughter] So I don't know how we're limiting the definition of this discourse. I mean, it's an impossible question, I mean, the whole thing. And I think it was made clear from the very beginning that photography has expanded in such a way that it's really hard to define what it really is. So no matter what you say about photography, it is, by necessity, limited to a fraction of it. So I mean, that's my response.

02:26:22:00 KELLER: I actually thought the reference to Courbet was kind of interesting because, of course, Courbet was excoriated for his inclusion of the everyday in his art as not being appropriate. And I mean, that's part of what made him such a powerful figure, was how sort of scandalous that was. But I think one of the things we talked around a little bit here was photography's engagement with the real world. You know, and some of us have been talking about a text that the photographer Paul Graham wrote that's been sort of circulating out there [in]—I hate to use the word—the blogosphere. But what Graham wrote was about this sort of absence of a critical language to talk about photography that does what he described in really beautiful language about a dance with the real world; and how there's a real apparatus for talking about photography that's like Gursky or Wall, where the artistry or the craft, the conceptual part of it is so clear.

02:27:24:00 And he talked about, you know, how do we talk about what Robert Frank did? There's not a language that works so well for that. And I think that's something that we've talked about a little bit, and I think that you might've been getting that a little bit. That sort of it's not entirely clear where that kind of work that deals with the actual issues of the real world as it is, where that fits, necessarily.

02:27:50:00 BESHTY: But I think— but Graham's wrong. I mean, there is so much scholarship on social documentary practices, and debating it and dealing with it and trying to contextualize it. That's usually the bulk of what— at least that I confronted. Like, the entirety of *Contest of Meaning* is essays on that. Usually when people— At least the most fiery discussions were usually *about* the premise of social documentary and that history. And I mean, so I don't think that that's necessarily— I just don't think that that's true. His premise, I don't feel true.

02:28:24:00 KELLER: I don't think he's talking about social— I mean, I think the use of the word documentary— There's someone in the audience who I know will agree with me, who wrote their whole dissertation on this subject. But the word documentary is just so problematic that— He's not talking about social documentary photography with an agenda; he's talking about this idea of being in the world, visualizing it, pressing the shutter at a certain moment and making the photograph that comes from that experience. So his use of the term documentary is so loaded at this point that it's not really useful—although it is the term that he uses. I don't know what a better one is, but— Because straight photography, I don't know, that's not very helpful, either.

MAN: Still photography.

02:29:06:00 KELLER: Still photography.

AUDIENCE: [inaudible]. You don't think there's a lot of great critical writing on that subject, as opposed to about Jeff Wall[?]? To me, it seems— [inaudible] bulk of good critical writing about the topic is about the Robert Frank, Helen Leavitt, Walker Evans kind of photography. Only the most recent stuff is obsessed with the Jeff Wall, I made it myself[?].

02:29:32:00 KELLER: I'm just reporting what this text, what this sort of general feeling is. But I do think that that kind of photography is much more difficult to talk about. I mean, that doesn't mean it hasn't been done.

02:29:44:00 AUDIENCE: The artist[?] hasn't made a self-conscious effort to embody what the critical discussion should be in his work, as Jeff Wall and those guys [inaudible].

KELLER: That was Graham's point.

02:29:53:00 COTTON: Although I do think it was him trying to embody that. [laughs] I mean, there was him wanting to make sure that we all understood that he represents the front of the barricades on that point, right?

02:30:09:00 GALASSI: I think that we've gotten maybe a little bit off, that it wasn't—I think that what Paul Graham's essential message was, was that the—that in other kinds of art, like fancy brushwork, you see right away that there's the art of it. And I'm not necessarily endorsing or not endorsing this view; I'm just trying to clarify what I think he was trying to get at, which is that in the art of descriptive photography—that's the term I would use now to avoid the loaded documentary thing; it's just you go out and take a picture of the world—that it looks just like all the other pictures that are out there in the newspaper. That we all see a lot of photographs all the time, and that its artistic dimension doesn't have an obvious marker. I think that that's what he was talking— That it does, in some areas of descriptive photography, like Edward Weston, for example, it *does* have an obvious marker, which is the exquisiteness of the print, and that everything's sharp and that all the surfaces are beautifully described.

02:31:37:00 GALASSI (Cont.): And that's an obvious marker of artistic control. But that there's a lot of photography where the essential artistic element doesn't have that kind of obvious marker. And I think that's all he was pointing out.

WILLSDON: Yes, please.

02:31:56:00 AUDIENCE: So my question is about—Is it okay? Okay—the power of photographic vision. And I have two parts to this question. So the first one, what do you feel is— how dominant is a[?] photographic vision on painting and other imaging systems? For example, like the show upstairs of Luc Tuymans is highly influenced by photography, right? A lot of his paintings are coming from photographs. And the other part is how do you feel that photographic vision has influenced how we see the world, and if we see and value the world as being worth to be photographed, being worthy of the action of being photographed? [long pause; laughter]

02:33:00:00 COTTON: I just have low sugar for that one.

DICORCIA: I see the world as washed out and fuzzy.

WILLSDON: Okay. Well, listen, why don't we— I was going to ask George to say something, but I won't now. No, just because of the whole thing of, I guess, the expanded idea of the photographic. You know, but I won't. Because you said it last night, too. Okay, I'm not going to say it. Why don't we just hear from—

02:33:24:00 SNYDER: Well, let me just touch on that last thing. For me, it goes back to Tillmans, the idea that— What I love about Tillmans is that he makes me sort of see everything through his eyes, and as photographic and as— It's all possible, it's all interesting, because I love his vision. So his pants on the floor, the fruit on his windowsill, anything through his eyes has interest for me. And I think that any good

SNYDER (Cont.): photographer will make you see that. So that it doesn't matter what they're looking at, it just matters, in a sense, how they're looking.

02:34:13:00 BESHTY: And also, I mean, on the subject of Tillmans' work, he understands exhibition spaces much better than I've seen almost any other photographer really understand them, and use them in a really dynamic way. I mean, that's one of the possibilities that happens through his practice that I think is pretty unusual and kind of extraordinary, that there's a maintenance of a certain type of photographic vision, one that we can easily identify and understand. And there's an extension into the understanding of the social space of the gallery that follows very much from the thought process of the production of each individual image, that I think opens the parameters of the conversation that is possible through his work. Instead of just staying inside the frame, there is a possibility to think of the entire space of the exhibition as a kind of frame; to think about that as a composition, and also a social space. So I mean—

02:35:07:00 SNYDER: And it's not always just about the individual picture, it's about the whole range of the wall.

WILLSDON: So I think we should take two more questions, two last questions. Maybe— No, I think you were there before.

02:35:26:00 AUDIENCE: In the nineteenth century, when somebody wanted to sell a picture, they made a picture of a little girl. And if it didn't sell, they would paint a picture of a dog next to the little girl. And if it still didn't sell, they would paint a bandage on the little dog's paw. [laughter] And it seems somewhat in the contemporary art world today, if somebody wants to sell a picture, they make a large color digital photograph. And if it doesn't sell, they make it even larger. And if it still doesn't sell, they make it colossal, especially if it has some red in it, and maybe a little off of focus. I bring this up because I recently saw an exhibition of Robert Polidori's photographs at

AUDIENCE (Cont.): the Metropolitan Museum, of photographs of some of the scenes of New Orleans after Katrina. And I like Polidori's photographs very much. But in looking at these photographs, I thought, because they were very large photographs in that show, if they were eight-by-ten photographs, they would be documentation of a tragedy. But instead, they were like forty-by-fifty inch photographs in big frames, which seemed that they were almost being made, these photographs of this tragedy, as interior decoration for some hedge fund manager's house in Aspen.

02:36:44:00 And that whole nature of taking something in one size that would be a documentation of tragedy and turning it into interior decoration, I find is a bit of a problem. And the problem of scale. The sense, in a sense, almost of a kind of painting envy; that sense of trying to make these compete with paintings. And you know, Edgar Degas once said that there're certain types of success that are indistinguishable from panic. And I find when one is going through someplace like Paris Photo, with all of these giant, desperately large photographs, that there is the tremendous sense of kind of smiling panic. Unfortunately, in Paris Photo, they can't smoke anymore, or they'd still smoke there, too. But that sense in the contemporary photo world, that sense of— Why is there this desperate sense of super size?

02:37:45:00 COTTON: What an incredibly observant man you are. [laughs] I wonder, like this contemporary art world, I wonder if either camp would really want to take ownership of it, either the contemporary art world or the photo world, when you're talking about that. It's almost this byproduct of a market boon for this thing called contemporary art photography, that it's got to be big and laminated [inaudible].

02:38:08:00 AUDIENCE [over Cotton] Well, it brings up a certain thing[?]. If the photograph is taken within the last ten years and it sells for over \$100,000, it goes into the evening sale at Sotheby's or Christie's.

COTTON: Right.

AUDIENCE: It's no longer in the photo sale.

COTTON: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: You know? And so there's this push and pull. And a lot of those people say, Well, one of the reasons it's in that evening sale is because the work is the size of a studio apartment in New York, you know?

02:38:30:00 COTTON: And also would appeal to a different collector set.

AUDIENCE: Exactly. Right.

02:38:36:00 DICORCIA You know, we all know size matters. And if you're on the receiving end of the money, nobody's complaining. [laughter] And that's always going to be the case. Whether it's appropriate is probably what you're really asking. And yes. I mean, there's a reflexive defensiveness that has been a part of photography as long as I can remember. And it has found some very, very subtle and not so subtle means to associate itself with quality. I mean, let's face it. In the art market, the pheromones[sic] of photography just don't make it. It's not sexy enough, you know? It's not— Pheromones, that's what they are. And you know, it's hard to say whether size is something that people just buy to prove that they have something bigger than somebody else.

02:39:51:00 But the problem is you seem to be addressing it *at* somebody, like: whose fault is this? I would say it's nobody's fault. It's kind of like if nobody bought it, nobody would make it. So where's the problem? The problem lies with the consumer, not the producer.

02:40:18:00 SNYDER: Well, maybe then the response is that we should get rid of hedge fund managers. [laughter]

WILLSDON: Are they over?

ALETTI: Yeah. I mean, we've just gotten an account of University of Chicago economics.

NICKEL Well, I think where we are now is that hedge fund managers are the tastemakers, is what you're saying. They are the definers of good quality art.

WILLSDON: Okay, we're going to take two more questions.

02:40:41:00 DICORCIA: No, if you sell more than the next guy and if your stuff is more expensive, is it better? I mean, that's a no-brainer. No, it's not. So you know.

BESHTY: And there's lots of, like absolutely invisible artists who sell tons of crap all the time. And I mean, you know, and go straight into, like, some obscure— I mean, I can think of a ton...

DICORCIA Yeah. You know, who—

BESHTY: ...that have no real critical reception or public reception, but continue to churn out things like sausages. And that's cool.

02:41:09:00 DICORCIA: Steven Klein sells pictures of Madonna to hotel chains in Japan, and makes as much money as anybody from Düsseldorf.

WILLSDON: Yeah.

02:41:19:00 AUDIENCE: Okay. I think there's an elephant in the room, and I think it's probably the room and the little elephants on the stage. There are only three of them, or two or three of you, who actually are involved in producing photographs for people to look at. Everybody else has a vested interest in the art market or the museum world. Actually, Geoff, this is not quite true of you, but— So the perspective you're bringing is a presumption of the necessity of the institution. And I think the role of the photographer was, until about twenty-five years ago or whenever, a documentarian. You know, whether it was Atget or whether it was a front brain, back brain— I don't know the difference, P.L. But when you talk about Diane Arbus, she said that the reason she took photographs was historical, that there were things people wouldn't see if she didn't photograph them.

02:42:25:00 And it's not about documentary photography, it's about the photograph as document. That was what it was. And then suddenly it was discovered that if instead of looking and seeing and having wonder, you *talked* about it; if you could talk up a storm, if your pictures didn't exist without the talk—Jeff Wall, Gursky— You know, they don't exist unless you can get into a conversation about them.

BESHTY: They're hard to deny that they exist. They assert their existence pretty—

AUDIENCE: Damn right; they might fall on you.

BESHTY: I mean, what do you mean by they don't exist without talking?

02:43:04:00 AUDIENCE: You don't look— Well, this is a dangerous place for us to get. But you don't look at these things and immediately have a sense of wonder about the content. This is bad place to go right now. [laughter] But my point is, is they got big; the people who make them can talk them up a storm; and then they started selling, because they were talked up a storm, they were bigger, and they became an essential

AUDIENCE (Cont.): part of the art scene. And then sort of this dilemma, this dichotomy came up between the photograph as the document and the photograph as a work of art. And I think that somewhere in here the reason— If photography's dying, it's be— It's not dying. How many billions photographs are being posted every day that are documents of somebody's life being shared with everybody else?

02:44:00:00 If there are too many, the only reason there are too many is because there's no mechanism for getting them into a museum. You can't put fifty-billion photographs a day into a museum. But the—

SNYDER: Thank God.

AUDIENCE: Pardon?

SNYDER: Thank God. [laughter]

02:44:13:00 AUDIENCE: Well, exactly. But what I'm saying is, is— So last night, when we were talking about this afterwards, the issue was not is photography dying, what is dying? Are photographers dying? Or maybe museums are dying. That how you present this stuff is a really big deal. And one last thing, Charlotte. When I grew up in England, there were museums and there were galleries. Galleries, where flat things were on walls. Museums were repositories for historical documents, information, and material. And that's a huge— And when I came to New York and I found I was going to museums, I wondered why all this flat stuff was on the walls. I thought it was looking at repositories of stuff. And I think this distinction between the document and the work of art—which I'm not derogating as— I'm just saying that they were very different. They're very different.

02:45:07:00 GALASSI: Neal, you're forgetting one really important thing. Of course, Diane Arbus' work is about the world out there, and that she was responding to these people. But for me, the key thing is you could have somebody who knew how to get the camera in focus, go around and photograph all the same people that Arbus photographed; they'd be documented, they'd be all there, and all the art of Diane Arbus would disappear. And what's so *incredible* is the art that she made out of responding to those people. *That's* what matters, not the fact that these people got photographed.

02:45:54:00 AUDIENCE: Well, I agree with you completely. But she was documenting them. And there are different qualities of documentarian. I mean, I'm not disputing that.

BESHTY: There are a whole lot of words in *Pencil of Nature*. There was a whole lot of talking that Talbot did about what the intent and what the contexts were for each of those individual plates. And I think there certainly were a great deal of artistic aspirations for the use of photography that didn't situate it as simply a document of what was going on, but were conscious of it as a material. I don't know, Heartfield [inaudible]—

02:46:30:00 AUDIENCE: I think that we're[?] fundamentally rooted in the idea that they were a record. And what they were a record of was incredibly important. The detail of it, all the stuff within. But they were not somebody's—

BESHTY: But people brought up Peach Robinson, Rejlander. I mean, from the get-go, these were—

AUDIENCE: But they're not the product of somebody's idea laid into the photographic form.

BESHTY: But *Two Ways of Life* was all commentary and all idea. He was organizing an allegory. I mean, and that's—help me—like eighteen-seventy— [inaudible voice] Huh? [inaudible voice] 1857.

02:47:13:00 WOMAN: But I think the older ideas, the ideas that the viewer is uninformed to grasp by looking at the[?]

AUDIENCE: Thank you.

WOMAN (AUDIENCE) : Whereas the new ideas of Jeff Wall and Andreas Gursky require that you be in on a secret, a secret that the photographer could tell you if you knew him. And that is that this is staged or this is Photoshopped or this is altered. So there is a difference between the document that is accessible, essentially, to the viewer— The mysteriousness of creation is not accessible, but the document and its meaning and its ideas are accessible to the viewer fifty, a hundred years later, or at the time. But that's not true in the same way of the ones that have an idea that involved changing something that only the inner circle knows about.

GALASSI: Did everybody hear that?

VOICES: Yeah.

GALASSI: Okay.

02:48:02:00 BESHTY: I think that one could argue that there's a context, say in the case of Arbus and what the relationship were to these sitters, that is opaque when you walk through a museum and you see the photograph and you get a title; that you don't necessarily know what the conditions were under which the photograph was made. And I think there's always going to be [inaudible voice] a missing context in that way, that you could treat as a secret. And I—

02:48:22:00 WOMAN: Well, [inaudible] for long enough or see enough of them, without ever hearing a word from Diane Arbus herself, you glean something of that relationship. But I don't think you will in front of a Jeff Wall.

02:48:37:00 GALASSI: If you stand in front of the best pictures of Jeff Wall and Andreas Gursky and you don't have some kind of visceral response to them, then I feel *very* sorry for you.

WOMAN: Well, I have a visceral response, but I don't have access to the secret. [inaudible].

GALASSI: There is not secret. There's...

WILLSDON: The secret of production?

GALASSI[?]: ...the picture standing in front of you; you can look at it.

02:48:57:00 MAN: [inaudible] the secret?

NICKEL: If there's a secret, it's— I mean, Duchamp had a secret and Jackson Pollock had a secret, too. Knowing more about the particular games they were playing or their critiques or their objectives or the theory behind it enhanced understanding of those earlier works. It's part of Modernism. Manet was playing a game, too that people were confused about.

WILLSDON: Let's take— this is the last question.

02:49:22:00 AUDIENCE: Okay. Sorry, everyone, to— I feel remiss for not asking this sooner, because I'm surprised that for three hours, we've talked about photography and it's been a leap frog between the wall in the museum or the gallery and the screen.

AUDIENCE (Cont.): P.L., you said that you didn't even talk about the photo book. Clearly, I have a vested interest in the printed page. But it is one of those economic frameworks that has informed photography, provided a platform for photography, a delivery system, a venue for reception, haptic experience—all of those things. So maybe this is a conversation for a different panel. But I was curious if that came up at all. And Vince, I love your writing about the printed page, the magazine world. Peter, you posit Henri Cartier-Bresson's career as being informed by the rise of the pictorial magazine. So how could this not come up?

02:50:27:00 MAN: But in what way?

AUDIENCE: Well, I guess you're talking about loss. And again, I know that I have my own agendas in this. But in the loss of a tactile experience of the photograph, there's something between the wall and the screen, and that's usually the printed page. That historically has been. So—

02:50:50:00 DICORCIA: Well, you know, this also impacts the discussion of size, how you appreciate a photograph, how you apprehend it. Well, the intimacy of the experience of photography, which has shifted enormously from something like, let's say *The Americans*, as most people saw it first, to Jeff Wall, which reminds me of something I first saw in a train station. So I think it is a larger discussion. And it also connects to a discussion, which is part of photography that we haven't talked about, that—I mean, I am a photographer; but I also am not a fine art photographer exclusively. I've done a lot of things for other medias or uses of photography. And those are all disappearing. And there may not be— photography may not be over, but there are aspects of it that are very definitely over. I would say magazines are soon to be gone.

02:52:02:00 DCORCIA: I know I'm totally in denial about this. [laughter] But it seems to me every time I go to a magazine stand, there are more magazines...

COTTON: Oh, I know.

ALETTI: ...than there were last [inaudible]—

DICORCIA: Well, I don't mean magazines as a— you know, that's like— you know, just because they invented disposable diapers doesn't mean that somebody's not wiping their kid's ass with a towel. [laughter]

MAN: I'm not sure where we're going.

02:52:35:00 COTTON: Oh, you were so [inaudible] compare it [inaudible; inaudible voices over each other; laughter]

WILLSDON: I want to see a magazine of P.L. diCorcia's collected analogies. [laughter] I mean, even just out of this program.

COTTON: Can I answer[?] [inaudible] question? Oh.

02:52:54:00 ALETTI: [over Cotton] No, I mean, I also think that the last time— In New York, there's been for the past several years, an art book fair that every year has gotten larger, and that really makes me feel like it's not going away. And not only not going away, but there are more artists making books, more photographers putting their work into books than ever before.

WOMAN: Yeah.

ALETTI: Often because that's their favorite delivery system. It's still a great way to present work. It gives them a lot more power than it might in a gallery system. But also, there is, I think, a still real need and desire to see work in that way, to see work on the printed page. And as I said, I refuse the idea that magazines are going away. They're still a very valuable way to get photos into the world. And I think that if they're going away, they're not doing it any day soon.

02:54:00:00 NICKEL: I hope that's the case, actually, but it reminds me of the argument about global warming that says, You know, we had a pretty chilly winter; I'm not sure there is such a thing as global warming. You know, when it happens, it's going to happen fast.

02:54:12:00 WILLSDON: So I'm not even going to try and conclude this. I'm not even going to try to summarize it; I don't feel like I'm in the position to do that. But I'm just going to just say a word about what seemed to me the feeling over these, well, for us, three sessions, and two public sessions. And I think it's been— For one thing I would say is, I quite appreciate the durational nature of a program like this. I want to say that— I mean, a lot of programs, or programs in museums, are very tightly and neatly packaged and little mini-spectacles. And I've appreciated the openness and generosity and sort of sense of exploration that everyone's brought to this.

02:54:53:00 But the feeling I've had all along is that whole passages of time go by where people seem to think there isn't a question here. And then you have these moments, these kind of flashes, where suddenly something quite urgent and important appears. And then something of value that's lost sight of again. And so it seems to me that there are things that are vital in this topic, and I'm sure these issues are going to be taken forward into other contexts and other forums. So I'm just going to end by very much thanking you for your attendance in this and for your participation and generosity. And also all the panel here, for their role in this, too. Thank you very much. [applause]

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02:55:53:00 This symposium is over. [laughter; END]