

SFMOMA: Julia Scher Artist Talk

Thursday, September 15, 2017

Participants

Rudolf Frieling, Curator of Media Arts

Julia Scher, Artist

Dominic Willsdon, Leanne and George Roberts Curator of Education & Public Practice

00:00:03:03 DOMINIC WILLSDON: Good evening everyone, welcome. My name's Dominic Willsdon. I'm curator of education and public practice here. It's great to be able to welcome and introduce Julia Scher. This is, in fact, the first of many, the first Artist Talk in this theater for three and a half years. I used to be up here all the time. It's kind of great for me to be back, for one thing. And it's great to begin this series of Artist Talks, as it will be, with Julia. And I'll tell you why. I think it's because the work that is, of course, the occasion for us talking this evening, *Predictive Engineering*, which is shown in the museum now and has been since the museum reopened, is for me, in a certain way, a kind of key, or a sort of probe, into the internal organism of what this museum is and has been.

00:01:05:15 If you don't know—and I think you do know—it's a work that continues her scrutiny of systems of security and surveillance that is really the through line of her work since the 1980s. And it's a work, the work that you see today here, is the third iteration of that project, because it's so kind of embedded and inserted into the architecture and the systems of the museum that it has had to be recreated with each different physical form that SFMOMA has taken, because it was originally commissioned and presented in 1993, I think, when the museum was in the Civic Center; then 1998, on this site; and now again in 2016. And like so much of Julia's work on these themes, it explores— or at least it's kind of endlessly thought-provoking, in terms of the ways in which systems of surveillance certainly operate in our wider society, across kind of the political dimensions of that; but also, I think, the ways in which sort of desire flows through those systems...

00:02:38:20 ...the way in which both sort of horror and humor are present, the way in which fact and fiction can get intertwined. So it's become, in terms of the work *Predictive Engineering* here in this institution, it becomes a sort of tool for reflecting on various systems that this museum is composed of, and perhaps other museums are composed of, too. So I think it's— We're going to be WILLSDON (Cont.): saying so much more about that, as well as other contexts for thinking about that work. Julia's going to be in conversation with Rudolf Frieling, who's curator of media arts here, and also one of a team here in the museum— and there are several of you here this evening—part of a major project for us, under the aegis of what's called the Artist Initiative. It's directed by our colleague Robin Clark. And this is one of a number of projects that we have that can extend over multiple years and can involve deep and extended research into— and working with artists on ways in which key works and key collections of work in the museum have come together and can be taken forward.

00:04:03:10 In fact, a big part of the reason that Julia is here this evening is that she's here, also, for a significant colloquium of the Artist Initiative that will be held in this room tomorrow. And I'm going to say a little bit more about that later on, because if anybody here who's not part of that yet would like to attend, that can be possible. So I can mention those details later on. Let me just say one more thing. Let me say a little bit more just about Rudolf's role in this, because I think that Rudolf's approach to his portfolio over so many years has been one that's centered not primarily on media so much, but on systems—social systems, systems of

information, of exchange, of collaboration. And so I think this work of Julia's goes to the heart of what his program has been for so long. So I know that Rudolf and Julia have developed a number of different topics, because I've seen the email exchanges between them; and they're going to, in a way, to sort of jukebox of different topics that they're going to—

00:05:15:09 JULIA SCHER: [over Willsdon; she gasps] Oh, no!

WILLSDON: They're going to kind of improvise across for maybe forty, forty-five minutes or so, and then we can just— we can all open it up to discussion and I can come back and facilitate that. But for now, please welcome Rudolf Frieling and Julia Scher. [applause]

00:05:41:00 RUDOLF FRIELING: Am I on? Okay, good. I have a number of different ways of introducing tonight. One is, I will— Actually, I want to show you my t-shirt. [laughter] I got this about, what, six, seven years ago. And I'm not going to take off my jacket, but it is actually signed FRIELING (Cont.): in the back. So it is an artwork that I wore only once, for a discussion, and then I didn't quite know what to do with it at home, and I thought, I can't wash it. You know, what about the signature? So this is my second time only that I'm actually wearing it. [laughter] And I'm not going to wear it again. I'm going to put it in between— I think the Artist Initiative will probably take a look at it.

00:06:30:14 So our discussions go back a very long time. And there was another significant moment, about in that time frame when we were preparing a show with photography and I was collaborating with my then colleague Sandy Phillips, the senior curator of photography, on a show called Exposed, on surveillance and voyeurism. And I thought, this is the perfect opportunity to show, finally again, *Predictive Engineering*, only to learn, among others from our dear colleagues, Steve Dye, that I just couldn't do that; that it would take a major effort to reinvestigate what it means to show the piece, to possibly totally reprogram it. And I said, "Okay, we're running out of time here; we can't do that." So we were just showing her related website, which we also brought into the collection a few years ago. And it was one of those moments where we thought, we want to actually explore further what it means to collect processual work, online work, work that requires basically the efforts of an entire team in a museum—to think through what it means to collect that kind of work.

00:07:46:16 The second moment that I want to bring up is this. So thankfully, we do not have a red audience, like the Tate. Otherwise, Julia might've taken the fire extinguisher again and put it onstage. And we had the pleasure of introducing the Artist Initiative in November 2005—we, that is, a team of the Artist Initiative: Jill Sterrett, Robin Clark, Martin Haidvogel, and me—at the Tate in London. And Julia was with us, and as we were just beginning our talk, a fire alarm went off. And we were all somewhat confused, but thought it was well scripted by Julia, [laughter] only to then realize that it was an actual fire alarm. So we don't quite know what triggered that, but we're grateful for you to not having put again the fire alarm in action here.

00:08:48:00 So with her—Dom, you mentioned a little bit—fact and fiction get sort of mixed up in really interesting and intriguing ways, and you're never quite sure what you're dealing with. And FRIELING (Cont.): I think that is what fascinates me. But I was going to suggest that we actually start with you and where you're from. You're Californian, living in Germany right now. Has a professorship in Cologne, at the Media Art Academy in Cologne, and speaks pretty good German. [laughter] But she's still very much Californian; that's what I want to say. And so she grew up in the San Fernando Valley, studied at UCLA for her BA, and then MFA from the University of Minnesota. And your title of your thesis was *American Landscape*. I thought that was interesting, and I would love to come back to that.

00:09:50:20 You spent a lot of time in New York, as well. And your peers were Larry Bell, Chris Burden, Robert Graham, Lynda Benglis; Dan Graham, as well. And then she taught the first surveillance studies class in the US ever, 1996, at the Massachusetts College of Art, in Boston. You received a fellowship from Harvard, for field surveillance studies, for a year. And you were teaching at the MIT for a number of years, until you then finally went to Germany. Having said that, we also go back as an institution, way into the early nineties, but we're now really interested in learning what is it about LA? And I'm now quoting something that Dominic mentioned. You know, we had a really wonderful email exchange, like all email exchanges with her are wonderful. So the first topic that she suggested, and I quote, "Los Angeles, import/export for carefully-crafted images, stuff about me and other artists growing up in L.A., and its effects." There we go.

00:11:06:09 JULIA SCHER: Well, thank you Rudolf Frieling. Rudolf is, and the experience of you and the museum, has been a huge part of my life, so thank you very much. I'd also like to thank the original curator, the first curator of media arts, who's Bob Riley; Jill Sterrett. The list goes on, for people who, like you, find exploration necessary—it's not just outside of budgets or art—and have a way of inflecting where authority can and can't go, and discuss. So I want to thank everyone first. Kriss Ravetto; Gloria Sutton; Fiona Meade; Pip Larson—Laurenson, excuse me—who will continue this dialogue about conservation tomorrow; Robin Clark, [of] the Artist Initiative; Martina Haidvogel, and media conservation today and the new position it takes in the world, not just in museums. And just in general, the City of San Francisco, which this piece is really about. It was born here, it's been here. So it's an architecture of and part of the city. It's the West Coast and the drama of San Francisco. Not necessarily captured in the work, but is part of something I call a larger SCHER (Cont.): picture of durational aesthetics. That is, is there a way to describe the functioning, the creation, the construction of art, including its deconstruction, with larger terms? And I think Kriss, who was at this great conference in 2008 in Scotland, will attest to, that there're many, many new versions of what future of media art can be. We'll talk about that tomorrow.

00:13:12:10 FRIELING: L.A.

SCHER: L.A. is— Okay, thank you. [laughter] Los Angeles is the culture and cult of looks and looking. And I was born into this. No stranger to— Oh, I see a picture on the screen. The picture here shows what I was born into. Here is Universal Studios, right next to the old Republic Studios, right next to Lockheed, and where they had built the secret bombers going over Russia, right next to the GM auto assembly plant. So postwar San Fernando Valley had many, many different cultures using high technique in combination. No stranger to newcomers. The San Fernando Valley has bred a lot of contemporary artists. Christopher Williams, the guy who runs TMZ. Do you listen to gossip news at all? [laughter] Anybody here listen to gossip news? Nobody? [inaudible voices] Oh, shit. Oh, shoot. Oh. Uh. Okay. Valley boys and girls. So the culture of this area inhabited across different worlds of economics and of Hollywood and industry.

00:14:39:15 The next picture shows one of those aspects. And I'm shortening this up, of course. This, if anyone recognizes it, is an aerial view of a— Does anybody know what it is? Too young. [inaudible voice] Yes, a drive-in movie. This drive-in movie was called the Victory Theater. Of course, it's a postwar thing. And we would see movies against Germany and this, of course. But it was also a place for sex and other things that go on in a movie theater. Right next door to it was a Catholic school, a very big one. And then right next to that was the first McDonald's in Los Angeles. So car culture and movies and the lust for being in another place was very strong. Next slide—

00:15:28:09 FRIELING: Before we go on to the next slide, can I made on interjection here? Second quote: “Sex, drugs, and rock and roll, recommended by Dan Graham, because that’s all it is, isn’t it?”

SCHER: Okay. I asked Dan what we should talk about today. And Dan, without a hesitation, said this line. And yes, there was a lot of— It’s a longer story. And I don’t think we have all that much time. [laughter]

FRIELING: Okay, we’ll go to the next movie.

00:15:58:09 SCHER: But a lot of all of those. And it was the postwar period, with a lot of things about media and television and mixing with actors. And kids who were acting in TV, film were in my classes. They always picked the smart people. I was never picked. But smart people would always go in and out of your class, because they were off doing a movie or something. Rock and roll was big. I was a groupie. I never really learned music, so I hung out with, you know, the group Toto and Steven Stills from Crosby, Stills & Nash, and Rita Coolidge’s twin sister Pricilla. It was just this crowd in Laurel Canyon. So these were all having nothing to do with conservation, which is our topic. [laughter] But this was— So I was a groupie.

FRIELING: Well, conservation is not only our topic. Our topic’s actually your practice.

00:16:56:15 SCHER: Oh. Okay, alright. So—

FRIELING: So maybe that is a part of it.

SCHER: Alright, okay. But I’m—

FRIELING: Can we come back to the movie?

00:17:03:20 SCHER: So this here is the movie theater, where you see the audio output is separate from the film spectacle. So you’d watch from the darkness of your car, a spectacle; but the receiver into your ear of sound was next to you. It was under your control. And this was

SCHER (Cont.): fascinating to all of us, especially if you piled into the trunk of the car to get in free and you wanted to hear more, it was problematic. So this aesthetic affected me a lot, I think, in further work.

FRIELING: What then happened when you moved away?

00:17:48:00 SCHER: You mean to the beach. Well, you wore less. In Venice Beach, I roller skated to work wearing a green macramé bikini. [laughter] And I— Yeah. The beach— Yeah, that was—

FRIELING: I was actually thinking Minnesota, but—

SCHER: Oh, Minnesota. Well, there was— [laughter] There’s more clothing in Minnesota. Yes. Minnesota’s so far away and so disconnected that I started my work with surveillance there. And it was inspired, in many ways, by programs at the Walker Art Center, the books that were brought into the bookstore, Susan Meiselas, the target torso shooting ranges, the wonderful works of Godard, the television series. These programs. Buster Keaton, *Go West*, big inspiration.

00:18:35:10 So the work with security began there, in a far-away place, Minnesota. And in a magazine called *Dissent*, I began to read the work of Gary T. Marx, who later invited me to MIT. And Gary Marx came up the max—His first book, *Police Surveillance in America*, was brilliant, and I read that. But he came up with these adages for the maximum security society. And I was so impressed with these and they made such an impact on my life, I've done a project for each of these societies. The engineered society, where he later wrote about the predictive engineered society; the dossier society; the actuarial and/or predictive society; the transparent or porous society; self-monitored society; and a suspicious society. And reading from his work *The Engineering of Social Control: The Search for the Silver Bullet*, this is a draft from 1989. He writes— Am I going too fast?

FRIELING: I think we can follow. Keep going.

00:19:56:09 SCHER: It's in English. [she chuckles] Okay. "The self and the social—" This is much worse to follow for me in German. "The self and the social environment may be organized in a variety of ways to produce social order. Penzanaro suggests four models of achieving order, with respect to organization of the self. With clear indebtedness to Bentham and Foucault, I"—this is Gary Marx—"I have suggested the concept of the maximum security society as an ideal type for ordering current developments and trends in the organization or structuring of the social controlled environment. The maximum security society is made up of six subcomponents." Now, he's not talking about installation art, but you can— if you twist it enough, you can see how wonderfully installation can purge itself of other meanings and move into surveillance and social networking ideas.

00:21:04:22 So the maximum security is less inclusive, as some of these other philosophers— And does not deal with social control in general. Instead, Gary Marx intended it to characterize some softer social control processes that have increased in importance and sophistication in recent decades, as the velvet gloves continues to gain ascendancy over the iron fist. Thus much of my work. So in that way. So this—

FRIELING: From there, you— You know, you made that transition into installation art; but at the same time, you also became an engineer, technically.

00:21:56:20 SCHER: Technically. May I digress into the Apple Store yesterday, looking for cables? Have you been to the new Apple Store? There's like 100 guys in skinny t-shirts to help you. When I started doing engineering and electronics in 1985, it was Acme Electronics in Minnesota, the only store. And there's one guy. And you don't get sold a thing to communicate with. I had to learn how to build things to— Okay. It's only interesting if you care about...

FRIELING: Cables?

00:22:35:22 SCHER: ...how things work. And cables, yeah. Okay. So yes, I learned how to put things together and became the first woman member of the Metropolitan Burglar and Fire Alarm Association, as a class one certified installer in New York. Thus my interest in fire. [laughter] Fire, danger. Danger. Warning. This sign is representative of that period, where I wanted to tie the invisible, the velvet glove over the iron fist, as Gary Marx characterized it, with warning signs, and occupying the space of a controller by making up a company name, Security by Julia, which carried the sign of warning. Of warning for what? Who knew? But—

FRIELING: *Dirty Data*.

00:23:25:20 SCHER: *Danger Dirty Data* became a piece in the early nineties. So this is late eighties. This is also late eighties. In addition to signage— Before I forget, I just want to say that *Predictive Engineering* is the only work I've done— Like, what's the difference between *Predictive Engineering* and all this other work you're showing us? It's the only piece that I've done that ties, implicitly, the signage of the exhibition and the museum to the work itself. So that in the iterations you'll see, there's always the signage, the title, and the piece. In this way, the architectural membrane becomes, for me, a very fluid technocratic, but also architectural and beautiful space.

00:24:12:12 So and this piece is called *Public Travel Area* or *PTA*. And it's at PS1 MoMA, 1988. And I bring it up because it's another museum piece, where you could walk through corridors and interact with electronic surveillance equipment, including cameras, monitors, speakers. And there's a lot of performance going on.

FRIELING: You were moving pretty quickly into museum space, as opposed to say, you know, public space.

SCHER: Yes.

FRIELING: Making performances maybe in public space, interventions in public space, et cetera.

00:24:49:20 SCHER: I'm too scared. It's not my personality. I'm not willful enough. I'm not a strong-willed artist. I love the museums. I love institutions. I had like a secret conversation with John Hanhardt once, where we were talking how we loved institutions. And at the time, you couldn't say that. Late eighties, you couldn't say to Gretchen Bender or to Dara or— By the way, the person who gave me the— Okay. This is another story [inaudible]—

FRIELING: Quoting you, "The museum is not indifferent to you."

00:25:21:12 SCHER: I've found how museums care. And they care about construction. I love that. And this is a new construction. I love that. What's not to like about construction? I mean, we'll have to be building on planets soon. What's not to like about construction and bringing art and aesthetics with it? What? Okay. I know there's not— There's a lot not to like, I know. But I'm just raise— saying it this way so you have something to argue back and, ah-ah-ah, stop! Stop! Stop! How— What's wrong with organizing?

FRIELING: Talk a little bit about what we're actually looking at. What happened in that museum space?

00:26:05:20 SCHER: Okay. This is a classroom at PS1. Does anybody know PS1 in New York? It was a school.

FRIELING: [inaudible]

SCHER: So I used this room in the exhibition, a group show called *Covert*, put together by Julie Carson, who's now— I don't know where she is now. You would walk in and a sales— Depending on the day, a saleslady, me, or refugee would come at you and start telling you about the equipment and what was there and what you could do, what you couldn't do, what would hurt you. Gave out free literature. Giving out free stuff never worked out for me. Because I gave all this stuff in a little five-inch monitor. Somebody here. I just gave everything away. I also gave away free tapes. You could record yourself on a microphone and take the tape away. One day, one of the real

SCHER (Cont.): PS1 guards was singing into the microphone. No one else was in the building. It was freezing cold then. Alanna Heiss. There was no money for heating. And I was blown away by this man, who had a very bad-paying job and was just blasting this beautiful gospel music. So depending on the day, you got a different performance. And sometimes there was no one there. It's a longer story, yeah.

00:27:27:09 FRIELING: In a way that introduces immediately this idea, or this interest of yours, of exploring architecture as social environments. And you selected a few more pictures that sort of speak to that.

SCHER: Yes. This is a piece that was produced, put together by Jack Walsh, the Collective for Living Cinema, 1988. It was the first *Security by Julia* piece. It faces the street. And it was the front, the frontage of the cinema. So this frontage, this face, included live surveillance, microphone, lights, signage, fake guard booth, dumpster dived, and also a fake feed. It was the first of the what I call fake feeds, where two my friends, Celeste and Barbara, were inside the filmic space chasing each other. Kind of romance chasing, inside—

FRIELING: [over Scher; inaudible], right?

00:28:40:20 SCHER: Right. It's— Yeah. They're chasing each [other] inside the Collective. So at the front of the Collective for Living Cinema, what you would see are live surveillance pictures, and also mixed in through analog switchers, this chase scene. And people would come in off the street going, "What's wrong inside? Somebody's chasing somebody in there. What's going on? There's an assault." So that turned me on to the idea of romance narratives, of which there's a long filmic history. And Mark McElhatton, who programed there, had a lot of sexy, juicy, wonderful queer narratives, and it was a wonderful space and very supportive. And that was the first fake feed to be mixed in with live surveillance.

00:29:29:22 FRIELING: If you look back at your early pieces and where you are today, so what kind of trajectory is that?

SCHER: From early romance to— [they laugh]

FRIELING: Well, I was thinking about your work.

SCHER: Oh. Oh, okay. [they laugh] Well, I'm courting outer space romances now, I think. Moved into more terrestrial and into celestial imaginings. But—

FRIELING: We did discuss aliens a lot, actually...

00:30:04:00 SCHER: Yes.

FRIELING: ...in preparing the show.

SCHER: I think the idea of the protector, which you'll see maybe in the next slide, it continues the narrative. Here's an installation where someone is not dressed up as a witness or a refugee, but rather as a guard or a policeperson. So I think these mixtures of where is protection, where is threat, where is beauty, are still intermixed.

00:30:33:22 Oh. This is piece called *Buffalo Under Surveillance*. And it put the City of Buffalo New York under surveillance for a month, with the cooperation of Hallwalls. They got an NEA grant for it. So there's no fake feeds in this. There is, however, the use of the Amiga and beginning to use—not yet till *PE, Predictive Engineering*, but use of text on image. That's just the guard station. We're not going to be looking— Well, that was 1992. This is 1995. And if you can imagine, I was one of the first artists to jump on the web. I was. And these are pictures that just kind of just note that period. 1995 was on the web. We could go to the next slide, *Securityland* and many other things happened at the same time. Just to show you right before and right after the first *Predictive Engineering*.

FRIELING: So that was kind of the landscape of your work, which was almost exclusively focused on issues of security and surveillance, and you have continued that and it is this ongoing practice. One of the things that we found out was it was so difficult to think of Julia's work in terms of objects and installation instructions, but it was much more productive to think of a practice that needed to be reformatted and rethought, in relationship to our spaces, our times, our technologies, our screens, et cetera. So what we're looking at here now is 1993, the very first time Bob Riley then commissioned the work for SFMOMA, in the War Memorial Building on Van Ness Ave. 1995 was an iteration actually not in San Francisco, but in Toronto, right? I don't know why 2008 is there; that should be 1998?

MAN: Yeah.

00:32:57:09 SCHER: Well—

FRIELING: 2008 was the website.

SCHER: Oh.

FRIELING: No.

SCHER: Actually, the more I think of it, the more *Predictive Engineerings* there are. I know that's really bad for conservationists to have to deal with. But I just remembered, 2008 was a remix in Cologne.

FRIELING: Oh.

00:33:18:00 SCHER: And I was in email conversation, I think, with you—I hope it was you and not somebody else—to do a audio remix and to bring San Francisco to Cologne.

FRIELING: So for us, the story was 1993 *PE1*, 1998, *PE2*. To be precise, it's actually *Predictive Engineering* to the power of two; *Predictive Engineering* to the power of three. So it would, you know, always be sort of a multiplication of sorts, and enhancement. And then 2016. So let's go back to 1993. And we have a first image of that. And maybe you can picture that scene again in our old building.

SCHER: It—

FRIELING: Nudity was not an issue.

00:34:17:03 SCHER: Nudity was not an issue.

FRIELING: It is today, for some reason.

SCHER: It is today. But I'm going to read from— This was gospel; now it's totally out of favor. Baudrillard. Then it was very hip. So I'll just quote you from this, because one of the things that got me into nudity— *Predictive Engineering* is the work that deals with nudity in my life. I mean, nudity in my artwork, so it's [inaudible]. Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* was very big at the time. He writes, "Obscenity—" Because we were worried about what you could do, what you couldn't do. "Obscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, no more stage, no more theater, nor more illusions." What is closed-circuit television, I would ask. "When everything becomes immediately transparent, visible, exposed, in the raw, inexorable, light of information and communication. We no longer partake of the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication." So there were many, many factors in French theory at the time into the work—the idea of reversibility, going back and forth through tracks, repetition, and loops and cycles—which brought footage that contained nudity in the work. Naked people running around the museum.

00:35:43:02 And to describe what's in this shot, this is a closed-circuit television shot of one of the hallways at the War Memorial Building. Why are we looking at this shot right now? The trick of this piece was, it— There were two hallways that were identical, that I got to use. They were outside SCHER (Cont.): the exhibition space. And how could you get people interested or excited about— I know. It's a longer story. I thought in these two identical hallways, if you have, in two monitors— in one hallway, a picture from the other hallway, that it looked like there were naked people, that people from one hallway would run to the other hallway to see the naked people. And then because it was a fake footage, they weren't there. So people would run through from one hallway to the other, just to find the naked people. And there was a slight wear in the carpet after the end of the exhibition that showed where people would go through the exhibition area. So it was the hallway space that intrigued me in this piece. It was not in the exhibition of *Thresholds and Enclosures*, but just outside. So this is one of the shots.

FRIELING: And here, you actually see the hallways.

00:37:08:23 SCHER: There is the hallways and the signage for *Thresholds and Enclosures*. The overhead lighting grid was the first place where I wanted to hang the equipment, but it was too fragile and could not be used. So the monitors and speakers with audio are on the side. And I'm really mashing this work up and shortening it. But in general, it was a closed-circuit television piece that included fake footage, or footage to entice the viewer into watching more or reading the texts. The texts on different monitors had different voices. One was the voice of a machine; the other was the voice of a human. And this is—I'm shortening— abstracted. And one set of monitors would say one thing and the other would say something else. An Amega computer vector program was used to kind of pinpoint bodies as you went through the space. So without spending too much time on it, it was a piece that had your image mixed in with live computer graphics, so that you would think the machine or the fake live person was thinking about you or talking about you or identifying, verifying, and judging who you were.

FRIELING: We talked a lot about pictures like these and the notion that this was placed in a passage, and what that meant for the continuity of the piece. And it's particularly important to then compare that to our 1998 installation, which did not have a passage, which was a monographic show of just Julia's work. And it was a dead end of sorts. So you reacted differently to that space then.

00:39:07:13 SCHER: Well, the War Memorial Building was one reaction, and the new Botta building was another reaction. This was a dedicated space, so I tried to make it not so dedicated, tried to make it appear as if it's just a hallway to somewhere else. So thus, a full-body mirror—giant mirrors, three giant, expensive mirrors—were used to fake a museum hallway. Does anybody— Is this—? You want to hear more about these pieces, or would you rather go on to the more—?

FRIELING: Well, we'll talk in general about the evolution of the piece. It's important to point out, also, on the left, you see a screenshot of your related website.

00:39:54:09 SCHER: Yes. I feel I was very lucky. Instead of a catalogue, there was the first website for the museum. And it was worked on with Perimeter. Steven Jaycox and his crew worked on it. So you have fake scenes of the museum, as if you're looking at a surveillance computer-control screen. Why? Because the museum, at the time, would not let you, due to insurance purposes, broadcast or project or display anything outside. It was violating the privacy, the secrecy. The kingdom of the museum was violated, if images went out. So it was fake. It was images from the exhibition turned into a website that made it appear that you could be looking in on the real museum. In addition to that, there was a fake bomb scare and some other juicy things. If you go to the website, you can see them.

FRIELING: Still nudity, though.

00:41:05:12 SCHER: Well, I have a lot to say about nudity, but maybe no one cares, so—

FRIELING: Well—

SCHER: I think in this shot, it's just a beautiful scene of the architecture of the museum. This space, these spaces, are penetrated by artist's ideas every day. [mic noise] Oh, God. See? [she chuckles] It's so exciting.

FRIELING: Let me just add to that. One of the pleasures of the archive is you find a photograph of naked people in front of the elevator in the Botta building, and one of our trustees comes off the elevator, not prepared for that scene. [laughter] So you were shooting scenes in our public spaces, and you were engaging volunteers, actors, friends. We have two of our actors with us tonight. So what kind of scenes were you after? What was—

00:42:07:00 SCHER: Dara and Timos took over the roof. They came as a couple, as a double. I'm very into the double. We can go into that later. A genuine couple, reenacting scenes from the cosmos, on the roof. They continued their presence into *PE3*, where they serve as the wise people, the mentors, the heads of the past, the last upshot, up-close head shots of *PE3*. The rest of the shots are receding. Theirs lay present as the dominant heads, the watching heads.

FRIELING: We were particularly interested in understanding how you orchestrated your scenes. You know, you were very interested in chase scenes. You were interested in the stairwells. People were falling down the stairs all the time.

00:43:05:09 SCHER: Yes. I'm really attracted to Pathé.

FRIELING: Pathé.

SCHER: Pathé. The first movies were chase scenes and scenes of destruction. And they used the same places, the same locations, over and over and over again. And very much, I fell in love with these films. So it was in this idea of living and dead, this open and closed, this hope and then hopelessness, that I fell in love with, and felt the body of the architecture was a good place to re-find that again. The architecture's camera, the camera of the museum, is only a sensor picking up what— Time and time and time again, you have art shows, and in and out, and the breathing life of a place is moved in and out of a camera's view. So it was just a way to bring that energy in.

FRIELING: So we finally reach 2016. This is a shot from our seventh floor gallery, media art gallery. It's a group show from the collection called Film As Place. And the fact that I titled that Film As Place influenced you somewhat.

00:44:31:10 SCHER: Yes. In a big way.

FRIELING: In a big way?

SCHER: Huge. Huge.

FRIELING: Huge. I still haven't got this list of film references, though.

SCHER: Huge. I know, I feel really bad. Because it's never complete. But endlessness, I learned with *PE3*, is a lie. Anything with DNA, there is an end. Each of the scenes has a component in a Hollywood film or a television show. Everything from *Man With the X-Ray Eyes* to *Vertigo* to you name it. *The Birds*. There's a fabulous connection for me between Hollywood and the scenes picked, and falling down stairs and *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* and Lucille Ball and— The coordinates are very big for me. So—

FRIELING: Well, one difference is obviously that the context is a group show. Another difference is we have a new space. You needed to relate to a new space, and we were quite clear, at some point, that we should actually go back to the very first iteration and recreate a sense of passage in this. But the big question for us, as for you, I guess, was well, this is now a big step from 1998 to 2016. A lot has changed. Sadly, surveillance has not gone away. On the contrary. But it has changed. We have changed. So maybe you can talk a little bit about that difference in context and how that influenced you in conceiving this piece now.

00:46:21:08 SCHER: Well, which thing to pick first? I guess one of the things I really enjoyed about Film As Place, in the idea of it, is that I was already— My own game, ha-ha-ha, I'll juxtapose this image and this image; it'll be really funny, ha-ha-ha. All of a sudden I'm confronted with two SCHER (Cont.): very serious pieces of work in the adjacent rooms. And that hit me like a great lead balloon, how to be challenged in a positive way by the accumulation of artists. So I think this was one main— the force, the power of these works. I didn't feel like I wanted to put naked people doing blowjobs next to Dachau. So it affected me because Dachau affects me. I didn't have the urge to do that, on the one hand. On the other hand, I had to do it anyway. So there is a blowjob scene in a car out front. But it still affected me. The challenge of the juxtaposition was very big.

00:47:42:22 Secondly, to come to terms with the Hollywood stage and lighting, and the surveillance as a set of reproduction of Hollywood, of broadcast. And so I felt at liberty to consider that, to think about that. And so that was the second big, big thing. And the third thing was the idea of just the general— It's 2016 where

everybody— No one at a talk like this would ever raise their hand and say, well, what do you mean by surveillance, because everybody knows. So it's a different environment. So I think those are three things that were very challenging to me.

FRIELING: I would quote you again, saying that difference, for you, you coined like, "In 1998 or in the nineties, the crisis was to be seen by Big Brother or the system. In 2016, the crisis is *not* to be seen."

00:48:47:22 SCHER: Right. So there's dark spots here. You can hide from the surveillance in this museum and in this room. It's easy to hide. It's easy to move away. You can reverse the effects I—

FRIELING: Weren't you referencing the fact that a lot of people just want to be exposed?

SCHER: Well, selfie culture's big. It's huge. I love selfie culture. To make a long story short, it's one big selfie room. But it comes, in this shot, it's not just your head, it's with a warning tape is in the shot. So if you do do selfies, it's with the— usually with the warning tape, the black and yellow warning tape. Actors take their cues from marks on the floor. I know this wasn't in our topics, but it inspired me very much to take the Hollywood cues of— And many other artists use this. It's not like I was the only one to use the markings. So many of the footages, in the bathroom footage and other SCHER (Cont.): things, you see little pieces of tape on the floor, and then you see the warning tape. So it's a selfie generator with warnings. You do this and you're warned. I can't believe I'm not going over my very deep notes on this practice of organizing these kinds of constructions. But I think we're— exercising free will in a museum is still one of the major themes. You're not in a prison. You're not in prison. You have free will to move through such a glamorous space. I mean, it's glamor and Hollywood and all these things. And it's at risk and it's— There's a lot of vitality to it, but there's a lot of danger in this self-celebration and— So.

FRIELING: Let's talk about collaboration and authorship. This piece would not exist if it weren't for the collaboration of a lot of people. I want to point out two who were instrumental in programming the piece, Mark Hellar and Matt Ganucheau. And we were at some point, looking at sensors. And we knew that Julia wanted to have sensors as part of the piece, but we were also wondering, well, what do they do? What do the sensors do?

00:51:23:19 SCHER: Okay, for the archivists, here's— This is what all the sensors do. And there's sensors that trigger things, hidden overlays. The general idea is that the whole piece is just a sensor. And there's more to it, in that in our future, in that in general, the idea of a sensor-based world is upon us. And it takes that to the fore. They're embedded in a program, which is part of a Max patch program. To make a long story short, what the museum bought when they bought *PE2*, they bought an algorithm. That's all they bought, an algorithm. So *PE* is actually just math. You can do it anywhere. It's a math piece. But math is also a synthetic methodology. So reference to our discussions tomorrow, this, this role, is huge. That what is a gesture of mathematics, in a world where buildings might disappear? Or in twenty years, if you ever do this piece again, what would you show? It's algorithms. However, it's tied to the museum's architecture. And it can be all the new architectures that come. So for me, this displays a hella— hours and hours, must be a hundred hours of work on the patch, and choreographing people through the space, with sensors that are reactive to human presence. They trigger audio and visual clues. But in fact, in the larger scheme, they trigger all the manifestations in the room, in the work itself. They are guardians to those triggers. And it's a big part of the piece.

FRIELING: Have you noticed any differences between '93, '98, and 2016, in terms of people's behavior in the space?

00:53:47:20 SCHER: Well, I haven't been here long enough to really take in what people are doing with it now. I ran into someone at a deli late last night and he said, oh, yeah, he joined the museum, and he really liked the piece on the seventh floor with the dildo. The Matthew Barney. So— It's a hallway piece. But I don't know. I have to go in and see the piece. I think it's normative; but that doesn't stop the ability of the piece to collect the images which are part of the algorithm. That's its job. The algorithm is for the collection of sound and image. And I'm a visual-based artist. Durational aesthetics is about what things look like cumulatively, over time. So it's still doing its job; it's still functioning. It's like you may not care anymore about a hand dryer. Do you remember the hand dryers, where you go in the bathroom? They don't have them here. They're ubiquitous, they're normal. Yet I know the guy whose father invented that. Ken Feingold's dad. Do you know the media art Ken Feingold? His dad invented the hand blow dryer. And he didn't get the billions of dollars, because why? Because he was so busy working on his engineering that his partner took to the contract to the patent office and got all the money for it. But Ken's a great artist. I mean, it is a lot of things around— I love engineering stories. I'm a voyeur to real engineers, and that's— But no, I think it works as a great hallway piece. You see yourself in others and in the staged environment. And I'll have to go back and see. That's a really hard question.

FRIELING: Our discussions focused a lot around the relationship between the old iterations and what might possibly constitute the continuity of the piece in 2016. We talked about screens, how those screens should feel of today. And in fact, it's the language of the institutional screens that you see in that piece, as well. There's also a historic component to it, and you see monitors from '93, one from '98. But there were also new aspects. You wanted to expand on the understanding and the formatting of the— And I think the next shot is somewhat new, or points to a new trajectory in this.

00:56:47:18 SCHER: Yes. This is life or death at the museum. Life or death artworks. Do they have— If something has DNA, as I talked about last year at the Tate, is there death? Does the artwork live on? But this is also from *Vertigo*. And it's also the roof of the museum. And we had a SCHER (Cont.): drone and we were able to get footage which deals with things that are on the very top, the corporate top, which I normally avoid, for obvious reasons. But here, Larry is falling off the museum. Literally falling off. Maggie Morris is climbing up, as in *PE2*. But Larry is actually trying to hold on, and can't hold on indefinitely. That is, the point is that endlessness is not real. There is no endlessness with the museum or with an artwork. It can go on in perpetuity, you can reconfigure it, you can redesign it. But is there an endless? Is there a paradigm about this? And when we're talking about the conservation of media art, where does this go? How does this— Bruce Nauman's two circles. I mean, this his a wonderful example, this endlessness, the spin, and where it goes. And it goes back to original practice of— Okay. So I just was— I'm using an analogy, at this point, but—

FRIELING: Well, we also have drone shots.

00:58:22:09 SCHER: Yes, we have drone[s]. We're moving up. The drone, the ubiquitous, the unmonitored, the un-personed view is very exciting to me, and I'm trying to do a lot more work around that, yeah. Very into that. Have my drone license in Germany. So very happy. It's really hard to get in Germany. Especially when your German's really bad. [laughter] So I can fly a drone.

Yes. Absence, presence. I have a lot to say on that, and we could talk later in discussion. What's there, what's not there, what's ripped off, what's taken away, what's missing? What was the event that made a empty monitor bracket? And all the issues related to— I think because of time, just if anyone's interested, we could talk about it more, you know.

FRIELING: There's an important aspect we haven't mentioned at all. And that is—and I quote again from her emails—"How voices create authority, and changing our voice changes trust." Your voice in the space and your voice as text. Say that again, differently.

00:59:51:09 SCHER: Oh, okay. You know Bernie Sanders, how he talks? Do you know how Bernie Sanders talks? He puts the emphasis on the first word. [changes inflection] You sit at the table. I'm telling you, that's right. The bill will go through. The emphasis is first. The first. The guy. The senate. Go over there. This first word. Imagine a bunch of people at your dinner table sitting SCHER (Cont.): around, and he's trying to convince you of stuff. That is the way he talks. It's dinner table. You've got to convince the whole family. You're going to hell. You're getting out of here. You're going to pass. You know? I'm telling you. Okay. When I talk, [changes inflection] the invisibility committee will meet you now. The invisibility committee will meet you now. This is invisible. The emphasis, the sound— Oh, Jesus. No one cares. [laughter] I love this. You know, I just wanted to show you something, that there is something intimate to my art making, however small a gesture it might be. Okay.

01:01:14:12 So when I say a line, it's not— there's no emphasis on the first word. [changes inflection] The invisibility committee will meet you now. Your body juices are important to us, here at the museum space. Warning, conductor probes on now. Danger, dirty day. So this cadence, this manipulation, plays with the voice. So you have Siri. How many other computer voices do you work with and communicate with on a daily basis? So I'm just playing into the phenomenon of what the voice does. Not only seductive, but how much of its time it takes of you every day. It's an increasing amount. So the— We can talk about it. If anyone's interested later, we can talk more about the voice.

FRIELING: Well, this is particularly relevant, in that it is a message. The Security by Julia text messaging service, I hope some of you have subscribed to that. Free. A message a day, at noon. And they all have a certain poetic ambivalence. So how do you create this almost impromptu messages?

01:02:45:22 SCHER: What, there're 260 of the text messages? I think you put 100 up. You know, a long time ago, ambivalence was very in. And then it was not in. Do you— [laughter] You guys are too young to remember. Okay. Alright. So you're too young. Well, a long time ago, ambivalence was in. I'm really crunching all this philosophy, and I'm sorry— So it's embarrassing. I can't compress Virilio into a one sentence thing. But in general, the idea of seeing, of this resonance, and of text, started with the need to give directions. My cousin Paul is blind. And not like my parents ever came to my art shows, but he came. And so I started doing audio works as not just warnings, but as directional warnings. [changes inflection] Please move to the left. Please move to the right, and then see the sensor on the wall. The camera is too your left and behind your face. SCHER (Cont.): Warning, there is a step over here. Over here is the toilet area. Warning, placater adjustment probes on now. So it is with this in mind that I began working with my voice. I wasn't because I thought, oh, I have a great voice. It was because someone who really wanted to come see the shows was being left out in my scramble for the vanity of the visual. So I was kind of prompted to this challenge of including text and voice. So the signs came after. But I think what came first, the chicken or the egg? They've actually found out. The chicken came first. So in this sense, the signage came after. It's true; I read it. [laughter] I also read that if you don't wear a bra your breasts stay higher longer. [inaudible voice] And so bras are a gimmick. So who knows what you read? So it was in this spirit of trying to communicate at kind of the highest level. Direct communication in a media work. And could an installation work approach all people with dignity? Or was it not dignified in all its aspects? Is it a takedown to just kind of some cultural elite that only takes in certain clues because they're hip?

FRIELING: Social network. Another quote. “Exclusivity, indignity, consent, logging, shamming, teenagers clubs, Instagram, the walled garden of Facebook, et cetera.”

01:05:41:12 SCHER: Yeah, we were going to get to that if there was time. I see teenagers who are on social media all the time, and many of whom are subject of not just bullying, but girls who one week, a guy will like them, and then the next week they don’t—in text. And it’s not just like you and your close friends know; it’s like 600 people know. So I think the effects of this, that is, the warnings— We haven’t created the kind of warning system, to young people especially, what kind of danger, we’ve all put our foot in. And I think the Facebook garden and all these things are really great topics, because it’s utter surveillance. Someone’s making a lot of money for you chatting away about some guy’s, you know, football score. So I’m very— And I’ve seen what happens in these bullying situations. Such violence. Which is unpunished. And there’s no laws. So play with cameras all you want. I played with cameras. But any warnings I have, you walk through and it’s a mute nothing. I’m interested in the challenges of these dangers that we don’t yet see. Invisible dangers. Invisible. And this is also going back to Baudrillard and the other side of invisibility is visibility. But with invisibility comes seduction. If it was all just out there and we knew everything, it

SCHER (Cont.): wouldn’t be so seductive. So as young people are seduced into systems we just don’t know everything about yet— And there’s people here in the audience, I know, who know a lot more about this than I do. But I just see it as a warning, incredible dangers. And I see these young girls, who I can’t even tell you the problems. I just breaks my heart. Heartbreaking.

FRIELING: Well, I was going to say that in a way, *Predictive Engineering* is the opposite of Snapchat, although it does seem to run through a series of transitions of images and transmittance of images. It does record. And it records— So whoever is interested, it records at four p.m. You want to be part of the piece, you want to be in the memory of *Predictive Engineering*, come back to the museum, pick a camera. We have a camera on every floor. Be there at four p.m. Just be there or perform.

01:08:25:13 SCHER: It’s like *The Martian Chronicles*. Can I read this thing about the conservators, speaking of *Martian Chronicles*?

FRIELING: Go for it.

SCHER: [inaudible]. Okay, so this last slide is—[she chuckles] it’s the last slide—is to the conservators. We haven’t really had time enough today to talk about all the incredible issues that have come up in previous renditions. But I wanted to just show a slide for the conservators and the media conservators and how hard their job is. It’s about conservators. “What are you gonna do when things go wrong? What are you gonna do when it all cracks up? What are you gonna do when the love burns down? What are you gonna do when the flames go up? Who is gonna come and turn the tide? What’s it gonna take to make a dream survive? Who’s got the touch to calm the storm inside? Who’s gonna save you?” Conservators. [laughter] But it’s a more inclusive— It was just an ode to them. And this is from— I didn’t write that. This is *Simple Minds*, 1985. And I chose that because ’85 was the first year I started working with electronics. So—

FRIELING: Well, you know, you call your art yourself, transitional art. We have a transitional moment here, and we’re going to play—

01:10:01:17 SCHER: Then we’ll have questions at the—

FRIELING: We'll take questions afterwards, but we'll let you enjoy this one as well.

SCHER: So you can leave, if you want to get out of here.

01:10:11:04 [clip plays]

01:10:16:07 SCHER: [over clip] This is for the conservators. If you don't like the eighties, you should leave.
[laughter]

FRIELING: [over clip] We should pump up the volume, though. He's taking it down. You don't like the song?
[laughter]

SCHER: [over clip] Must be a young guy up there. [laughter] If you want to sing along, go ahead. I don't really sing. I just lip sync.

FRIELING: [over clip] Okay, I think we'll welcome Dominic onstage.

SCHER: [over clip] Yeah, welcome Dominic.

01:11:27:22 FRIELING: [clip ends] So okay.

MAN: Yeah, play that, but—

WILLSDON: We should probably conclude in a second. I have a question, but you have a question?

FRIELING: Yeah, I have a question, which sort of relates to what you just said. So you're teaching. Your practice and your philosophy, your spirit, seems to be very personal and sort of embodied. How do you communicate? Or what can you teach? [laughter] What do you do with your students?

01:12:02:22 SCHER: Are there any here? Well, they go on to do amazing things, which blow me away and make me cry. So I'm very proud of my students. They've done amazing things. And right now, many are doing great performance lectures. They've gone on to make films. One won an award for an animation. They're making a lot of movies. They're doing protests. I spoke at my first protest, not in America, but in Germany. And it's illegal for me to take my students to a protest that's against the state. So we have to like, meet up separately. But it's all online. And I used humor. But then I felt so guilty. I fell after my first protest and broke my wrist. And I think it was just because I felt so guilt-ridden. So I think that it all comes through. We study Foucault, about them. We study architecture. We study construction, ways and means of building. We study things that aren't necessarily needing to have the word media. And we look at the positions of enlightenment, so-called enlightenment, over time. What have people through the ages considered their enlightenment, their enlightening gift, or their position of strength? What's the enlightenment during the age of AIDS, for example. Who comes up with a great line? Karl, Queer Nation. To appropriate, to take, to make. So to bring enlightenment, to bring things up to the surface. So we discuss all this. And we make projects and we— It's all online. We did a symposium, Women Under Surveillance. You can find it on the school website. So a lot of different things. And if I could say there's one thing in particular, we have big— We talk a lot. We talk a lot about strategies for intervention in installation art. But we also talk about inhumanity, what hurts. You know, people

killing animals, people killing. Why does death happen? Why does war happen? You know, what can I say? I mean, I'd have to— Just go to the school webpage, I guess, and you can— What do we talk about? We talk about— Lately, we talk about—

FRIELING: We talk about Julia Scher.

01:15:04:20 SCHER: We talked about Sarah Schulman recently and, you know, *People in Trouble* got stolen, and she has two new books out. [We] talk about her new work. We talk about SCHER (Cont.): literature a lot. We talk about science-fiction and aliens. We talk about different cosmologies. We talk about phenomenology. We talk about the problem of surveillance in the world today. We talk about the police, we talk about no police. We talk about the slaughter of minds, how your mind gets cut up, hurt, corrupted.

WILLSDON: Let me just as one last thing quickly. We have, obviously, three versions of *Predictive Engineering* now, and obviously, two prompted by changes to the architecture. In the future, apart from the architecture, what, with technology or surveillance or how we organize ourselves, would have to change to require a fourth version of *Predictive Engineering*?

01:16:05:09 SCHER: The contract says whenever and if ever you do it again, if you need to update the stuff, the contract says do it. And you just have to keep this algorithm of the saved, the past, the organization. I wouldn't call the math the organization; I would call it, for lack of a better word, it was a cool idea at the time to find a way back into something I totally loved and could never really do. So that's all it takes. It takes some love walls, and that's about it.

WILLSDON: Ah. Let me thank you again, Rudolf Frieling, Julia Scher.

01:16:57:22 SCHER: Thank you. [applause]

01:17:12:11 [END]