

**William E. Parker dialogue with students from the Rhode Island School of Design:
“Distinctions,” recorded on January 27, 1979.**

The following transcript is based on separate recordings made by Parker and a student. One set is owned by Nevil Parker and reproduced with her permission, and the other set resides in the Special Collections library at Rhode Island School of Design. Each set is incomplete due to the stopping and starting of the tape recorders, but combined represent a full documentation of the extended conversation. The tape begins with a discussion for a student-led plan to create a portfolio of photographs and a printed publication on the theme of “Distinctions” as a response to the *Mirrors and Windows* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

The following transcription begins at minute 7:49. Text set in () refer to Parker’s comments made while quoting another text. Additional information set in { }

-Bob Martin, February 2023

Student: I had seen the Szarkowski *Mirrors and Windows* show, and I was offended by the show. Both the installation of the show and the concept of the show. I thought it was an utterly simplistic notion, and a notion which confused more than clarified the situation in contemporary photography, at which point we were talking about the notion of distinctions, that it wasn’t a question of either/or, but rather it was a question of making distinctions amongst various types or approaches to photography, which you could break into schools, or flows of thought, or however you want to phrase it, but that trying to make that major division was probably fruitless.

Yes, I remember, in fact you, Gil, I find it delicious because you defined the term, distinctions, you remember that evening when we were sitting at that, what is the name of that place where we always use?

Student: Steeple Street.

Steeple Street, yes. And I was concerned because what, in a sort of roundabout way, what has concerned me is the fact that we fell into that discussion originally by discussing people like Nick Nixon, and Wessel and we were talking about some of the concerns that had appeared very recently, and whether Szarkowski, when he takes Winogrand and Friedlander and Nixon and others and puts them into groups and opposes them to those who are purportedly introspective or seeking a kind of self-insight through photography as opposed to a more extroverted approach to the world. I thought it was, again, I am quite in agreement with you, a kind of issue that has a very

long history, that kind of simplistic viewpoint, and it is very much a mistake. There is a book called the Mirror and the Lamp, I think it is by...I'd have to check it {M.H. Abrams} He deals with the idea of the lamp being the illuminating of the external world, which is very much like his {Szarkowski's} idea of windows. And the lamp can be associated with the sun, associated with artificial illumination and then the mirror as being this idea of an internal, reflective source. {Parker is inverting Abrams' use of the two metaphors here: for Abrams, the artist as a mirror refers to the more extroverted sense of Szarkowski's window approach: the artist reflects (ie., a mirror) objective truths that exist in the world. The romantic movement, inspired by the Enlightenment, relocated the source of truth from the world to the subjective realm of the artist: the artist is now seen as a light (the lamp) projecting truth upon the world. Thus, Abrams' use of the terms is opposite of Szarkowski's} But he points out how that metaphor has persisted for centuries and then argues the point that it is really not that simple. It is like postulating the difference between an introvert and an extrovert. They may arrive at the same conclusion but it is the modes of operation through which they express their personality or introject their understandings of the world. So in reality it is like trying to make them oppose one another, and as Gil pointed out, rather than letting them be seen as two modes, and two among many. Two modes of a way of perceiving. The thing that alarmed me was the fact that, I don't know that it is an alarm, but the thing that strikes me is the fact that there has been a presumption that photography excused painting from an obligation to be referential. Cavell takes that view, and most theoreticians of photography, it used to be said that photography replaced painting in terms of reference. And the most recent voice is Stanley Cavell who states that, not really at all: photography set up its own parameters, its own limits, and experience, and as a result, painting didn't have an obligation to no longer record the world. And he starts with the 1860s and talks about Manet beginning to paint elliptically, that is abstractly, reducing things, and he was also influenced by photography to essentially a value structure. And so painting inevitably went toward a kind of formal construct. And by the time of, say 1905, 1907, painting began to remove any kind of relationship of itself to reference. That certainly hasn't held, but nonetheless, that was the purported intent of formalism. Whereas photography purportedly was kept in obedience to the idea of reflecting what things looked like. Even as late as the 40s, Clement Greenberg writes his commentary on Edward Weston's work and calls it "The Camera's Glass Eye." And he says that photography should be anecdotal, it should stay with the literary. And by that he means that he is offended by the principle of abstraction in photography that Weston was certainly declaring. Abstract only in the sense of diverting a part away from a total, which I think Greenberg didn't quite understand that Weston wasn't being abstract as much as he was taking portions from larger totals so that they appeared to be abstract. And he stated, Greenberg felt that that was painting's purpose and not photography's. And I think a lot of people did believe that. That photography should stay somewhere in the campground of the world,

and it should always remain somewhat removed from the realm of ideas, including very personal ideas. It has been constantly called the styleless medium and Szarkowski in *Photography and the American Landscape*, and Nathan Lyons most recently in *The Great West*, in that introduction he wrote to Gary Metz's show on contemporary photographers exploring the southwest and the Rockies and so on, makes the statement that, although he somewhat gives you room for the possibility that there were influences, but he mentions people like Tim O'Sullivan, and Watkins, and others, as if they were approaching the view of the landscape without any precedent or tradition. Of course he puts in parentheses, although we might suspect that painting, which indeed did precede their work in the west, could have had an influence. But he states that they were basically working without a tradition. I think that is nonsense. I really do. I think that it is not a question of whether, that would presume there can only be a pictorial influence, you follow me, and that these people worked almost like absentees from every other kind of influence that was occurring within the world view of that period. And you did have in the evolution of photography, the reappraisal of people like Talbot, by... whose point is that the man was distinctively interested in a kind of formalism, and that was tub or haystack and those shadows... were thought of as pictorial forms but seen through the terms of photography. And that it wasn't a documentary mode that was being developed that could never become art, that would never have any relationship to art. And what I have felt... that painting did indeed lose its obligation or no longer had an obligation to be referential, obviously, from my view, I think it failed. Say for example with the advent of Cubism, and elevate that basically from the 1905-7 period. Seven I guess would be more accurate. But the thing is, that if indeed for the next half century, the inevitability toward abstract art, and non-objective art, and then exponentially, according to these theoreticians, photography should have been going more and more toward referent. In reality, it didn't. In the late 19th century pictorialism was highly metaphoric, highly symbolic: anything was *but* what it is. And even the use of non-silver media, or experimental media, whether it was a renaissance of the cliché-verre, or gum bichromate, or bromoil printing, and so on, things were very much in the service of a kind of romanticizing attitude. And you can say that the effects of symbolism in the late 19th century were no different in painting than they were in photography. In other words, the idea of no tradition for photography, and the idea of the documentary mode just hasn't held. As I said before, the reappraisal proves that from the very beginning there was a concern with pictorial values and to hell with the idea of what things looked like, whether they were to be named, and the larger corpus of Talbot's work has much more to do with the exploration of, not the identity of his children or of his wife or of his aunt or what have you, but much more the idea of the way they are placed, how they are organized within the plane. Things of that nature. So there was truly a sense of distinguishing the kind of pictures that occur in photography that might not have been thought of in reference to painting. When we talk about the idea of the edgeless image,

and photography having an opportunity for suggesting that what you are looking at as a picture does not stop at its edge: that it is still part of a world. Whereas paintings do tend to stop at their edge because we are thinking of a form of inventive consciousness and a syntax that requires someone to have made a mark, whereas photography doesn't have that requirement. And the sense that in the progression from the 19th century, it may well be that because of the necessities of the exposition work and the fact that someone was supposed to be like, Tim O'Sullivan recording the Green River in Colorado, letting us know what it looks like, doesn't mean that he didn't have a particular view that was entirely different from the west coast studies of Watkins or Muybridge or some of the other photographers that participated, like Gardner on the 30th parallel, or what have you. There is a distinctive difference between every one of those people. And it has taken us a good century and a half to realize that they are not just pictures of things. And Weston Naef pointed that distinction out beautifully in *Era of Exploration*.

Student: You come to a very interesting point. It is not that photography is the result of what is in the world, rather what is seen. And when you say a styleless medium, it doesn't seem to be.

Well, it might be more pertinent to say it is the style of the perceiver, the selecting principle of style. Style has traditionally been associated with the idea of invention in a form. We talk about the way someone makes something. It is very difficult to talk about making a photograph, although some people do. In other words, that whole idea of the phenomenology of light being the prime determinant of what is recorded, and then a person selects camera, selects films, selects the view, selects the vantage point. That can be an aspect of style. But you see I think it is a much more perceptual style. The idea of what is seen, and then also you can call it a style that cannot exclude the mechanical. It was like Peter Bunnell so beautifully pointed out, the fact that if we looked at Anne Brigman's work, and we looked at some of the inter-negatives for some of her pictorialist images, we will see how she definitely worked her inter-negative differently from someone else, you follow me? So there is a kind of mechanical stylistic choice, or selection of how one wishes to print things. Even the idea of exposure, or the type of film one chooses, shouldn't be relegated to the realm of technology. Those are distinctions, they are distinctive choices. Painters may choose a type of brush, or a type of paint, but generally we don't talk about paintings in terms of a number three brush, or whether it was a flat, or a bright, or a round. We don't think in those terms. But as photographers, we have to think in terms of whether it is a 20 millimeter, a 50 millimeter, a 90 millimeter, a telescopic, you understand what I mean. In other words, the idea that, well at least that has been neglected. And I am not interested in returning to a kind of camera annual where you have your little nomenclature in the back of the book, but

sometimes if we were to talk about differences between types of work, we might very well be evolving towards a point where we are going to need to understand that the mechanics, the technology *is* a part of the perceptual style. Because you are choosing something that will extend your vision in a certain way.

Student: As a painter, when he or she chooses a palette.

Yes, but you see we don't really think, though, about the idea of tracing the painting back necessarily to a choice of palette, or what I call technics. We might talk about a choice of color, do you see what I mean?

Student: A choice of mark-making.

Oh yes, definitely the choice of mark-making, but in fact remember, that stays within the realm of the painting. You see you talk about the choice of it but you don't really look at a painting and say, aha, now I see the choice of mark-making: you are looking at the mark-making. But in a print, you are looking at something very distinctively as a choice, you don't always have to know, but in other words, if you look at something printed on Brovira as opposed to Ilford as opposed to Portriga or whatever the paper might be, in other words you *do* see the difference between a warm tone, a cool tone, a blue tone or what have you, in the sense that that becomes inevitably an attitudinal set in relationship to how one wanted something to be seen. So that in that sense you do get a perceptual style but not, what can I call it, a physical style. I call it a mechanics, a mechanical technics style.

Student: It seems that the difference is basically between, say in a painting you can make a variety of singular marks inside of one unit whereas in most technical features of photography you are dealing with an overall, everytime, like a certain choice of lens, has to do with the overall of a certain position in relation to what you have photographed, it is overall, taken into consideration in that single unit at the same time, unless you get into hand works.

Or else you do something that interrupts what you might call the typical phenomenological event, that is the light, and so on. You could very well use masks or screens or even later, after the fact.

Student: Or you can use your hand, which is something in terms of mark-making, is something I think is often floated by. When you print, or when you make a photograph, you inevitably alter, selectively and locally, the world view.

I completely agree. But I think the thing I would want to insure is that I for one think that photographs perhaps transform the world even more than paintings do, because paintings still stand in relationship to a kind of material construct: a mound of dirt in a painting is a mound of oil, or something like that. Yet on the other hand, photographs, when they are to me, they sort of strike your eyes, more of the decision-making process of the photographer in terms of not just obeying what the world looked like but how one wants that world to be seen. Now it might be just the simplest idea of dodging or printing in, that creates a phenomenological experience that you are not going to find in the world and yet it still has the traces of something that is extremely credible. In the first place because of the fact that we don't see things in the way that photographs present information to us. The idea of scanning and selective focusing: as I am looking at Keith and Nancy, Josh and Gil are somewhat diffused, but I can focus on you and then they become diffused. But obviously a photograph tends, and typically a photograph, I am not talking about the distinctive photographs that may argue the point: typically photographs tend to deliver us *all* of the information, typically. And as a result, we already have there a kind of a perceptual event that I would trust that the photographer had to be conscious of, in an inclusive sense, whereas painters tend to exclude certain elements from their work and become selective in the way they develop their form, in that sense by exclusion, not by framing. Photographers have to be first inclusive, in terms of what they are seeing, and then obviously what they exclude is outside the picture plane, it is still hovering around it. That is why I like the Cavell notion that a photograph may well be more about what is excluded than what is included, yet at the same time, what the photographer does select and what the photographer does determine the print to look like: dark, light, whatever the temperature is, there is that sense that choices have been made that do not require me to dwell upon one area to the exclusion of the rest. There is a kind of inclusiveness about the nature of the photographic image because it just doesn't occur in painting and it is a radical impression because we don't see that way. I don't know anyone who can look and capture it all in one point, record that blink. (laughs)

Let me get back to something else, instead of wandering all over the place. It is ironic to me to think of things like *Demoiselles D'Avignon*, by Picasso, was painted in 1907, and that purportedly is the great announcement moving forward that things are going to change, and thus we will have Analytical Cubism, and thus we will have Synthetic Cubism and eventually it would move towards, in a typical strain. Because there were figurative painters simultaneously with Cubism. And there have been highly referential, watercolors and prints and so on, along with the strain of what you might call the typical development of Western painting. As much of what we are talking about is Western photography in comparison. The ultimate aim of painting was to keep relieving itself from any obligation to record the world. So I would say the most typifying point now

would be, in terms of the evolution or the teleology of what painting began to do in about 1907 if you want to trace it back to Manet or if you want to go back further to Poussin, I don't care, the point is, is Colorfield painting. Or the idea of the shaped canvas, or pure phenomenology: itself/reflexive painting, whether you want to talk about Morris Louis, or some of the more romanticizing types, you want to deal with Olitsky or Noland, or... Gene Davis. Whatever the types of work, and even among younger artists, even the fact that they call their works *pieces*. They don't think of them as metaphors, or as records of something, they call them pieces, things, works, objects. And ironically a lot of the terminology used about painting that need not any longer be about anything other than itself. The photograph is often thought of as an object if you go back to its earliest strain like the daguerreotype and the materiality of cased-works and the materiality of silver. If you extend the word materiality to include light energy and chemical materials...or the chemistry of photography being suggestively object-like. You have to take that as a metaphor, object-like. The irony is, collectively, and I think even most critics, theoreticians, and museum personal kept thinking of photography as still having an obedience to the world: that it was always going to be a slave to the idea of recording things, and yet I don't understand why then the major thrust typically in photography from the late 19th century up to the late 1960's and 70's has been to "metaphorize:" to make the world metaphorical. The persistence of the idea of the equivalent, the sense that the photograph is in the services of the anecdotal, the fact that it has been thought of as much more a record of the individualism of the photographer, and there are isolated people in the drift of that, that just didn't quite fit into that strain. They were lately appreciated. I would even include people like Walker Evans. I don't care how quickly he was known or how early he was exhibited at MOMA or what have you. The point is, in the collective mainstream, he was a kind of island to himself. Ironically, what's happened is it seems like things that Cubism announced: simultaneity, seeing all things from multiple viewpoints. You can talk about the photograph's simultaneity: that you see everything with clarity in a typical photograph that you would never be able to see. You don't have to have the full frontal and profile of the head combined into one as in a Picasso. Photography is the archetype of simultaneity. Seeing *everything* at once, even if from a fixed viewpoint, with coequal detail. And again, in typical photographs. The idea of formalism, that purportedly painting had the prerogative to express itself in terms of planal organization, or seeking flatness, or respecting the two-dimensionality of the picture plane. Ironically what we find is that photography, I think very recently has returned to a recognition that design does not have to be "in the mind:" that is, in the theoretical consciousness that someone says I now will follow the Cezanne-esque dictum and respect the two-dimensionality of the picture plane because *that* is the truth, it is two-dimensional. Photographers can now...start dealing with these principles that are known by the cliches of lining up, or interesting contour continuations, so that something that is fifty miles away now looks

like it sprouts from, or continues from, or extends from, something that is two feet away. The idea that if we position ourselves in the world in a certain manner we will find out that it can have as much two-dimensionality as it does three. Or maybe we are finding out that this absurdity of trying to distinguish between the two and the three in terms of pictures. Painting can never deliver us an opportunity to experience the same thing that photography does: that signal to the fact that a photograph has, I use the word, it is our ingram, it has ingrammed us to expect it to be a record of what we experientially think of as three dimensional, and yet in reality, it is equally important that we recognize that a photograph is on a flat plane. It is just that reference, that transfer of reference of the spatial three-dimensional environmental world. It's as though photographers were really desperate to try to establish an authenticity for their own forms. After all, the whole Stieglitzian effort to try to develop a respect for photography as a fine art. We don't need to drag the history into a new perspective. But the point is, what did they drag into view? Basically, a highly metaphorical, symbolic and romanticizing type of photography. And a photography that was not in the service of what I call either formalism or of record: but mainly a kind of metaphor, what John Szarkowski would call "mirrors."

Student: Primarily because of market forces...

Market forces but I am not so sure. I think it was because of an inhibition on the part of photographers to accept the fact that they could do exactly what painting did *plus*. I really believe there was a kind of collective inferiority complex, and it does not have to be thought of in a psychological sense: an unwillingness to accept that after the countless periodicals and journals that try to distinguish between brain art: the painter, the sculptor, the architect, and mechanical art. I really honestly believe that Stieglitz and others couldn't accept the fact, oh they did privately, we just see the ones that they published. They couldn't accept the fact that photography could do exactly that *plus* stay within the parameters you might say of a very strong referential identity. Although in reality I think they were also embarrassed by the fact that photographs couldn't generalize well, typically, that is why the reason for Pictorialism. Steichen has to smear vaseline on the lens in order to escape the fact that he would get clarity. Because it was considered embarrassing to have clarity because that meant that immediately you were in the realm of the machine. Whereas in reality what was wrong with the idea of getting clarity at the same time by reengaging how things might link to one another, as ...lining up and things like that seem to be calling our attention today, one can get both a high degree of a spatial milieu, great clarity and at the same time, preeminent flatness. And that is a new mode, it has never appeared before in the history of visual consciousness. That is why I would say I'd trade in if I were dealing with a summational form, and not out of a personal subjective choice, it is not an aesthetic choice, but I'd trade in any number of photographs: whether I'd choose one from Mark Cohen, or Michael Bishop...

or William Clift, or a half a dozen other unknowns that I think do include everything that painting attempted to achieve in the last 79 years (laughs) and everything that photography was too embarrassed to try to achieve. That is the idea to distinguish and to make distinctions, and admit the distinctions, even by the evidence of the photograph...I'm not finding collectively photographs that tend to deal with diffusion, and parts of totals so that they look quote, abstract. Or the attempt to try to make things look ambiguous just for the sake of some kind of metaphor: there are many photographs that appear ambiguous: we are not terribly sure of where we are in space and time, it is sort of a wash. But on the other hand, the great strain has been to make things, even if they are altered mechanically in some way to make them clearly defined, distinguishable... No matter how they are altered in terms of the process we are still getting a clearly distinguishable sense of the referent. At the same time we get that signal, that things, either according to the mechanics or according to the type of camera work, remain syntactically. That is in the definition of what is recorded remain defined in a way that our vision could never encompass: clearly not possible for us to see that way. And yet, ironically, at the same time, clearly we can identify what is seen. It is a kind of paradox. Does that make sense to you, what I am trying to say? Then at the same time, informing us one step further that one can deal with the paradox that things like deep space, and no space, or flatness, you can call it that, flatness is a dimension of space. Colorfield painting would tend to say, there is no reference here, it is the object, it is itself-reflexive, don't ask it to mean anything, or be anything other than its shape, or color, or what have you. But ironically, you see that is an effort to say that we have to *invent* things to become *objects*. That is where you really get the idea that the Colorfield painter is trying to remove us, as it were, from the belief in things that surround us constantly. Whether it is chairs and tables, or people, or trees and mountains, or what have you. Photography says, "they're there." But they need not be perceived as being separate from this picture, or even separate from my choice as a photographer to present you with this kind of information, which I have worked upon in a number of ways. And then too for the observer: the observer also reengages that photograph as an object: an idea that has been around ever since **Dennis Longo** wrote that little introduction to that thing Bob Heineken did at the Eastman House some years ago, we can add some dates if we need to later if you want to use any of this. The ideas that there was a real concern with the photograph as an object, but what they forgot, they were thinking about hand coloring, or the photo sculpture, like Heineken making structures...or the photograph as object in terms of some technique that would make us sense the print as having a different surface quality: reticulation or even solarization, a metallic luminous quality. *That* kind of idea of the photograph as object. Instead of looking at it as though you are holding an object... and you are also looking at something that no matter how much you sense its kinship to the world, it is not *of* that world, it is truly separate from it, but yet, paradoxically, it is like a window. This is where Szarkowski confuses the issue. It is like

a window in which we fall *back* into things that we've experienced, assuming that we have some form of evidence before our eyes, but at the same time it is a mirror in the sense that we see it as a sign of the high degree of selectivity on the part of the photographer, and selectivity even in terms of the mechanics or the technics of its production, as well as the mirror of our own determinations as to whether we choose *that* particular view of things. And then we start finding ourselves intersecting what we talked about in relation to Sontag, an ecology of images. That is one of the brilliant things in that book. I just have to accept it. The fact that she said: it is not like saying, determine what we will see and what we will not. But we really will start having to make distinctions that these pictures *are* different from that world around us. Too many people *do* believe that the picture might replace the world and never have even the slightest clue that I have never seen a photograph yet that records the way any of us see, I'll even dare speak for other human beings. This kind of ecological attitude has to do with people starting to make very strong distinctions about how they are viewing the world in photographs and the first thing to do is to realize that you are not viewing the world, you are viewing the photograph, as simplistic as it may sound. That you are indeed, strangely, paradoxically, any other adverbs or what have you, you are viewing, you are sensing a reflection of the world. You are sensing a memory of the world, it is not so much a metaphor, you are sensing a presence of a world-site in a typical photograph. That is something that we say is dependent much more upon the fact that it serves as a kind of signal to experiences that we have had prior to it. And it is not necessarily in that image...Painting attempted to try to deliver itself as the object itself, nothing else. And to me it is a tragic form because it absolutely would insist that we as human beings collectively *need* to suddenly have objects. You see the paradox I'm making? And therefore that enables us to recognize one thing: that painters, to my mind, evidently don't believe that we should make distinctions anymore. We need to invent new things, do you understand what I mean? It is as though the world, and all the things in that world, no matter what they are phenomenologically, have become a class without distinction. And that the only level for distinction left is to see whether or not a plane extends out from the plane that is conventionally rectangular or square or what have you, like in a Stella, or whether or not I see this phenomenologically itself-reflexive work extended in parts. And I find it rather unnerving to have to go to certain exhibitions and realize that I am not having any kind of reference to my environment: I am to see...you are no longer capable of making distinctions about your environment, therefore we must give you new motifs, new forms. It is like inventing the wheel all over again. So with Ellsworth Kelly, I am suddenly to enjoy the phenomenology of a huge painting that might give me the distinction between a red ovoidal shape and a white ground.

Student question: Returning to Sontag, what is the effect of making that change in painting? The people who are looking at the world and objects in that fashion? What are we being taught?

You mean by the painting? We are being taught, tragically, about how much we have lost our world, that is what I feel. I am not going to say it in any other way. I think we're being taught that it's a terribly dangerous period of time. That is why I call it a tragic view, a very unnerving view. Talk about the age of anxiety: *that* is the signal because it is stating that the world has no interest for the observer. You can take it just on that level. To be seen, the world holds no interest. Therefore, this work of art offers you the phenomenological form, that is like saying the same thing. It offers you an aspect of phenomenology in matter, plus you are to perceive it as though that is the new recognition that you are to have, and what do we have? A form that is divorced from even the interest on the part of the artist, in biography, in intentionalism, in reference, and to hell with metaphor or equivalency or anything else. You are to enjoy and experience that as a completely unique object. You do not have to amplify it.

Student: So we are learning the aesthetics of a medically concealed container.

Exactly. We are learning what it is to live, and we are learning what it is to conceivably, I don't know you never really learn to live without it, I am sure some people would giggle at that. We are trying to learn to give up the world and I don't want to do that. (laughs)
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I really believe that is what painting is attempting to do. Whereas strangely enough, photography has just now recently accepted what it was able to do all along: it is able to both. This is rather a simple-minded thought, but to me it is one of the most important, the fact that, you remember we were talking also about...this idea of dumb subject matter?

Where did Gil go? He *de*-corporealised. (laughs) He looked at a Colorfield painting. (laughs) Or the world lost him. But thinking in terms of an idea of when Henry Wessel first started, or when Bill Danes sent those postcards: some people talked about how the photographer was no longer interested in the idea of trying to develop the idea of equivalence, or to suggest grandly personal viewpoints that others would think were unique perceptions of life, happiness, or whatever. There is enough attention now given to just the idea of recording what is there. Well that is really ridiculous: there is more than being recorded than what is just there, but what did interest me was the fact that, in a way you can say that the subject matter was dumb, but dumb in the sense of mute, awaiting speech. I know that sounds corny but it is not. People thought of it as a new

banality, the inanity of recent photography: the attention given to urban environments. The irony of it is, it was like giving a voice again, instead of a telephone wire being suddenly having to declare the premise of line, it could be a telephone wire! It could speak with a voice of its own: there's the new phenomenology of phenomenological presence. Or if a flagpole lined up with something else, let's say with ship masts, and they were not "verticals" first: they were not thought of as compositions in a gestalt of horizontals and verticals and overlapping planes, but they literally were, a telephone pole and a ship mast. Or building facades. Even when you think of the arch-formalism of Lewis Baltz, who was working on a project-oriented basis, still those facades that people refer to as "Mondrian-esque" and I thought to myself, there is a great mistake being made here, because they refer to him in the tradition of DeStijl, the Dutch Constructivists... In reality Baltz was presenting us the phenomenology of a facade: that we then, only because we couldn't accept the fact that the *Mondrianesque* was already there. We have to name from the world of formalism, we have to start talking about it in the terms of what you might call the painter's eye.

Student: But doesn't that automatically point out that photographs set up all of those perceptual sets at the same time.

They do.

Student: And possibilities. And it is just a matter of the viewer, whatever the viewer is dependent on in terms of the way that they are going to recognize what is in the print to make a specific identification with either the world or the print or.

That is a good point, John. In other words what you are saying is maybe, I've never quite thought of it quite in that way before, but for the observer, speaking of this idea of distinctions: it is like a set up. Like setting someone up for something. In a typical photograph, the observer is set up to start making choices as to how one wishes or predetermines the information: from the painter's eye, from the idea of reference...

Student: But everyone does that who makes visual information, sets up to a certain degree of parameters, a painter does that, a photographer does that, sets up the parameter that they use to specify information that you are going to see.

But I think painters tend to close it around their own determinations more than photographers do... What I mean by that is, you still can't escape the idea, as you said earlier about mark making: there are painters who try to deny that syntax and so on, but ultimately I think painters tend to absolutely delimit that experience by virtue of what you can see in that painting. And for photographers, I don't care what they do, somewhere

there is hovering in relationship to that photograph, even if it is not of the world and it is a unique object, but there is that sense, we have been engrammed for too long, that we are experiencing... some kind of identity that we know came from *more* than just that person who took this photograph. Painters try to close that experience and make the determination that what you are witnessing is *mine*. It is like when we were talking about issues of framing. I can't imagine a painter not wanting to be egocentric, not in a negative sense. Didn't Pop Art attempt to try to collectivize experience and make it possible...that was one of the...it wasn't a written manifesto, but that was one of the efforts, to try to say we are dealing with the imagery of popular culture. I didn't see all of them daring to do Brillo boxes or *sharing* the aesthetic of dealing with the great American nude. You still call them, there is a Wesselman, there is a Warhol. There is a, whoever it might be. And Photo Realists made an effort, a grand effort, to try to reduce the terms of painting to what you might call a neutralizing image. That is where you wouldn't necessarily have to think of the painter, but you can't escape it, you do see the differences between a Salt and an Estes or whoever it is...And there is one of the concerns of using the airbrush...but you still realize the choices of elimination. Like Estes stating, "I don't include human figures because they move, and they bother me, (laughs) so therefore I work from photographs." Or Audrey Flack, I don't know if we should put her in that school, but nevertheless will work with certain types of still life setups, or even appending titles to her work to give historical references. There was an effort to make the painting become part of the evidence of our experience, but they can't escape it. In other words, we still see style.

Student: Ok, but how is it that we can tell photographers apart?

Perhaps because of the concentrations, in a period or in a group of photographs. Again, we might have suggestions about, I like to think not so much about what's included but what's excluded. You see, again, perceptual stuff. And perceptual in the broader sense, what's selected and so on...I never trust the idea of presuming that a photographer will stay, it's like a fly alighting: you're never going to trust that it'll be there when you swat at it, you just hope you hit it, because every time you think you've got a photographer stylistically pigeon-holed, you know what they're going to do, they *change*. Because you know painters can go through months of explorations and the alterations are slow, but a photographer can change in a day. Print up 50 pix and you can show four different changes or drifts in visual consciousness... But I still tend to think more not what's in that photograph but what has been left out of that photograph. You obviously see that I am thinking of the photograph as definitely having a link back to my experience and what I call the collective experience of what's in the world, even if it's an unusual sight or environment I've never seen before or experienced. Things like framing: it is not a question of what's included in but what is left out...So how do we

distinguish between photographers? You get hints from things like just the way the print appears.

Student: Which is, I begin to have a question about how it is that individual photographers manage to see the world in that way. Is that the world that is there or is that the world in the extramission sense of vision. Do the little waves come out of the eye and that is why it is there? Or is it in fact, is the phenomenology of light what causes it or is it some interaction between energy fields?

I've never really thought of it in, there is a simple way of talking about it, like we talk about is the world simply a sum total of our projections? Or is the world simply the sum total of what is introjected, that comes to us, and then we sort it out? I like to think of it, that photographers seem less likely in their work, no matter how much their prints and their photography alter things: and I mean alter just by stopping down the aperture... But there still seems to be less emphasis upon changing what's out there than there is by changing what is here before our eyes in the print. Painters are really insistent upon building up a new consciousness of the world, or as they are saying now, to accept the painting as the world.

Student: Except that when I look at Harry Callahan's last show at Light Gallery. Then when I look at Providence after having seen that show, Providence is a different city. It seems to me that we learn new ways to see, we learn new meanings, that different things assume importance as a function of our experiencing those things or things similar to them.

But to say it that way, Gil, would really go back to the *Importance of Being Earnest* and Oscar Wilde: when he stands and tells, whatever the lady's name is, that no indeed, it is not art that is imitating nature but nature is imitating art. In other words, that would imply then that when Harry Callahan presents us these chromatic views of domestic architecture... in Providence that we are then seeing Providence in a different way. That is the art motivates us to see the world differently. I would say, maybe to my mind, you see I have to think of it in this way: I'm being taught to accept things that I never included as significant for my vision, or I never thought of as being important enough for me to look at... The irony of it is that photography at this point in time is dealing with a kind of cataloging of potentialities for vision, and visualization. Vision just to see and visualization to see how it can operate and function in a picture: that we never thought *could* be...

Student: That has something to do with what kind of camera, like being presented in wide-angle form or in a telephoto form because we cannot view the world in that way.

By seeing a Callahan photograph in wide-angle and in that clarity, you start seeing it the way the camera is made. It becomes a choice of the photographer of the kind of camera that is picked. And so Providence hasn't changed, it is just us viewing it through the way, what Callahan picks to view it.

Or even accepting, you see when I use the term acceptance, even in terms of the print, but still it is including aspects of what you could conceivably find direct links back to, accepting the fact of a certain type of attitude toward subject.

Student: If you think of the brain as selecting what the senses give it...the senses give it all, the brain makes its selection.

That is right.

Student: You are accepting Harry Callahan's view whereas some people might not, therefore they wouldn't see things at all, they wouldn't see his view, whereas you are accepting his view so then you can see that view, you are allowing yourself to accept it.

Student: Well then, what is the function of the activity in terms of the audience. Is it to extend consciousness?

Well keep in mind though that a lot of this has to do with...if you start talking about Callahan and the way his work has changed...think of the courage it has taken him over a number of years to give up, all you have to do is go through the most recent book and look at what he was doing in Chicago early on and the whole influence of the Institute of Design and Moholy Nagy and so on. The thought there was anything *but* what things looked like. It's got to be how the picture is composed and organized, and again I think very much *internally*.

Student: What I am angling at is if contemporary painting is teaching us to give up the world, but even that work in Chicago still pulls us to the world and sensitizes us to our environment.

...I don't believe this is sensitizing me to...I'll use this as an example... Like this: {shows a slide of an early Callahan telephone wires} I'll be damned if I am going to say that just because there's a title, telephone wires, that I'm being sensitized to telephone wires, you follow me? I am being sensitized to the terms of design, at least in the sense of how design was originally defined, you see what I mean? And I am being sensitized here to not think of, I don't care how much is visually evident, see for example {shows slide of *Environs of Chicago*} Now there's a predictive element here. It would be no different

from Harry suddenly looking at that telephone pole, but look at the distinctions that are made between *that* and *that*: finally we have, how many years later, going to Peru and accepting the fact that even though something bifurcates the plane, between the flag pole and the antenna there is an environment space that says, *that* is an environment. *This* is a composition. {The early telephone wire image} Do you understand the difference between the two questions? That is composed, yes, but there is still a sense of my being able to accept that as phenomenologically apparent *through* that vehicle of the photograph as something I would conceivably see with less need to have it be seen as a vertical against an extended rectangular plane.

Student: Except that if you are on Route 66 heading west, *that* is there.

You are quite right, but we only know it is there. To say, *this* is here, is a highly selective form of visualization. And most people aren't looking, the genius of terms, forget cancel, the uniqueness of vision here is the fact that he would select out of that field and decide on these particular rectangular units.

Student: Yes, but what happens when his vision is fed back into the world. It is a sense of linkage. That yes, you know that the world extends beyond the picture plane, ok, and that world is warped and it comes back to where you are even though the photo is in the past. It eventually bends to the present...and the future, when you leave, when you put down the book and you walk away from it.

And go out into the world and you see it.

Student: It is there, and it tells you about, you are sensitive to that being there, that the terms of the world being reduced to that point.

But you are more inclined, certainly through Robert Frank's work, you are more inclined to start looking, you go back out, I like how you are describing that: from the picture back to the world and therefore nature imitates art, you follow me? You are tending to deny a hell of a lot when you start seeing it in terms of design, or the selective unit out of the total, like the windows in the facade, it makes a very beautiful construct.

Student: But I think that is very important in the sense that just as people have started to study language in terms of what it is, you go down to the smallest bit. Because if you don't understand the formal structure of that which you use to communicate, then the possibility of communication, and the transference of meaning, becomes that much more difficult. The designed pictures were a redefined, or an examination of the visual language of photography, and since that time, people have gone along taking that as...

a primer if you will, and many of the issues that people are currently involved in seem to be using that as a foundation. Where it is presumed that you are aware of the nature of the medium, or the language of the medium, so that you can then approach something like Michael Bishop's work with an understanding of the language, and that would be, as you say, almost predictable from Harry's working the pure design bits.

Yes but in a way I, they may be similar, I think it depends again on how much is excluded and how much is included...We are very conscious of the fact that inclusion of a more dynamic environmental field has been apparent than the idea of exclusion. In both cases we're aware of something being taken out of context...It suggests that, I believe, personally, that one could construct a composition on the basis of those earlier {Callahan} photographs, that would not use anything that would even be photographic: you could use Color Aid paper and value structures and create a series of rectangles or linear movements and get *exactly* the same experience. In the majority...what I am thinking about is the idea that because we do see brickwork, or lintels, and posts and so on, then we say, "how unique." *This* design was selected out of a total building's facade. Today I like to look at it this way: saying that there is *less* the idea of that principle of what I'd call "selecting out of," the abstrahere, the diverting of a part away from a total: more of the total is there, you follow me? And yet the relationships that occur are questions that we can indeed experience by just simply shifting left or right or what have you, or climbing up something and looking down. We are able to, through that photographer's viewpoint, experience this in a much more humanistic manner than the ideas of a cerebral consciousness that says I accept this person's construction. I'm not sure what that means except for the fact that we don't seem to feel that, when I say we I mean collectively, humankind seems not to be in need of being sent "subtle" signals: it seems to be in need of being sent very *obvious* signals. That is where I see distinctions being made, like Michael Bishop: I really can't think of his work, Chuck Hagen and I got involved in this the other day and I wish I had a tape of that because, my god, he was brilliant. (laughs) We started discussing this whole background of...I'm just seeing if my little tape recorder is working (laughs) Speaking of egocentrism! Hi Billy, how are you? (laughs) He was writing a little catalog introduction for Michael's work and he called me because he said something I'd said over the summer about his work and he wanted to use it, and I said sure. But the idea was he was saying the hardest thing of all was to try to understand really what *is* the difference between let's say someone like Michael Bishop's (End Nevil Parker tape) composition, which is very strong, but again, you know damn well it is a composition of vantage point and placement of self in reference to an environment, and it is not a composition that starts with a predetermined aesthetic that says I will insist upon the fact that the picture plane be the most important element, and that the forms of bridgework or building facades or telephone wires or anything else, is, really those are secondary to the lines, shapes, textures colors, masses, and spaces.

Michael seems to give us the sense that it is just as important to know that dimpster-dumpster is a dimpster-dumpster. And that that strange... *is* the roof of a house off in the distance: the two conjoin and they make a very interesting what I call a *planal* conjunction, and yet there is nothing that tries to make me believe that the dimpster-dumpster and the roof have become other than that, except in their juncture. I don't still arrive at the point that I am now seeing green planes modeled with white. Think of all the schlock color photography...you know, Haas and everyone who dealt with the idea of color was to ingratiate you on the basis of color separate from things. It is so obvious that it is hard to say how it is, I mean I don't think we can make it subtle, that is what I meant by we need more obvious signals: the ways things do juxtapose, link to one another, and so on. I like to think, I was taught, and I am sure that most of you are too, that we were purportedly taught to give our attention to things that are important and eliminate those that aren't. But lately I think that photography teaches me that everything can be important. You see what I mean? And that is a real, so then you no longer make distinctions according to hierarchical orders, like I am suddenly to go out and observe when the peonies are in bloom, that they are more beautiful than that weed that snuck up in the dark that I don't want being there. But that doesn't mean I can't make distinctions about the way I might remove the weed and retain the peonies. I don't think I'm liable to go mad and pull up all the peonies and cultivate the weeds, you see what I mean? It means that in terms of visualization I may find that the most mundane, simple, banal and even annoying phenomena may well become something that I need to observe because it is indeed an aspect of my world. That I can no longer say that I become excited by the peeling paint on the wall, or by the sense of the weathered door having been so removed from context that I begin looking at the circular shape of the doorknob (laughs) counteractive against the rectilinearity of the panels in the door. There is not an interest in doors and doorknobs, but an interest in rectangles and texture. What happens if I'm suddenly forced to recognize that my interest should be in that as a picture...I've got to accept the terms of the picture and of the perceptual consciousness of selection and the determinations that the photographer made but at the same time I can leave that picture knowing full well that I've been reminded of a world, very much as you said that now I see Providence differently. It may be that you are not going back into that world and seeing "Harry Callahan:" you are going back into that world and distinguishing things that he saw and reclaimed for your attention as being conceivably significant. And I don't have to say, yes, well I have always thought that way, I've always seen that way and the hell with it, I don't see much evidence of it.

Student: It is almost as though... things do not exist unless we have a name for them.

Student: At least an identification.

Yes, an identification.

Student: And it becomes a naming process. You have seen it before. The only thing is, it just simply has not intruded upon consciousness. You had no way to remember it.

It may be that what I think is happening, and what I see as happening is a kind of new theology in a way...I have been reading recently, people trying to rediscover those things that always fascinated me but was always so skeptical: Saint Francis really did love all things. (Laughs) I mean Giotto didn't convince me...no one ever taught me that this rake suddenly to become this saintly type and therefore birds and other flowers, bees and serpents and everything else, were thought of as having a kinship, and maybe they did, at the same time. Are we then in a new period where we no longer need to spiritualize anything, we need to phenomenonalize it, do you understand what I mean? I do not want the painter's phenomenalization, because they are telling me to get rid of the world and look at their piece as the important distinction. And that makes me want to eliminate the fact that I think I have had an encounter with this *bamburanta*. Did I ever tell you this story about this plant?

Student: Well, no.

As god is my witness, this is the truth. you've got to experience this plant. This thing goes through a series of subtle motions, and it's not because of the light, it will bend toward the light during the course of the day...but at night once they established their position, we can be sitting in the kitchen and you'll hear (whoosh)... these leaves, suddenly like paddles, they will give a quick *snap* and they start changing their positions. I have sneaked up on it, I have tried everything until finally one night I caught it. But it won't let you know it's going to do it and that's what we were told, it's an African plant that was given to us by a former watercolor teacher at UCONN. She said, "Bill, it's absolutely fascinating," she said, "the plant knows you're there and it will not move," and when you turn your back you will hear (whoosh, laughter). So one night, what I did was I put my camera, and I dragged out my little delayed thing and the first time I snapped it nothing came out, so I'm thinking that it even affected the film, I don't think the flash went off...but then one night I pretended like I was coming into the room and didn't and quickly threw the door open and I saw it move. (Laughter) So you can be tricked too! I don't know whether it is true or not, I am going to ask someone over in the Botany department, but I've read about it. They said they are really peculiar, they are very sensitive of presences.

Student: What is the name?

Bamburanta.

Student: African?

Yes, African. {Bamburanta is a South American plant} Whatever that connection was? It's like I'm suddenly saying, it is important enough for me to experience that as well as something else in a way that doesn't make me feel that I must have a kinship with all of nature, or that I must suddenly adopt an attitude that all things are spiritually important. In other words, it's as though they are important because they are occasions for a dialogue: it is not just "I" then select "it" as meaningful. In a way, it is a part of the field of my experience and therefore I should be attendant to it.

Student: Because it is, it is important.

Yes, Exactly.

Student: And as a theological position, it is one of the things we were talking about Michael Bishop the night we were at Steeple Street, is that the problem with a formalist aesthetic is that it tends to deny the possibility of that kind of meaning.

Or that something can be important because it is. I like the way when Wessel first started, I think, I associate him with, not that there weren't precedents before Wessel, and Ruscha and others, I shouldn't make it exclusively Wessel, this idea of beginning to see environments that we just didn't particularly think of, even, say of gas stations or roadside markets and so on. Walker Evans still gives us a certain degree of what I call the Walton's Syndrome: it is very nostalgic. And Wessel, well here's it's Bowen's Garage all over again and I'd like to cancel out as I'm driving by the lovely Eastford, or the sandpit across the street. It is like, why? It is like teaching me that these things are not necessarily to be accepted as something I want to inhabit, or become involved in personally, but they are in need of being recognized as a component of my world.

Student: So what you are saying is that the choices in photography are of a perceptual nature.

Exactly.

Student: The time factor involved here in terms of something accepting something where in our everyday lives we don't select these things out, and the photograph does, therefore we can then accept it and go back out into the world, it is because we made

the acceptance out of time, out of a different time sense. So it is imperative that we see these things out of time, in a photographic form, or else we would never notice...

Yes, that idea of displacement, that idea of past-tense images, is very important that I know that that thing has been taken out of time so that then when, as I re-enter time, well you know I'm always in it, but you know what I mean. As I go from the photograph, my god, don't write that down (laughs) Forget it. Cut. You're through. (laughs) But you know what I mean, the idea that as you go from that photograph and you might see something similar to it, obviously there is that kind of signal. It is sort of a delayed semiotics, the signal then is charged only as you discover something back in your own experience.

Student: To me that becomes the value of the photographic medium in that the world becomes that much more wonderful or enjoyable because of that phenomena.

You know there is a good point there, when you think about it, Keith, because...I don't know of any painting or any painter, who does not want you to be locked in to the experience of their work as it is before you. Can you think of any? Now granted with reproduction...I can think of all ways to amplify that thought that we could go into a debate that would go on to a conference: but the idea that painters obviously paint so that you witness their painting as their testament, mark-making, their declaration of what's been included, left out, choices of color, and so on but as I said, I don't think, I may go back out to the world and see it differently because of the painting, as we've inferred that the photograph can cause us to do. But what is interesting is the signals of the experience are locked into your being before the painting. Whereas in a photograph, quite often those signals *are* delayed. In the first place, you are looking at a past tense image, in a typical photograph. I am sure there are photographs that can form before your very eyes, you follow me... But often what we see, you might say my god, I am not particularly interested in looking at that. And suddenly you find yourself perceptually...it could be five minutes later, it could be a year later, and suddenly, you see that sign becomes operative and makes you look at something in an entirely different way. That links back to what you were saying about, the wide angle attitude of Harry or that you see Providence in a different way. In a way it is not just because Harry presented you that photograph, it's a series of, it is like a teleology that does not necessarily have to occur and you are locked into the experience of that pictorial image at Light Gallery or wherever, that you may well find that you are seeing a delayed reaction that can enable you to some degree to leave the photograph, leave it behind as it were. And then you can look forward to the next signal perhaps. But whereas painters tend to want you to stay within their pictorial environment. And that is why we say, and every artist or anyone else stands up and says, now remember students, the slide can never

encompass the real thing. Ironically in photographs I do say that you need to see the original prints as well but sometimes I almost think that you *can* see it by looking at it in a slide, no matter what change in scale or what have you, I feel less problematic about looking at a photograph in slide form than I do a painting. Do you see what I mean?

Student: Because that experience never leaves the world...and the notion of plenitude, that is what I was trying to say about the bending of time, because it just bends right around.

It is past tense but it bends back to the present because you carry that signal, that is what I meant by a delayed reaction, into the realm of the world, the world experience.

Student: It is also identifying objects. If you see a picture of a car, you have a notion of what size it actually is. So if you see it in a 20 by 24 print or in a slide, you still have a notion that it is a certain size in reality, bringing that back in.

The two operate, that is what I meant by all of the conditioning of experience of what you know about scale and space and things that you can't escape. I think that is why we excuse photographs from having to get monumental. And Avedon made some monumental photographs but I think people probably are more amazed by the fact of what kinds of mops (laughs) more than they did the idea that you had to have something life-sized to believe in it. Whereas painters might become monumental because they really do have to express the colorfield large as it were to make you believe it is itself-reflexive.

Student: They can't take the world for granted. It cannot presume the existence of the world.

That is the grand distinction made: the painter has decided that the world doesn't count. I am talking about the extension of painting from 1907 forward, and I do not think that Martha Mayer Erlebacher and her reflection on the Van Eyckian mode, or that Philip Pearlstein in his figurative mode, or you name it. Bill Bailey at Yale. Those who are working in a Neo-figurative vein are not declaring the premises of a world, the premises of what a world looks like. They are declaring the premises of what a painting can look like as opposed to colorfield painting or abstract expressionism. And they damn sure are unique and they have style in terms of mark-making and the choices of line, shape, texture, color, mass, and space. Whereas more often than not photographs tend to, sure they, as I said, show us the attentions, to my mind, to my eye, more of what has been excluded rather than what is included. Although I might add that some earlier photographs that are more design conscious tend to show us what was included on the

terms of painting, not on the terms of {photography}... Say in Aaron Siskind's work: there is no doubt that I see the signal that he responded to, was the signal of very early Abstract Expressionism and the influence of people like Kline... In other words, so therefore he enables photography to reflect painting. And yet at the same time, when he enabled us to say, oh, the tactility of a torn poster, or the quality of aging stone in the Rome sculpture photographs. They are still presented in the terms of something happening internally within that plane. And I really do deal there with inclusion, not exclusion. Not selecting out. So when we talk about ideas of distinctions, you also talk about, it could have nothing to do with everything goes, let's have a new sort of theology where we start respecting that there is no hierarchical order in subject matter that would be important. I think that is a vital issue. But that... there seems to be a reaction against the idea of trying to make the photograph behave exclusively within its edges. There aren't many photographs that I can't think of as anything *but* I go from the edge in, but I don't give a damn about what's happening around...

Student: Does that have anything to do with zooming in? Would you zoom in close enough say on Siskind's wall photographs or Callahan wire photographs, then you are including things and you are not thinking about what else is there because you are so focused in on that one thing. And you really just come in on that because you cannot relate to it in any other context from what is around it.

Yes, and not only that because we also have all the signals and it would happen from popular... where have I got those things... If you looked at *Good Housekeeping* magazine and let's say pick a date, May, June, July, December, 1924 would be a good date to begin with. Look at ads for soaps, cosmetics, Sani-flush, anything else. Look at what Steichen did. We have been conditioned about framing: most of the illustrations appear, I wish I did have it to refer to, you'd see it appear as either a painted illustration where you get a definite environmental sense or else it is a photograph that gives you more inclusive environmentalism. Steichen starts coming in and showing *the hand* reaching out to touch another hand. Very strong cropping. Or the Orientalism of figures standing that creates a linear construct. So we were conditioned to start seeing, did it move? (laughs) Well it doesn't usually (laughs) but it will move today... the light it wants to turn back out but you don't get to see it, it doesn't want you to know (laughs)... So we were conditioned to start seeing things isolated out and then also being self contained. My god, in the 20s, just think of, through the 30s, how, even from Zola, this idea, a better example would be like Stieglitz not seeing Dorothea or Georgia whole but in parts, and those parts seem very much contained. I don't suddenly think of where are her breasts? Or where is her torso? You get the idea I am talking about? Today I might be more inclined to say I don't care about where things are, parts, I am being sensitized

to start seeing things as much more inclusive. But at the same time, I think of that inclusiveness from a much broader field, we might say just to look at the arm and the hand as being a more radical form of, I should be sensing what has been left out. I really do. So organized within the plane, and all the cues came from painting and other forms of design, may be sensed within the borders sufficient to itself. Today I may get more information from certain photographs, but at the same time I am very conscious of how much has been left out. It is almost like drawing the distinction of how much does surround us. We are not any longer out here looking at a framed image of the world, but as Gil implied, the idea of what was past comes back into the present. I think we see ourselves back again in the spatial envelope in which we are surrounded by a world as opposed to us standing away looking into it.

Student: By seeing more you start seeing connections between things, then you start thinking that there are other things that you can connect with that, that aren't there...You could go...like a checkerboard pattern.

Student: It starts suggesting that the function of the differentiating nature of consciousness is to in fact integrate us into our world rather than the implications of the industrial use or the technological use of consciousness has been to separate it out.

To separate us out from it, or establish hierarchical orders. There you go. It is like that is why I call it a new theology: differentiation or analysis has been to set things into categories, hierarchical orders. You start with what is important and you eliminate the rest. Look at all the self-help manuals and the 'how to control your time and get **{End 1998_47_098Bb}** control over your life' and so on, you put things in group A, this is important and that is not. We are taught to do that, constantly, but yet ironically it may be that we are being taught to say no, differentiation can be just as synthesizing, just as including, as any other...That we now differentiate and say, all things, all things, (laughs)

Student: Say it once more.

ALL THINGS are important. (laughs) But again that might suggest that we don't need to presume a kind of hyper or a specialized hyper-sensitivity: that we become a saint by saying that everything is important. Or you don't become a primitive and suddenly say, I and the tree are one...you think that everything is so co-equally important that you have to live in this kind of state of mysterious participation. You can still be separate from the world and yet recognize that you are included within its parameters. I mean I do bless Fred Sommer for reminding us of that, that to so many people the world is anything but here.

Student: Do you see this trend of distinctions changing, or where do you see it changing from, or going from now? Where it is more inclusive now perhaps...?

It is difficult because I begin to look at things, no matter how...distinctions so that you keep everything credible in its appearance...Like if Tom Barrow scarred the negative, or something like that, in the Cancellation series, or people altering the photograph in some way. There is that sense of reminding us that they are making that mark on an image of the world in a way that sort of forces us to think of it as material. Does that make sense to you at all? In other words, painting on a photograph: it is not primitivism in terms of polychroming a totem, but it is a way of saying I now no longer just paint the image per se: I paint *on* an image as a way of physicalizing the photograph.

Student: But whether you are Chris James or Tom Barrow, you are still dealing with the credibility of the original image.

Or Tom, it is the idea of sort of saying...in that group...fascinating from the standpoint, the idea of the principle of the cancellation of the original and the idea of an environment, but you wouldn't think of cancelation as being discard, reject, *that* image of the world. You also have the idea that it was a forcing back into the public observer's consciousness that this is property in the environment that he has seen and has a right to alter it so as to personalize it, by canceling. But what I found fascinating was just the fact that the very nature of canceling, we thought of that idea of rejection. And the very nature of presenting us the print of the canceled was to make us really view it as something that we might have wanted to accept. So we get that turmoil. You understand what I mean? He calls to distinction that which we have eliminated. He did it more or less by just making the subject the whole principle of the exclusion. And therefore it called to attention that perhaps our need to be more inclusive.

Student: He is denying us the acceptance. He has already made those judgments for us.

Well he did, but he also drew it to our focus...whether we liked that or not, we have the principle of canceling him (laughs) as an option, and then we went out and took our own photograph of similar types of environment, would that be much different from someone going out to an industrial site or wasteland, or whatever, and finding a remarkable interest in it...I can only look at it from my view on the standpoint that if Emmet Gowin found it sufficient enough, originally...he goes into that dentist's office and looks the Ansel Adams with the burnt stump and the grass growing around it. He is interested in painting and drawing but eventually, you know, that captioning. Well, it was sufficient for

him to at least think of the limits of his world as being centered around the environment of the province of his family and the compound in Virginia and so on. It was like not having to search a grander world than that which was immediately around him. You could say he was one of the ones who announced in a very, what I would call a very nostalgic manner. And I think it was nostalgia because look at the images separate from the sensibility. Just look at what he photographed. And you start thinking of the fact that if Barbara Morgan photographed a pregnant woman, or Harry Callahan photographed a pregnant Eleanor, I never quite felt it was Eleanor... You never sense it as being quite a person. It becomes almost like a generic type, or an archetype: a symbol for fecundity or fertility or progeny, whereas Emmet, I could never escape the fact that I liked it, and it seems so strangely like an album picture because it was Edith. You just couldn't get away from that. And at least when I first saw those, it was a very early show he had... a first announcement when Harold showed that work in that little cabinet show up at Eastman House. There is a man who would go out and take his watermelon patch cover with the strings on it and hang it up, and have the children behind it or whatever, and then photograph it as sufficient to itself to interest him. And then we find ourselves saying, my god, I have this lovely plant in my living room, (laughs) My wife just breathes on it and it grows, but if I get too near it, like the bamburanta. (laughs) But the idea is that things could be sufficient subjects, and therefore they need not be classified according to whether or not they are to be metamorphic or suggest other states. One of my students, Jeff, I can't remember his last name, pardon me Jeff, but who really, I think intelligently, worked on the idea of it. Because I would say in class what interested me is the fact that we read in Newhall about the straight photograph and how Weston would work with the 8 x 10 view camera, and make the contact print... and therefore it is an honest, direct appraisal of the world, and then you've got the thing but more than the thing, and then it would go dot, dot, dot, you know those deleted dots and he's left out the rest of the statement. And we have all read, the essence of the thing, the quintessence of the thing. And so you see that no matter how literal someone might have been, he really was interested in ideals and kinds of absolutes. And that he was an arch-Platonist. And therefore he said, if I declare something so specifically, by virtue of my mode of framing, remove it from a kind of experiential context, I don't tend to want to eat that artichoke or that sliced cabbage or those carrots, or even use the urinal, it is too beautiful... The idea is that he sees the object with great clarity but then reminds you that there is something within that object of a formal nature that makes you transcend its object-ness. You tend to go from the realm of object to the realm of ideas, and thus I have already left the world. Whereas today there seems to be less emphasis upon that kind of declaring the formal beauty of things, formal or even structural relationships that appear within the plane and much more the idea that I declare that it is important enough for me to see them disposed in my environment in some manner. Not that Emmet didn't compose or have qualities in his prints on the Azo paper... they are just

arrestingly beautiful in and of themselves, but there was still that sense that it was Emmet's world...and I'd say damn, I've been missing all that, because we didn't think it was important enough, to sit in the backyard and photograph the kiddies... Or that we didn't think it was reasonable enough to see the difference between the skin when someone was pregnant and what happened when it retracted. And it is not like a new simplicity either because those became like grand dramas. And Jim Dow, I think makes a very beautiful distinction, without the *Whole Earth Catalog*, without the return to the land movement, and also without sensing how far we had escaped the world; like seeing the world on the cover of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, he says we would never have been responsive to Emmet Gowin. Because you had coupled along with that, the return to the land, everybody is reading about it and buying their backpacks and going to LL Bean trying to make a commune and so on, that kind of thing. Or we were trying to think of how we going to adjust to this new age: all that crap about technology and outer space. And Emmet is doing the very opposite: staying very much within the precincts of his own family and backyard. And therefore what was it, as we are projected out of the context of our own world, or else we are trying to project into a utopian order of a regaining of the world: he is in it and saying it is enough for my cosmos to be as large as this family in Virginia, or his bedroom, or his living room. And so he is saying, ironically, that the power of his imagery was that it might be reminding us of a lot that we've lost, or might be reminding us a great deal of things that were there, right around us. We just didn't think they were important enough. Maybe you all don't feel that way but I know a hell of a lot of people who felt that way. We were all nervous because we were told you don't dare, so to speak, enjoy your own environment. Did that ever hit you? Have you ever felt that you were corrupted in that way? That you always have to be thinking about futurity...Gil, maybe you didn't but...

Student: No, that was the devil.

That was the devil. It is no different from Martin Luther King: I have a dream. See what I mean, I mean in the framework of a graduation speech.

Student: But he also said that I have been there, don't worry about me.

He did. You are quite right, that is a good point...Or the new frontier, all of that came out at that time, and it has been going on for ages, you know, lights out for the territory. There is never anything here, it has always got to be out there. And that has been an issue that came out of a kind of Judeo-Christian heritage that stated, it is called ... teleology, where you evolve toward something that you will be with, and it is like fishing: you throw the line out and you are supposed to pull in the fish. But you are never satisfied, because you are always going to wait to get the next larger one, right? Well,

most people do. They don't stop fishing if they are real fisher-persons. They are not going to stop fishing, they will want to get the bait for bass, what I am trying to say is we never think in terms of that which is obtained, now, but it is always this futurity that we project ourselves toward, I mean it in that broader sense. Whereas Emmet tended to think of the now.

Student: We've spoken before about this...involved with progress in the direction of the sculpture to accept the materiality. And it is only when you do not accept the fact of things when you live in the constant idea of things, that when you get something, it never matches what the idea is, therefore you have to want to keep...but if you accept the materiality in and of itself, it is, and you have no need to concern yourself about how this does not conform to your idea of what it ought to be. You eliminate that sort of confusion.

If you follow that line, and you are right, I would say yes. But if you follow the line about pictures in general, whether photographs or paintings or what have you, I really am convinced that, obviously there is enough information about pictographs, or the language, or we talk about the history of art, visual consciousness...that we evolve toward more and more sophisticated ways of displacing what was out there surrounding us as a group so that we ended up with more or less like tribal agreements about the way we view the world. Then the great individual complex came into view and therefore they said, I am not sufficient enough to be able to record my world, therefore I have the master who gives me information about the way I should see the world. And then we find ourselves I think emerging to a time, at least the possibility is there, that consciousness seems to be doing it most uniquely, stating that the environment is there. And I don't want you to confuse that environment out there with this picture here. You see it lingers as a reflection but you have got both things: you've got a picture, and you have got your environment. Therefore we have choices. And it may well be that pictures will remind us not of staying with pictures and seeing the style and evolution, we might find that they become powerful enough to motivate us to forget pictures and go back to the world. That is why I really feel this idea of the sense of touch...paraphrasing Tillich, like when he says god is the god that comes from the god of theism, has disappeared into anxiety and doubt. I would just like to substitute the word touch is the sense that comes: when the sense of sight has disappeared into anxiety and doubt. And I don't know what that will mean. Whether we give up pictures or maybe pictures will be where we take a walk again, walk up and touch something. I don't know what it will mean, but there is a peculiar sense that there is a kind of not conceding of our teleologically as building towards a next direction of pictorial realization but the next direction of experience. And maybe as photography reaches its point of greatest influence, and I am

not just talking about how it is being collected, I am talking about its greatest influence, is the fact that it is a prelude to an entirely different form of witnessing our world.

Student: It is weird that a machine would give back the world that a machine took away.

Isn't it interesting in how, just as you said, it was brilliant to me, that differentiation which was purportedly to winnow out and to make distinctions between things may well be the very thing that is going to force us to start NOT distinguishing, not setting up hierarchical orders. Now that's weird when you think of it, that the advent and development of human consciousness: cerebral cortical thinking and analysis may well be reaching the point where it's going to, it's like *2001*, we go through the warp, and we are right back at the stage where things are akin, but we don't have to be noble savages, we don't have to be primitive. We'll still have our analytical powers in tact. There's hope in other words.

Student: It is sort of like accepting the fact of the yin/yang sign, that within the white there is the dot of black, and within the black there is the dot of white, and they exist, they do not conflict.

And some people don't want to sit around and think of the vagaries of life...I have friends who cannot tolerate the idea of trying to deal with certain modes of art, or pictorialization of any sort, or even phenomenalization such as architecture, sculpture, on the basis of any other terms than formalist concerns, or technological concerns, or the tradition of art. I was just never particularly moved by thinking of it only on those terms, I think I can handle it that way, but I ask myself, 'why am I interested?' And I think as most people would be if they are responsive. I am certain that you people must have asked yourself that question at one point, 'why are you doing what you're doing?' (laughs) And I hope it is not because you think of it as an elitist stance that separates you out from the rest of mankind because you see uniquely. What I find most photographers doing is declaring basically a lack of individuation in terms of the idea of 'my personality,' 'my unique way of viewing the world.' They may be declaring an individuation in terms of what I'm choosing now to 'select out of' but leaving you with the full awareness of what I've excluded: that's your world and mine. And being a little bit less likely to think of themselves as unique.

Student: And in the same way, forcing, forcing is perhaps too strong, but forcing whoever views the work to create a world or to consider their world in terms of something that is other than ordinary.

That is right.

Student: At which point the line of Ishmael Reed... in the *Neo Hoodoo* manifesto that every man an artist, every artist a priest.

Indeed.

Student: And it is an accepting a responsibility for the entirety of one's existence, not simply food, shelter and where I am going to be next week, but accepting the relationships of the clan.

That is interesting because we were talking about Dore Ashton, on her book called, *The Unknown Shore*, which to me is one of the most powerful testaments during the advent of Abstract Expressionism, was the fact that she thought of the artist as the new shaman, and thinking that the artist then leads us to the unknown shore. Then we are led, it is that Moses idea, to the promised land. Again it is... teleological. It is thought that there's something out there and we'll reach it. Of course we never get there, something always disappoints us, that's why we cannot accept the fish we catch and we always think of the next fish. But the Ishmael Reed idea is everyman an artist, every man involved in the sense of the discovery. There is that sense that I can become innately my own Shaman.

Student: Which is why the camera... is more popular than the pencil ever was.

Yes, and not only that but look at it this way: Isn't it strange how people used to make a grand distinction between the idea of the vernacular image, the snapshot and fine art: 'My god, your photographs should not look like snapshots, you're supposed to be dealing with art.' And now, *The Snapshot* by Aperture, a re-examining and acceptance of, they are not afraid of the democracy of the machine, the democratic inclusiveness.

Student: More importantly, they are not afraid of the democracy of the art of the creative impulse, and that is the sort of thing where if you accept the artist as priest, then the whole line of painting becomes that it is not that they are not priests, but they are priests of a really nasty son of a bitch god.

That says some can have it and some cannot.

Student: Yet what is being suggested to us through photography is that indeed, it is available. We all breathe, we are all energy, we all have a point or a purpose, we all take up space, to some end. And that end is, you have to figure it out, or you don't have

to figure it out, but it is there, and that is accepted, that you are important. Which is against the whole drift of a mechanized, industrial, technological culture.

It's like Edwin Land: did you all read that hype that he put out with the...the new film, *Polavision*? Did you read that thing that they actually sent out and that he had meetings with his salesmen and so on?...That the image itself will become more real than the people who are being recorded. But yet ironically within that there's that kind of twist because what he's trying to say is that, it isn't just capturing for all eternity and all that sort of thing, the image or what have you...he starts talking about a return to a kind of primitive state in which we will suddenly re-engage our life and our experience in such a manner that we will believe what we see more than what we do as human beings. What we see ourselves more than what we, well it is kind of frightening, but also, he wouldn't be saying that unless someone did believe that we have a need of realizing what we are involved in. Strange. It is the ultimate extension of the idea of the medium...

Student: ...Tim says the food is ready if you want to take a break.

Yes, let's take a break.

{Break}

If you were to think of, in your own development, anyone you might have looked at that influenced you and your thinking about pictures, and then when I ask myself, what is it that has been affected by, and you start summing up. I know for example I had, god, I think I'd seen Lee Friedlander's work maybe from the very beginning, at least those that were out on public display, I wouldn't have had any advantage of seeing early work before it was displayed at the Modern by John Szarkowski or even Heliographers earlier than that. But, I felt that, again there was a kind of attitudinal set that I could associate, you were talking about how you know a style, if there is such a thing, it is like there was an attitudinal set that I would identify with Lee Friedlander. And yet when I look at the pictures even today I am reminded much more of the kind of paradoxes of the unusual juxtapositions that occur when I enter into my environment than I am of Lee Friedlander. There is a tendency for me to think not so much of a biographical mode, and again making that distinction between painting and photography, not to belabor it, but the idea of that I tend to want to know much more about intentionalism in a painter's work than I would in a photographer's work, because the emphasis of intention is declared in the photograph, it is sort of evident in the image as opposed to a painter. Because a lot of time in a painting you want to know what kind of studio, what kind of environment is something developed in or what have you. It is pretty amazing to think of, I find it surprising that when I read it for the first time a number of years ago, Stieglitz

virtually did do his own work right in his closet, in the kitchen. And...I would say that that was a surprise because it is just additive information. I never seem to care about what kind of darkroom he had, or what kind of environment he developed his work in, but quite often in painting that seems to be an integral part of the interest that we have. Well what is the point of it? It is almost like saying, that again, if you start asking yourself questions about who has influenced you, you might ask yourself is it he or she who has influenced you, their biography, their psychology, or is it, obviously their pictures, and then we take their pictures, is it what you found in their pictures or is it much more the way, as we were saying earlier, that they signal you to look at the world in a different way. Look at your environment.

Student: Also, photographs answer certain questions for you, by the photographer using a certain kind of lens, so you have a certain kind of idea of how he was thinking, what kind of paper he prints on, you have a certain kind of idea of how he is thinking. Whereas what you said before, in painting you don't tend to do that so maybe you want that kind of information, so you go for it in painting where photography you don't have to.

Or maybe... more like the behavior in the studio...there is something about that idea of tracing back biography, intentionalism, with whom one studied, things like that. Whereas, well, ask yourself that question, when you first saw Bob Frank, were you thinking much more of his biography, we know that in time because we have things printed, but I think we are much more influenced directly by the pictures as we saw them projected forward, into our experience and our environment.

Student: ...You rarely deal with one image, or if you go to a painting show, and if you see six things...but if you go to a show of photography, you tend to see 20 or 30 or 40 or 50 and you really do get a sense of a world.

Right, you get a sense of, sort of like an extended moment, of that moment. Because you can almost be guaranteed that you are going to expect something new in the ... experience of it. Not new stylistically, not new necessarily in format, or anything else, but new in the sense of what is revealed in the photograph. All that seems obvious, but again I think it makes that sense of, if I were asked the question, do I see an apparent change in what people seem to be attentive to in photography today, and I do see a distinct change, compared to what I saw when I first became involved in the 40s and 50s...Think of someone like Mark Cohen, what did he present us? Or what does he? And it is hard to talk about Mark Cohen. And if I say what does Philip Pearlstein present to us, immediately in my mind I start thinking of his interests. I am not quite happy enough just staying with the picture. I do that for the experience, but I want to back up

and say, well what were you influenced by and what made you want to paint this way and where did you study and the minute I find out he was an art historian first, and you know that he was influenced as much by Franz Kline as he was by any interest in figure painting, and that kind of thing. Then I feel like I am feeding information into the painting on the basis of intentionalism and biography. Whereas in looking at the Mark Cohen, I tend not to get so much concerned with where he grew up, what his environment is like, whether the community was offended by his pictures or accepted them, but I keep thinking those pictures as forcing me to respond in a new way to what happens *after* them. You see I am not as concerned with what happened before. Although I think that if I started getting involved with the pictures long enough, I'd almost have a set of intentionalisms *present* in the pictures. Because then I start thinking about the ideas of, as I said, what he has excluded rather than what he has included. And the simple idea in the early work where you get the close up, far away, that kind of issue becomes a set of stances. It is not organization, it is a set of stances that he takes in relationship to what he sees. Which is almost a guarantee that I can't quite think of, if I were thinking of Wright Morris's work, or Weston's work, or Stieglitz's work, that was most often published in the 40s and 50s and things we began to see early then, we did think of them very much as, we asked the question, why did this person make that decision? And we got involved in wanting to read about Weston or know about who he was and why he did this and so on. And it seems like with more and more picture-makers today we have less access...no...We have *more* access to biography. And if you just took like, say the number of interviews that appear in things like *AfterImage*. Notice, and... not just what people said but notice, what were their...when they were asked a question. Much of it is in the drift of experience as opposed to the idea of, well, I work this way because...

Student: When you mention Stieglitz and that whole movement, there was an academy. There was someone who could point the finger and say, so and so is good, but pictorially insignificant. Whereas today, there is no academy, therefore those kinds of references and trying to find the studio, trying to make the connections, profits you very little. You have to deal with the individual's existence.

Yes, but Gil, it would be too the idea that, do you remember that day we were all talking about teaching, and theses, and the idea that it is increasingly difficult to start thinking of programs in photography or photographs as centering around a kind of clarified idiom. It is not a clarified idiom. It is not anything goes necessarily, it is anything can be experienced. You see there is a difference in that. It is not like everything is acceptable, but every conceivable experience *could* become acceptable. And therefore the photograph is less burdened by the idea that *it's* the measure of the experience, as the picture. You see it is much more the way we behave in reaction to it, and that is a

peculiar thing to have accrued in time, to me. That the picture is like an intermediary between, either social confrontation or experience, or something that implies, it is a mediating agent, it forces us to not declare the terms of value on the basis of the picture, I keep seeing this accruing at this time, much more the idea of the value of the response, or the value of the interaction in relationship to the picture, or the value of, what is that line, the value of... (laughter). The sense of, what I said, not feeling the need to set the pictorial in a state of reverence. A lot of people wouldn't agree with that. But that seems to be increasingly the case. It is ironic, it is like with... collections that are developing, and museum interest in photographs, and archival protection of photographs and so on, all of that is to me reflective of trying to treat the photograph as if it were like a painting, a sculpture; it is the whole preservation. And yet it is ironic that the responses that are occurring and the interest in photography that has increased so radically compared to what it was even ten years ago doesn't seem to require that it be protected and preserved. So there is a whole series of strange paradoxes that are floating around.

Student: Like Blakely's work deals with that, or Jorgensen, you can touch the photographs and manipulate them.

Yes, or call (?) from the face dots disappear and that sort of thing.

Student: And the notion that museums don't seem to know how to hang photographic shows. I was incredibly offended by the hanging of the Stieglitz/O'Keefe show.

Yes.

Student: It was just unbelievable.

In what sense? I saw it but what do you think? I agree with you.

Student: There was no possibility, do you remember we were talking about the bending around. The way that show was hung, that was an experience that was unavailable to you.

It forced it into a kind of...

Student: Yes, it was a shotgun sense of lining them all up on the same level and you go around the room as though they are all equal, and one can be substituted for another, rather than each of them as unique and as a function of that uniqueness, you build an experience. But not as an experience composed of equal-sized parts.

That's why I thought Martha... had a wonderful way of declaring, I don't know if you read in *Afterimage* about Mirrors and Windows, a pretentiousness, gray walls and then white walls and dark walls to suggest what was going on, that you are supposed to know the signal, this is a mirror, this is a window, or what have you. And that is typical presentation that is supposed to determine your classification of a picture. And I think the reaction was not so much that we agree with his thesis or even like his selections, but the presumption of the delimitation of the experience.

Student: Which is the thing about museums, is that the experience is supposed to *have been*, you are supposed to be going there to have an experience confirmed, rather than seeking a new experience. And the thing about the way that show was hung was that it eliminated the possibility of a private experience, or a private personal relationship to the work. I felt the same way about the Meyerowitz show in the Museum of Fine Arts... just another incredible devil... In this enormous room, how can you expect something that is that size...

Yes, to compete with it.

Student: How can you expect it to survive in the room, regardless of what one thinks was going on, but just the simple fact of installation? And there was a marvelous installation at RISD, in the Wood-Gerry Gallery, by Melissa Pattonhood (?) who did a room that was just fantastic, because the work was designed for the room, and was a part of the room.

Student: It was a play *on* the room. It had a play on inside/outside. The photographs weren't hung on the wall, they were hung six feet away from the wall.

Yes, of course, you see there is a paradox here because I don't think anyone who is involved with any sense of pictorialization is trying to pretend as though they don't care about an observer, or someone to share the work with. And the majority even care a great deal about eventually getting published or eventually getting collected or appear in a museum or what have you, and that is certainly more than just being human. Obviously that means that the channels through which one's own seeing or selecting and then what is seen as a result of that selection in the print, would want to be shared. But it is like saying, to me what is so peculiar if we talk about less emphasis upon having predetermined constructs that are kept within the frame of the picture, like a design, and they become more reflective of the way we, we are being reminded that we need not be so concerned with hierarchical orders in the world, then how do we expect them to become behavioristic in life as opposed to in exhibitions, in publications. Do you

see what I mean? There is the paradox: we are then caught in a dilemma, if it means more than just picture-making or taking, how is it to function, the photograph? And then how are we to give up the distinction of this being an isolable experience? A group of pictures or what have you, then put into a museum context, or gallery context, or publication context. You see the problem would be is that, just as I've said, that we've given up our prior embarrassment over the democratizing aspect of the medium. We have given up the embarrassment that its mechanics can be admitted as an integral part of our own selection. And we have given up the embarrassment of saying, there is something that photography can do that doesn't have to be reflective of a painter's instinct or post-Bauhaus design organization or what have you. But then you might say there is another step there. People must be involved in this medium to distinguish out and to make their type of experience on a level *other* than simply having it seen in a book, museum, or gallery. Or become a commodity. And if so, what is it?

Student: Isn't that automatic, though, in the way we have come to decide that we first identify say a print or printed matter as an object? And we have from other arts been able to analyze and break down the objects in certain fashions to reflect experience. The thing that stands out to me in terms of a photograph is that when you analyze and break down the photograph, you can do it pictorially but you also have to break it back down in terms of the experience that is possible, that could have been possible, as a result of the place, of identifying the place, of identifying it as an actual thing.

In other words you're not just breaking down the picture into its component parts but you're also thinking of the environment that picture reflects and conceiving of its component parts or even later, not even thinking of that, but also being triggered to think of another environmental experience as related to that signal. In other words, what I am saying is, the sense of ordering our consciousness to become attentive to things we forgot, things that we felt weren't worthwhile looking at, things we thought were not the stuff of art. And much photography today reminds me that a hell of a lot is there that can be the stuff for art or for pictures. It is like asking the question, do we sense that it is still important that we mediate the experience through pictures? If anything has called that into question it's photography. You understand what I mean. I don't think painting is calling that into question. No painter is sitting around wondering about whether they should paint as a way of defining the world, you know what I mean? Because in the first place they pretty much accept the fact that they're omitting the world. Even students; what motivates them is the fact that they're going to create something that is absolutely unique. It's going to have no pre-pattern or post-pattern, it's going to be bound to that. It's a very powerful motivating factor. People involved in other media, at least in my experience as a teacher, I see a different thing goading people to continue their work. Most of the fine arts are centered on the idea of the unique

presentation and that would include drama or music or what have you. No matter how often it could be repeated, but it is the interpretation of the actor, not the part. Whereas photography seems to have a role that says, it is not the interpretation, it is the selection but it's also the part itself. Do you understand what I mean? It is not the role, it is the part itself that becomes the distinguishing feature. And then you start saying, then we have called into question as to whether or not we need a picture to mediate our experience.

Student: In a certain way we do just like when you look at something and you can only be attentive to a certain point to a certain length of time, consciously, the photograph automatically makes that point and make conscious a whole area which you can go back to at any time. And in that way re-experience the same thing in any number of ways.

Yes, but again you are looking at, that is like re-experiencing a cadaver, because under any circumstances, you are looking at something that is past tense.

Student: Is that like a right brain/left brain thing? We visualize the world on one side, we visualize photographs on another side.

No, it's not distinguished in that way. How does it go? The emotive/emotional aspects are communicated, let's see now how does that go?... I had to turn around to see which side of the brain was working...motor controls and things of that nature...the investment of analytical modes is left brain: and right to left starts distinguishing out, or is it the reverse, you know that new thing of looking a human being with one eye closed? Close your right eye and then the left eye and look at the right side of the face, that's it, and then I'll know what your true emotions are. There is not a mode of picturing where photographs are perceived by the left brain or the right brain.

Student: The only reason I asked the question is because of the sense of time: when you are visualizing the world and when you are passing through it, as opposed to a photograph. You are dealing with a different sense of time, and that seems to be the distinguishing factor in the left side/right side. One is a linear view of the world and the other one is not, so I wonder if there is any...

Well, obviously, you are responding both to the sense of that triggering what I'll call for want of a term, an emotive response, and the other a more categorizing response, analyzing out what things look like, there you're distinguishing things to be able to name them or what have you, which is different from the idea of just having a feeling affect.

Student: Because one side is dependent upon things being the same each time, whereas the other side is in no way dependent upon a causality of that sort, there is no need for causality.

But even so, I don't think that is quite an issue in the sense of what happens when you think of pictures as motivators, or as reflectors, or... You see if I were to ask the question, "Why does much photography today seem to include a more apparent spatial environment?" I am not going to find that out through analyzing left and right brain response. It becomes collective. They are different typologies. Even if you want to revert back to a more metaphorical system: there are intuitive types, feeling types, sensation types, thinking types, and yet there doesn't seem to be declared a kind of typology that you can associate with an individual; photographs tend to be associated with a collective sense of what is worthwhile looking at, you know, what's viewed. If you say, in the Baroque period, and you start having a great interest in gravity, gravitational pulls, and things like that, or deal with the interest in mechanics, not only the mechanics of bodily functions, but mechanics of vision, obviously paintings, despite the individuality of the artist, begin to reflect that collective concern. And many of these things can be traced down to specific influences. But in other words, that is why often something will set rather precariously on the edge of a table and look like it's going to fall. It is no accident, whether the painter wanted to deal with some aspect of Newtonian physics at one period or not, it was like it was part of the drift of things, and those things are almost like collectivized intuitions of a concern. You would have to be very minimalist in your thinking to say that, if you start dealing with any photographer today and say, "what were the specific modes of influence?" That would immediately put you back into the realm of having to go through a full psychological profile and biography. What one read, how one was taught, or what have you, and I don't think even if we wanted to do it, it wouldn't be taken very seriously. You understand what I mean? In fact when we talk about the iconography of the photographic image, we don't tend to go to, as we might in a painting, to start tracing back, who taught whom, and what influences were apparent, or what have you. We tend to go forward, in other words, we start saying, what does this serve as a kind of provocative agent? And how does this make us, as we were saying earlier, respond differently, or react differently to things, it's like, from Harry to Providence. And that becomes what I'll call a facet of human consciousness, not of individual consciousness. And maybe it's what we do see when we look back at earlier periods, like in the Baroque, and all of that activity and all of that energetic motion, and that diagonal organization, or that sense of precarious balance, or those landscapes that open up and give us a sense of rediscovering that the world is quite large. You might say that in our time, that photographs seem to be serving *that* kind of function. That we see retroactively when we look back upon our grand age, because there is much more of a tendency to talk about what Jung would call a collective consciousness,

or even a collective unconscious urge to find out what we are aiming toward, not as individuals, but as a collective.

Student: At this point, it would seem, I don't know, can we hazard a guess?

Well you can ask yourself how you feel about certain types of photographs, and you are hazarding a guess that might be reflective of everyone. I can't quite do that though with paintings today. I can with categories of paintings, you understand what I mean? I can talk about what the aim is in terms of how I'm expected to see that work, but it is ridiculous for me to presume that I'm supposed to see it as some reflection upon an emotional set of behaviors, or a way of re-reading my world, or what have you, because they themselves have declared in their work and by their own statements, that's what we are avoiding. And yet, much photography today that tends to be declaring other than the fact that there is some kind of external manifestation that you are to see witnessed, as reflected upon. Even the interest in, let's say, when Peter Bunnell pointed out in his recent Amherst talk ...despite the fact that we can read in pop-photo magazines, all these ways to create artificial lighting and get a really nifty photograph. It is interesting in how more and more photographers started using flash night and day and using the idea of a light that is forced upon things. Misrach, Hallis... doesn't matter if you're using a flashlight or a strobe or what have you. Or this idea of even when you don't really need light, amplifying the light. Well, why? It is as though, a sense that sometimes it might be well become kind of medium-oriented, to create an unusual effect on the spirit...

Student: The plant did.

Did it move?

Student: A whole bunch. (laughter)

You must be disappointed, it's supposed to be secretive... it knows it's being taped (laughter)...What has impressed me is the fact that it is a problem more than it is a fault because there is no solution here. The idea that, I am put in the position of looking at a lot of photography today, as much as I'd like to point the finger at a type, my finger keeps slipping beyond that image back to something in my environment. As I said I tend to go forward. But if you said you needed to hold that image because we need the experience of being able to arrest motion, or life, or what have you. Or maybe that these guys who are using flash need to create a metamorphosis of that which is obvious: halated edges, eliminating shadows, or what have you. We still can't escape the fact that they're using something that already is, so to speak, going to be affecting

the image, whether Merton uses flash, or Misrach's strobe, or what have you, we know one thing for certain, that is what is being recorded is the phenomenon of that reflected light, coming from the strobe or the flash, and as obvious as that might sound, that's entirely different from a person creating some kind of invented color scheme or metamorphosing in a Surrealist painting, animals, trees, persons, places, and things. Like again this sort of need to further amplify that which is already a part of our experience: the fact that we do see because of light therefore I am going to confirm light. And as I look at many types of those pictures, where did they do that one, was that Dade County, what was that called, the show called *Flash*? Have you seen that little catalog? They collected a whole bunch of people using simply flash as an integral part, Merton and a half dozen others. I still think that much more rather than a technique or type of picture. Like again, another need to force the issue of us becoming aware of the way we do see things, through the simple issue that we see through illumination. It creates its effects but what created the effect? *Light* created the effect, not the person who triggered the strobe, or held the flash, or what have you, see?

Student: It sounds as though you are beginning to suggest, and you are probably saying this all the way through, is that because photographers are dealing with real energies, as contrasted with the painter who is dealing with not real energies, manufactured energies, that somehow there is something in that distinction, in that difference.

There is.

Student: Comes a large part of the power of the medium of photography.

I like the way you put that, Gil, to me it is like the painter deals with inert substances, which must be willed into some kind of identity, true? But the photographer deals with already pre-existent energies. Light is a pre-existent energy. (laughs) He doesn't invent the light as it were. He doesn't invent the chemical effect that is going to occur.

Student: And nor does he invent himself.

True, and so as a result, now, assuming that, see... those subliminal effects that we appreciate in the photograph, a hell of a lot that we don't want to divert away from the photographer, because everyone likes to think, "I did this." And indeed I said that's where you then skip the idea of the manufacturing process and you get into the problem of the selecting process. And then selecting out, and I like that term, you are not selecting the terms of what you are going to invent, it is not building a context, the painting, you are selecting out of a context in order for presentation. Now once you have

presented that, then we talk about behavior. You see what I mean? In other words, how do we respond, do we want to go back to biography or intentionalism?

Student: ...It came up in Photo 1 class, the notion that you don't have to worry about being unique if you are involved in photography. If you listen to yourself and you photograph your world, it will happen, whereas a painter...

Yes, you can get away with that in photography, you can say that. I like that, you could absolutely inevitably be unique, but only because of one thing, and what would that be? (laughs) That you can be unique only if you don't start and interfere with the possibilities of an image by having all sorts of paradigms and traditions to obey. That's what I meant earlier about Nathan (Lyons), when I was talking about the idea that photography has no style, because they claim to have no tradition. It had a tradition, in terms of even painting influencing those western photographs, but what it was the particular vantage point or the stance one took with the camera did offer the selecting out process, and it wasn't that Clarence King sat down and said, "Now Tim, I want you to photograph *that*." He said, "You all have this sector." And he made his own choices but it is damned to be sure that someone else would have gone there and probably made another type of selection. But in both cases they would have shared one thing: neither could have made the claim to the invention of the image.

Student: And for that reason you can never really have an academy.

That is quite true. There can be academies in the sense that they won't last very long...

Student: That is the problem with saying there is no tradition. Yes there is a tradition, but there is no one who can last long enough or exert enough force to impose a tradition, so the tradition cannot be codified in that sense, as you were saying, into paradigms. Because at that point, it falls apart, because you start comparing the world to an idea and it gets very strained.

And then what you also find is instead of distinguishing out things and also trying to refine the world that does exist: the environment, the milieu, the things that you see and what have you, in photography it seems like we continue to work more and more towards inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness. And that is what I meant, there is a point where all this will break. And we are not going to have this intermediary agent. Or will we? That to me is an interesting thing: will we at some point be able to make distinctions about what's important enough to look at, have a sight of, without needing either a sight that is *already* one step removed, as in painting, or at least at the best, one person's invention. Because there are no natural energies involved in the idea of a

painting or a sculpture that you can speak of that have not been influenced by, that was inert matter that did not choose to be that configuration. Name me a single, the thing that I could name would be like Duchamp and his snow shovel, or putting *R. Mutt* on a urinal. You see there you had a gesture that tried to say, "This is art because I name it to be so," you follow me? And yet what we admire and what we respect in that work is not the innate identity of the urinal or the snow shovel, it is the very nature of what I call the biographical gesture. Someone that could have that degree of, it was a postular position to take as a human being in terms of what will be included or not. Photographs do not have to deal with that kind of gesture. You understand what I mean? They do not have to: the only parallel that I can think of is someone could take a painting of a landscape and writing on it, "This is a photograph." You see what I mean, and it wouldn't work. It would not excite us. But to put it on a snow shovel or sign a urinal "R. Mutt" you are then declaring that something is art because my consciousness determines it to be so. But interestingly enough photographers can never do that, simply because in the first place it ain't your consciousness that determined *it* to be so, you determine what would make the *it-ness* of light energy and chemistry become manifest to affect an image. So *it* is not you, *it* is the energies. Then we say to ourselves, what?

Student: Gil was wondering about what it was last semester.

Because we get all mixed up in terms of the idea of even critiques of pictures, and things like that. Where do we really hold on to it? There is legitimacy in people talking about their compositions and framing and printing and what they are including. But after a while all that really can become absurd, only if you don't think of having enough humility to realize that the world gives you enough richness of possibilities: as this chemistry does or this camera does, that we can respect the fact that we are behooved to work with it a little more intelligently or a little more cleverly or whatever it may be. But still we don't get, we can't ever take the presumption that we are dealing with something that we can claim to be our own, you know, the picture: that I now claim this to be exclusively mine. But every painter can...the main thing you need to offer.

Student: But you don't have to make the claim.

That's right.

Student: It is yours.

Yes, but I was thinking of it in a little different way. The minute it becomes a public document and people look at it and then they wonder if...

Student: That doesn't address your relationship to the work, that addresses the public's need, or the others' need...which is never a concern at that level, you know you did it. It is only when it goes out and it goes away from you...

That's right! I see how you did it, you selected it, you cooperated with it to become phenomenon.

Student: You hung around in its presence, standing like this.

You are in a state of agreement...that's the way Fred Sommer puts it, a state of agreement in the sense that you're not presuming to have stated that this world becomes what you want it to be, but you have enabled it to become what it will become according to the technical modes, the positions you took, the kind of linkages you saw possible through these materials and techniques, light, and everything else. But see, purportedly, photographs today start offering us, when we use that term distinctions, it's not that *this* is made distinct from *that*: I might add that it is delivering us *from* distinctions. Delivering us from the need to distinguish out but to become more inclusive. In other words, it's like enabling us to make the distinction that what we normally thought of as valuable to see or important to experience or what have you, is becoming less and less clarified. Distinctions can work, I am not trying to burden the term, but distinctions can work where we say everything is uniquely distinctive. And that is a distinction to make. I will not presume that, it's like saying that even though I'm sitting here and I look into a room, or you look at me, or whatever, that either I have to because of the very nature of my bio-physical function, must be able to make selective determinations of where I'm going to give my attention. Even as the sound of my voice, even something like, it's being recorded, or obviously it's being heard, I know that that is going on, but in no sense can I really be conscious of the total field. Photographs, as we said earlier, do enable me, typical photographs enable me to be able to say, "All of that could be held on the same plane," agreed? All of it could be held on the same plane. I don't know much about audio, whether every voice and every sound can be apparent on the same plane, but then I'm caught up in the sense of saying that obviously as the photograph does reveal to me a world that I can't see, you might not want to agree with that, it also enables me though to go back and perhaps be conditioned to want to say, even though I couldn't get it in total, I can start saying that it is time now for me to focus upon the blade of grass, the sky, the wart on the end of the nose, the beer can in the yard, yesterday's deposit by the dog, whatever it may be. All of those things no longer are thought of in some kind of state of ordering, as important or less important. I may still scan, but then I scan with everything being of co-equal value for sight. Not necessarily for life. Not necessarily for action.

Student: But if you think of that view as the whole, the photograph being the distinctive part, that adds meaning to the whole. And what you were saying about, that collective consciousness eventually won't need that part to understand the whole.

There you go. Yes, Keith, that's it. I might say that the photograph, by holding everything co-equally, without, strangely, it distinguishes everything co-equally, so that is what you call a collective distinction. That photograph is such a distinction of everything held co-equally, sight-ful...

Student: But at some level it becomes a ritual object.

Sure it does, because it means that it triggers me to say, I can never see the way *any* photograph reveals. I mean, there's no way you can do that. But the thing is I can go out into my environment and use what I call the defect of my optical sensors, I mean it is a rather wondrous defect but nevertheless, and it can teach me to start scanning and plotting out what I observe and not be quite so conscious of dealing with the typical western conditioning of foreground, middleground, background: you know larger scale therefore it's more important because it is dominant in my field of vision. All these things are truly... countless centuries upon centuries of ingramming to determine import. There are periods in which we say the art does not reflect the visual consciousness that we gradually evolved. It's like where things were, let's say in continuous narration, it was possible to see a figure in multiple places in one picture, a saint ascends a hill, we see four of the saints. No one worried about whether that was real or not. You understand what I mean? Because the experience of being in several places in a progression, I can say that one might have looked at that in a period of time, let's say a painting by Sassetta, in the 14th century, as being co-equally as realistic as we might say as we look at a photograph, which it ain't, if you will accept that it is mimetic, it mimics, but it is not realistic in the sense that we can say I couldn't really see the world in the way this information is presented.

Student: Well if you look at one of the golfers, or the tennis players swinging a racket.

Exactly, we know those are the progressive stages where a phenomenological presentation of an environment in a photograph, but you are not going to see it that way. But it may well make you become more attentive to become interested in this: that my hand is here and my hand is there: there's nothing worse than a wagging finger (laughs). The idea is that what if my consciousness presumed that I become very attentive to the past, the present, the future. The idea that I had to start thinking about the idea of what started a motion and what was its terminus? I'm now taught not to think

in terms of where I am now and where I am going, but where have I been, where I am at present, where am I going. It's like another kind of eternal round. Or I go out into the world and no longer decide because my typical conditioning, and truly I could say of western vision that I can see things in terms of a spatial field: foreground, middle ground, background. I think a lot of these recent photographs deal with lining up, and you take your choice of who, are telling me that I don't need to see the world according to the canons of the western tradition. So that now I have found myself *very* conscious of the fact that I begin to see all sorts of what I would call, initially, *anomalous* modes of seeing: that I can now go out and see if the edge of the barn lines up with the preacher's house next door, and then beyond that, something else lines up with that, I'm seeing them on, as it were, a plane of vision that is only permitted because I have been enabled to see so. And a photograph that really enabled that where everything was held constant, held in focus. Here I must select out of and see those events occur.

Student: It is almost as though, it is weird, because photography which is a...lens, and the presentation of a normal perspective, if we accept that the notions about lining up is being used to break the last vestigial hold of the whole revolution in Renaissance painting. About, this is the way space is.

Or, it's breaking the hold that Cubism had upon us that said the only way that something can be seen as truly pictorial was to have it occur on a flat plane, you see what I mean? After all, as I've said, that's been the typical archetype, that painting delivered us, informed us, of the importance of the pure picture. Photography was to stay on that track towards recording and reflecting. If that were the case, of photography's purpose that only leads us to a worshiping of cadaverous moments of experience: dead things. And I think what it's doing in a semiotic delayed triggering, it holds things constant, it may be a past tense, but we bring it into the present and future tense, it informs us of a new way that says what Cubism thought couldn't be in the world, is there: all I have to do is LINE IT UP.

Student: I've been perfectly content for the last four hours to watch you wear your collage on the top of your head.

(Roars with laughter) But you don't think that way. Would that have occurred, I don't think it's because it's just been discussed in periodicals and so on, but they used to lock people up who had visions that a building were closer that it were, you know that sort of thing, it was considered a form of schizophrenia. To see things, you remember in Ingmar Bergman's film, which one was it? Well you can start with *Through a Glass Darkly*: remember when the helicopter comes by and that whole spider image he kept playing in that trilogy of *Winter's Light*, *Through a Glass Darkly*, and so on, when all the

signs of schizophrenia were associated with a person identifying an actual phenomenological experience, and when I say phenomenological I mean something is happening to their vision. Suddenly the shadow of the helicopter goes by and this person suddenly thinks of it as the devouring god/spider. He hasn't shown "helicopter/spider" but it is like the person saw that arachnid creature in that strange...thing. Or the idea that, when he started using the reversal effect, we had a negative image and everything would be brilliantly lit in negative terms rather than positive. Those things that we now accept as commonplace just because we've been conditioned by so many films and photographs: not just still photographs, to see the reversal effects, the *sabattier* effect, that we can notice with great interest, we don't have to have it happen, but we can notice when we see the *halated* edges, we've been conditioned to experience this within our actual vision, as opposed to having to have it in the peculiarity of a picture... What at one time would have been thought of as schizophrenic, the idea of amplified sound, or amplified visual effects, or the idea of a person who could not, it would certainly be a problem for a person who thought if they really did think that they really could climb up that lined up telephone pole and end up on the roof of the house next door (laughs) that would really be a problem. It'd be interesting, we are talking about the way we see, and then sense out: it is like the world then is a picture and at the same time is a world we can go out and touch.

Student: In terms of the collective consciousness, that photography has helped us to expand our realm of possibilities in vision, so that we don't appear to be crazy.

Maybe photography is in a way, strangely enough, serving, and I'm not trying to invest it with some kind of therapeutic power, because so many people think if you do it it's going to be therapy, someone wrote on the bathroom wall at RISD that photography is therapy for incapable draftsmen. Not that kind of therapy, but a kind of collective therapy that we need not order our world in such a manner that certain appearances are not permitted.

Student: It begins to suggest an area that you can experiment with different ways of lining it up without bodily risk.

Without bodily risk or without psychological risks...it is like children in schools are taught to, and Piaget has dealt so much with that idea of how we as children tend to make relationships viable, come to life, that our relationships to our environment come to life by virtue of associating those experiences with our own physical movements, or what have you. It's like a child in an automobile. Tim and I used to remark on Nevil, "Isn't that clever of her," she'd say, "Look Daddy the moon's going for a ride with us," as we were driving down the street. Piaget used that as one of his illustrations with all those little

French kiddies said the same thing: they tend to associate the vehicle they're in or their own motion, and that the world obeys *their* motion, obeys their sense of physical actions, or rhythms or what have you. We tell them, "Oh, no, no, darling, the moon doesn't move, you do." (laughter) I'm not saying we can return to that wonderful level of childhood where it *is* kind of nice that you are in, at least, even though it might sound very egocentric, you are in other words the measurer of your world, which suddenly means that one can say "the moon is with me," instead of *out there*: a cold dead planet that some astronaut is going to step on.

Student: And there is no law to prevent that experience. And the thing about a photograph, maybe we can't see the photograph that way, but you can as a function of having seen the photograph, go out into the world and experience the world that way.

Yes, that's why I call it mediational: it's a mediational agent that enables you to, maybe we have to have that, we can't throw our head over our shoulder and look at paradise again, or become children again, and we don't need to become a primitive, or noble savages, or naives, or what have you. We have to say that these things are possible without fear, as you put it, bodily or psychically locked up.

Student: They have done experiments with vision, in this book I'm reading by Orenstein, *The Psychology of Consciousness*, with frogs. Having described the frog's optical apparatus to be similar to ours in some sense, and they set it up so that there was a varied number of stimuli that the frog had to deal with, and the conclusion of the experiment was that the frog could only deal with basically four, three or four, visual events having to do with basic survival techniques, and then making an analogy to children and adults: that the child has at one point the whole world out there to deal with, and as we grow up, we slowly define our own parameters, for our own sanity and our own survival, whereas at one point we probably really do see in terms of what comes through our eyes, we see quite a bit, but when we become mature and conscious, we don't see as much. We do see it through our eyes but we don't see it in our brain as much, we select out.

Yes, we select out, and organize out. It's like saying too, was it Whitehead or Piaget? If it weren't for the fact that we do need to become cognitive, we need to become analytical, we need to differentiate, otherwise, the phrase is, we would really find that our childhood nightmares are real and we would be overwhelmed by them. The idea is that really is a state of our own individual development. I'm not talking about photographs leading us back to a world in which everything is connected and we no longer have to function as differentiating human beings, but there seems to be an inevitable necessity for us to be able to rediscover an environment that enables us to

hold all things as equally important for sight, and to see relationships between things that no longer require differentiating out in a certain manner as this is important, that's not important. And above all, we don't need to elevate certain things to become what they're not. Or force them to become what they're not. That instinct led us to see everything as a metaphor, or as an equivalent, certainly within a strain of photography, as a symbolic potential, was presuming that we had to call it by a name, as in poetry or other modes, or that we had to visualize it as having a phenomenological identity that could only be expressed in the picture. And there's the irony, that we were hoping for a world that we never could visit; that's when Fred Sommer starts talking, and I just think it's a wonderful statement, it's not just mumbo jumbo, but the truth is, when he talks about, he'll say, well those pictures by Jerry Uelsmann," or he'll even turn to Harry's, not the recent ones, but the earlier ones, or Aaron's, he calls them metaphysical. Because they are in essence trying to record in picture form something that we really *couldn't* visit. And yet many photographs today seem to suggest *not* that what I'm looking at is the world in a direct portrayal-ment, it's a way of saying I look *through* it, and go to the world and have a way of witnessing it in an entirely new matter. That is why I said one of the ironies or paradoxes is the fact that the greater the sense of differentiation, almost the greater sense of synthesis. I don't know why we're being reminded of much of what we're seeing in contemporary photography. I can't believe it's just an inevitable evolution of photography or an inevitable result of some influence like literature, or psychology, or philosophy, or government, or politics or something like that: it's just a drift of human consciousness towards evidently revealing its own need to recognize that the world is still there. All the major metaphors of our time tend to tell us that it's not going to be here for long. Or that it's not there at all then you're wasting your time touching it or sensing it in any dimension. And all the other curative systems that seem to be around seem to be reminding us of the fact that the world is there, which is sort of a peculiar moment to be in.

Student: I guess because photography is essentially a technological event, or technological medium. It feeds back and says, ok that is the limit of technology. And at that point you have got to go back to nature or to the physical body or our own senses. You can't go any further than that. And that is all there is to that.

I love the story, it's a little thing in a publication that was very short lived, called *Transformation, DeKooning, Space, Time, Order*, something like that. {The title is *Renaissance and Order*, 1949, reprinted in *Trans/formation* 1, no. 2, 1951} But he is commenting on a story that Jack Tworkov told him about, it's a postlude to a whole expression he has about the physicist's face, you know, I'll use as buttons to button up the curtains of emptiness...and all the space I need is at the end of my finger tips, he is declaring the fact that he just wants to be himself, he just needs his own well being and

identity in other words to be able to perform whatever acts he needs to perform. And he tells the story, he says that it reminds him about Jack Tworokov telling the story about the village idiot named Plank. And Plank had an obsession for measuring things... I think I recall he had either a stick or a ruler and he went around measuring plants and trees and buildings and people and roadways and so on. The only thing Plank can never do is measure himself, and DeKooning ends the story there, and you are left reading this and you want to know which is better? To be able to measure yourself in relation to trees and buildings and so on, or not to be able to measure yourself. The desire has been, I think in pictures, until the advent of photography, and even particularly teleological up to this time, to try to say we can never measure ourselves. That this inevitable destiny of human consciousness will increasingly invent and transform the world, and there's always a better mousetrap, and there's nothing new under the sun, and there will be a new way to paint the sun: all this kind of thing, see, but yet ironically it's as though Plank was a village idiot, and that the Jack Tworokov story is a tragic story. Rather than saying it was extolling the virtue that all the space I need is here, therefore I am the universe, you follow me? That maybe the new discovery is that we need to teach ourselves and Plank must need to become conscious of the fact that he was really doing the proper measuring when he went out there and measured trees and buildings, and that he could also put the ruler right from his foot to his head and say, "and there am I, in relation to these things." There is a way that little anecdotes like that can be in the service, it is like Faulkner populates his novels with Popeye and the idiot and so on, who purportedly carry the greater consciousness. Do you understand what I mean? They carry the greater, and the Black often carries the greater consciousness, because they are observing the pretensions of the folks who pretend to be landed, gentry, or know their prerogatives, and they set up the hierarchical orders. Ironically we are reaching a point now where...we need to absorb some humility to look out there and see things as they are, and see things as they potentially could be, without having a surrogate consciousness operative. You know often the shaman was an albino or was often someone with a peculiar deformation of body...because we don't need that idea of the unusual anymore. Do you understand what I mean? It is like you were saying before, we become our own shaman.

Student: It is as though, if I follow what you are saying, photography somehow allows us to bring outsider in.

Yes, but it is more than that. Somehow it enables us to once again not assume that we need to be, that we need to know that unlimited dimension of ourselves, we need to know the limited dimensions of ourselves and start getting to the unlimited dimensions of what it is we are bound to and involved in. The real distinction is to say that I am not above the world, in the world, you know, transforming the world, but I am *of* the world.

Much photography today is telling me a hell of a lot about, you know, where I am, so I am able to measure myself. What I'm not able to measure is the limitless parameters. That is a paradox because parameters, or perimeters, let's put it that way, because there I am dealing with purportedly a surround that has a limit. The photograph tends more so than any other medium to tell me that those limits are never to be fully determined. Because I'm constantly able to discover, and if you imagine the endless permutations of experience that are possible, the minute pictures start announcing that everything can be seen as co-equally important, well we have just started. We haven't even scratched the surface. We can lose all that other stuff. We could lose the whole history of western visual consciousness and still be OK. As long as we knew there was some medium we could still work with (laughter). You understand what I mean? Because we wouldn't have to reinvent the wheel, we would then start with that set that is no longer important for me to metamorphosize the world, or symbolize the world, or anything else. I need a vehicle though, through which I can be reminded to experience it. And maybe we will reach a point where suddenly we all walk out, we won't be walking out into that fifth...whichever one where you leave things behind, but we'll literally not need pictures.

Student: How does that relate to performance art and body art, or does it?

Well it may be in a sense but after all, they are still very much bound to the performance. At a time, though, maybe it is as though we will, what: walking will be the dance, you know, that kind of thing. To me if there is to be thought of purpose, it isn't like, oh guess what folks, photography may disappear. I see it as maybe, in essence it teaches us to be able to give up the matrix of substitution. That'll be a hell of a long time I'm sure, probably I don't anticipate it happening for several millennia. I don't anticipate even that. I'm just in thought projecting an imaginary process. I'd rather have it that the world stays here than the photograph. And that the world stays here whether I do or not. That's what I love about Cavell's statement: one thing I like about photographs is that they remind me, how does he say it? Of my own immortality: that I am certain of one thing, as long as the world is around, the judgment upon me shall not be the last. (laughs)... But it is comforting to think that if we continue to persist in the sense of trying to make the world appear to be what it could not appear to do, if we keep continuing to be metaphysical. Or we think that we're going to find a way of forgetting it more easily by saying let's be witnesses to phenomenological painting that doesn't want any relationship to the world. Thank god for these people who are going around snapping pictures of things I know I really can't see that way in the world but I can go out and be reminded to start looking for those possible relationships. And that as I said is certainly, it postulates a kind of hope, or a kind of a, it postulates a kind of thing that to me would be one of the most extraordinary motivating missions for anyone to be involved in the

act of photography. Coupled with their interest in getting their Guggenheim and their one-man show (laughter) some are going to have it that way, or whatever it is. I'm not going to deny the person who wants to be recognized, but I think that if somewhere, I'd rather have even the public become conscious, if they start suggesting...I think lurking behind Sontag's calls for an ecology of images. One of the problems, even though I think it is a brilliant way of putting it, is that she still might want elitism, that this is a better way to deal with it than that. But she does admit that there doesn't seem to be even a way to distinguish out what is better and what is worse. What we now need to do is to start making our selections and maybe that implies a highly individuated order of the way a person would even look at photographs.

Student: That is even apparent even in the way walking into anyone's house and the way they put all of the same objects inside of a house, which is always completely different.

You mean like lamps and chairs?

Student: Yes, and just the arrangement. It is never the same but it is always the same objects. I just thought that the other thing that I think is interesting that you point to is this thing of, interest in the world, and we when came to be re-interested in the world in things like the Whole Earth Catalog. That in the time when we became re-interested in it was the time that we finally left it. When someone made it to the moon was about the same time that we became interested in all of the rest of it, back here.

Ain't it the truth. There's nothing more unnerving than the minute something out there that you thought well someday maybe we'll...and the minute that foot goes down, uh-oh. (laughs)

Student: And that is considered somewhat of an omen, that when they stepped on the moon it rained for twenty one days straight in New York City. (laughter)

Well there are those things, and it's not foolish to speculate upon them...or talk about for whatever purposes, because the idea is that quite often the effect like that will be seen in centuries as to what we really do feel, because they aren't simultaneous... It was necessarily retrenchment, but it was reminding us, it's here, it's here, it's here. We're trying to discover what is out there and yet we really only, as I said, we speak of this sort of timeline of visual consciousness, of how we discovered this and that, and how we gave our homage to worlds beyond this world, and then we came back to this world, and then we wondered how this world worked and all these things purportedly did influence the development of visual forms. Ironically now it's as though we're suggesting

that, we're not as much concerned with how it works, what it could be, how it can be poeticized, but it's pretty much just the way it looks. That's why I said all the aspects of visual consciousness could be lost and we're really at a beginning point.

Student: Did you say the way it looks or the way it is?

The way it looks until then I discover what it is. Do you ever get some... sort of reminder? I mean do you think so or not, because you MUST or you wouldn't be taking pictures.

Student: I do...because you are supposed are always supposed to deal with the thing as A and not A simultaneously, and logic can't deal with it, but it's there.

Let me show you something, this is why I have grown to like a person like Allan Sekula...propaganda...the enemy is...did you read his thing in *Art Forum* on photographic imaging or dialogue, he was talking about Paul Strand's moral virtue and integrity and his association with the Sicilian peasants, all this hype about, for Christ's sake he hasn't even spoken to one other than to say hold still. Here is one, I'll show you...I mean Nathan Lyons is so bold to think that we're entering into a period of a kind of new Romanticism. I keep saying it's not Romanticism, it's theology you fool (laughter). But he's not religious so he doesn't accept that. Here is Walter Chappell. Keep in mind this was published in 1960. And that show was... *Under the Sun*. It's a really prime document, because in reality, Minor had not announced, certainly in *Aperture* there were announcements of the whole idea of the extension of the equivalency theme and Stieglitz's tradition...it really came out of German Expressionism and German symbolism. But Chappell, keep in mind also had a great influence on Minor White. And in his writing he says, "*Under the Sun* may be experienced as an illuminated journey through 36 states of mind, a simultaneous narrative on the search for authentic vision" (Now notice these terms: authentic vision) "Independently explored by three artists working in a singular realm of camera vision." (So we got authentic vision explored by three artists, invested in as unique individuals, working in the singular realm of camera vision, as purportedly though there is something very different from camera vision from other types of vision. All you have to do is look at the pictures and tell that's a lie, you know what I mean? Then we got a little eastern story entitled, *Disagreement as to the Shape of an Elephant*: "If there had been a candle in each one's hand the difference would not have gone out of their words, the eye of sense perception is only like the palm of the hand; the palm have not the power to reach the whole of the elephant, the eye of the sea is one thing, and the foam another. Leave the foam and look with the eye of the sea, day and night, there is the movement of foam-flecks from the sea, thou beholdest the foam but not the sea. Marvelous." (I think this little story is

completely misunderstood in this commentary, because it suggests that the eye of sense perception is only like the palm of the hand) "The palm has not the power to reach the whole of the elephant." (In other words, you have to become the elephant, You have to empathize as it were, feeling things) "The eye of the sea is one thing and the foam another. Leave the foam and look with the eye of the sea," (Look *with* the eye of the sea) "Day and night, there is the movement of the foam flecks from the sea, thou beholdest the foam but not the sea. Marvelous. In *Under the Sun* all images arise and flux within nature. The world of nature is the visible extremity of the human mind and the human mind is the invisible extremity of nature." (That's a nice thought that at least there is an implication that the mind is not separate from nature, nor is nature separate from mind) "Reality of awareness are leading to an ability to equate these two worlds is within us, expanding and contracting, our potentialities of conscience and consciousness." (Now, once having admitted this lovely thought that I and the world are but extensions of one another: the reality of awareness are leading to an ability to equate these two worlds within us. And I suddenly feel that nature gets the mind part. You see because we assume that mind and awareness are the sum total of what is consciousness, and that's like forgetting one's own body and it's like forgetting the fact that I'm not going to start investing the bamburanta plant with mind: I don't need to. I simply say, consciousness is obviously a larger dimension than what the human brain encompasses, so Chappell really announces that he still has a duality operative) "Between these two extremities is a ceaseless movement, an exchange of everything. Through an aware act of vision these two worlds are made to register, and the impressions of life flow inwards and outwards through a screen of diverse imagery. Intrinsic qualities of awareness brought to vision by the artist liberate an image through the natural process of abstraction. In camera vision there exists the mysterious opportunity for distilling, separating, and finally fixing in relative isolation the direct abstraction of the artist's intuition of truth." (You get the picture already? It's always one man's, it's an abstraction, it's not an admission of the terms of what is seen, it's always what has to be filtered through the consciousness of this elitist individual called 'artist.' And through some kind of intuitive vision that we never could name, because we never can point out there, we got to point in here, and then when you've pointed in here, you stop, in someone else's head, and they can sit there and say don't you understand my son, you know that kind of thing. Or you need to take Art Appreciation 101, you know, you've got to be cultivated to even have an access to that kind of view) "In camera vision there exists a mysterious opportunity for distilling, separating, and finally fixing in relative isolation the direct abstraction of the artist's intuition of truth. In proportion to his ability to openly absorb the inner reality of the impressions from nature." (In proportion to his ability, well you know what that means, again, you've got a hierarchical order. And you see some got it and some ain't. And there always be the washed and the unwashed) "In this intentional combination of the human mind with nature, camera

vision becomes articulate, being an abstract art of the human mind in creative absorption." (Fully we've got to ensure that that camera is at the service of brain art) "Who would consciously make use of the eyes as a lens for intuition, the organ of inner sense that experiences the reality of nature's intent? The photographic image (that's a good question, who will?...) "The photographic image of camera vision, when realized, is a highly compressed abstraction of impressions, a relationship between the human mind and nature. These images exist independently in space, objects with an inner potential like seeds which sprout and branch out into the invisible mind. As a language these images are made to be received all at once, intuitively and directly, instead of word after word, serially, as occurs in spoken and written language." (Well, every time he offers an opportunity for a dialogue, you know between the recipient, or the perceptive individual, nature again has to be filtered through that individual and never gets to have its own claims. There's no way for you to reverse the order and say, well why don't we be in the service of the principle of nature? It is always *it* is in the service of *us*) "The human mind may be brought to register with any point in nature when attention moves towards a freedom beyond fixed habits: much like a camera-bellows allows the lens to extend from infinity out to a focal length of identical transmission. In this great compass of vision the mind tends to retreat from intuition into the obvious, limiting cognition to a fractional portion of the whole intelligence. Such an undeveloped receptivity leaves the mind closed to the fundamental function of Art." (And what are they?) "The fundamental function of Art is, a creative agent in Nature acting on the human mind through sense-perception, developing and deepening its sensitivity to finer impressions localized in an image, in this way enlarging the capacities of absorption; not as a game contrived for identifying the names of objects depicted from Nature with technical skill, nor a catalog of perceived curiosities decorated with a nostalgic absence of beauty." Now think of what is happening today in photography. Many images: they are localized, they are identifying the names of objects, see? They are depicted from nature, they are presented with technical skill. They are expressing technical skill in the sense that of the broadest possible parameter of technical skill including that which requires no skill like a diazotype (?), but you see that's technical skill. And that's why we're more prone to accept whatever occurs despite the oatmeal box with a pin hole in it or the diazotype or the Hasselblad, because we're no longer embarrassed about the possibility of setting up a hierarchical order, and then finally, many images today do become a catalog of perceived curiosities, decorated with a nostalgic absence of beauty. You see we don't have to have them become beautiful for them to become important. You see what he's also saying, that this intuitive eye, and this eye conditioned by the secret creative agent in nature, is trying to presume that ultimately, what is the vehicle for that? The elitist artist, the one who declares the abstraction and knows the secrets that lie within and has been able to become the medium for that creative agent. All can't, few can. And is avoiding this idea of cataloging and perceived curiosities, and

things of that nature. "From this fixed-focus vision of nature the sensitive spirit will recoil within." (This fixed focus...We recoil because we don't want the obvious, we want the subtle, the mysterious. The sort of germ that lies within nature, as if we're, what Chappell is trying to say is I'm really in tune with things. Jesus, how distant can a person get from the world? Because all he's done is a subtle way of replacing nature with mind. And calling it that I'm being fed by nature. I don't know how he's lasted this long. No wonder he got married recently in the middle of a volcano (laughter) He's testing it out. (laughter) I mean, you watch, and electrocuting plants, all that stuff. It's gonna get him, just watch, like that tree got Nancy) "In this sense the abstractions of camera vision result...from this fixed focus vision of nature the sensitive spirit will recoil within and at once deepen with the absorption of nature in search for the intuition rooted in an inner world." (Whose inner world? My, my, and what? The absorption is, that's right, absorb it {makes a loud sucking in sound} until it's no longer there, you've got it held cerebrally, or intuitively, and then suddenly it's forgotten. And what a disaster trip that is) "In this sense the abstractions of camera vision result as a formulation on the meaning of two worlds: the invisible and the visible, man's mind and the relevant imagery of nature." Relevant? You catch that? It's relevant folks, snow crystals and seed pods and figures that are amputated and transformed by shadows, and linearities created by tree branches, and wonderful color balance that are created by paint streaks on walls and buildings. Occasionally you get a little hint of something being there, you follow me? *That's* what's relevant. It's not possibly relevant that one should be able to, it's like, look at Nathan, look at these things. It's only relevant that you transform what's there. At least he cured himself, as an effort of trying to get some return to things. But the "invisible and the visible, man's mind and the relevant imagery of nature" (so obviously here's a declaration that there are hierarchical orders in nature: there's that which is valuable to see and there's that which is valueless. And finally) "It is with attentive recognition of these possibilities that this collection of imagery has been gathered from the works of three independent artists whose direct use of the medium of photography brings to light the authenticity of those little known realities existing simultaneously in the human mind and in nature." Right out of Coleridge, and a misunderstood Coleridge, just like *Mirrors and Windows* is a misunderstood metaphor of the idea of projection and introjection. Coleridge talked about a coalescence of mind and nature, and that's a different thing from talking about all the relevant imagery and that means what "I" the elitist artist uniquely using the camera vision, selects from nature, and those little known realities, for Christ sakes! We're just now discovering the little known realities in big pictures of A LOT OF STUFF. You know what I mean? That's the irony of it. And it says, "*Under the Sun* is dedicated to the visual awareness and the spontaneous intuition, *higher* than the ordinary, in the reader apprehending a new generation in the function of vision." Well, it was anticipated, and they sure came along. And what they were, were people who eventually decided that the world wasn't there. Every picture became

basically a metaphor for my intuition, or my point of view, or my elitism, or my separating out from things, and suddenly along comes the people that start, you know, backing up, permitting things to appear, and pointing out to us that those little known mysteries are found in the gross *apparencies* that are there. And even in the fact that if they don't get so caught up in this idea of uniqueness of camera vision as much as they do the idea of the experiential that occurs when we look at varieties of types of photographs. Or otherwise I'm missing a point that I don't think it's because someone was looking for a better mousetrap and they started using diazotypes, or they started using the SX-70, or they started forgetting the importance of archival protection, or...that any dimension of the way one behaved in photographing, and any dimension in relationship to how they would value the photograph that resulted: obviously the issue is displaced. It has a hell of a lot to do with just what was it we needed to re engage in those subtler realities of the world when those things were right there before us all the time. This is the kind of testament to exactly how subtly we are conditioned to try to escape what we are in. And that's a distinction you see (laughs) That's like saying it isn't there.

Student: You usually get kicked in the ass by it.

Well, we have to learn...it is like pre-ecology and so on. DeKooning paints a woman series, and the names of hurricanes, you know we name hurricanes "Betty" and we say, watch out for Mother Nature, she'll get you. There's an irony in the way we point ourselves to the most obvious things about the way we won't get away with getting rid of this matrix that we're *of*. I know of no other medium that keeps reminding us in such a rich way, to start making distinctions that don't separate us from the world but start finding out that, maybe, there will be a time when somebody will begin pointing out, they measure a circle and we come back to here...I don't know what it means but there's a hell of a lot going on today in recent photography that doesn't want us to escape

Student: One more time, I heard the apple, I didn't hear the words.

That doesn't want us to escape...and Szarkowski announced for us that there were two escape routes. Ironically, that's the tragedy of it, because it is an either/or: you either want to escape into yourself or you want to escape utterly into the world, and both are exclusive principles. You either get the world and not yourself or you just get yourself and not the world. I mean as I trace that. If I trace that argument forward you end up with nothing on either end. One would be that dead picture hanging on the wall, a world that is self-existent without me. It may be no longer, but it's like Cavell puts it: when I look at a photograph, it is in the past tense, and there is one thing I can say, the world is present to me while I am not present to it. Implying that the picture holds an identity of things made apparent so credible, in a typical photograph, that I say that world looks

very much present, and yet it is stopped in time, it is no longer subject to temporality as I know it. I know that it is dead, you follow me? But it looks very present. I know I am quickly moving toward the final moment of my mortality, and that pictures shouldn't outlive us (laughs). But it's not just that simple, the idea that when he says, the photograph is present, the world I see in a photograph is present to me while I am not present to it: one thing we can say with certainty, it's a world I can't subjectively interfere with, call by another name, or what have you. I pretty much, I sense its identifications. And yet by the same token you can say that the...I like that thought, I like that idea, only as it goes in so far as I can say I also want to say that world I see in the photograph is reminding me, in so far as I'm moving toward my last moment of mortality...to experience the world, not the photograph. And obviously you're not going to be convinced to experience the world unless you have got something pretty nifty hanging up there, or looking at in a book or whatever it is, (laughs) that's why it's still a bid for being unique, and what you take a picture of, and what you include, and how you will do it. I don't think that any old picture will do. That is my view.

Student: Is that perhaps a way to distinguish between what's a good photograph and what's a bad photograph? Or one that works and one that doesn't?

Gil, I'd be afraid to even test it, because, you see, I'm not talking about a type of photograph, a type of printing, a type of, it's not like an appearance, it's like, we know darn well what a good photograph is because it will motivate us. Yeah, there you go: they'll make us *act*, to rediscover that...that I and the world are one. We're not, as Chappell would say, uncovering those subtle mysteries. We are *in* the mystery. Although I don't even like that word mystery but you know what I mean... (laughter) Perhaps a more promising thing than saying you'll never know what we are talking about (laughter). Because we're sitting around on a Saturday afternoon, (laughs) where is the world? The sun is shining...you see we are also subject to the same ironies, and everyone is. No matter what you're involved in your life, that you're reminded that something is there and maybe that is the reason pictures will persist, and that we're not ready to give them up, it's only because we have to keep being reminded.

Student: We have to keep being told that we are all bozos on this bus.

...Good lord, look what could happen to me if I didn't: I'd quit smoking, I'd be running. I'd be running up touching trees and things like that. I'd do things that would just be so radical for me (laughter).

Student: Wait a minute, you're telling me you've never run out and touched a tree?

Oh yeah I have, believe me I have. (laughs) Maybe that is what motivates me. Also, there's one of the things that strikes me as somewhat, is whatever we're involved in, and you have to ask yourself sometimes whether you're dealing with your own personal confessions or interests about the world, or are you dealing with something that is collective. I remember as I was involved with analysis, the idea of Jungian typology, my types are basically intuition and thinking. So sensation is the least accessible function, that means on a psychic level, not a physical one, you know, sensation in the sense that I don't particularly view things according to their material construct. So obviously photography has always held a fascination for me because it's doing exactly what I think I need, you follow me? But yet ironically, I was very comforted by the fact that I don't have to look at Billy and think, 'That's my hangup,' that I want to get back to the world and all this stuff like that, because Jesus Christ, every paradigm in our own time is confirming, that we've lost touch. The therapies that exist now, the forms of upheaval that exist now, of social upheaval, are all centered around a loss of contact with fundamental, physical evidence: the primordial nature of matter. It's so ripe in every dimension, it is appalling.

Student: And in that book, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, makes the argument that we no longer trust our own judgment, we're increasingly being incapable of making distinctions that are important for us. We are ready to accept anyone's answer other than our own. And if photographs force us to make our own decisions about anything than that is a counterforce to...

What I say about recent photographs is that they do leave us enough declared identity that we pretty much feel comforted that I could experience that. I don't think many people would be very comforted by... That is why you can look at Minor White's work, and what he'd testify to, and it was nice to see that he also looked at the world whole and saw things, that's the interesting thing, you can really see the conflict in Stieglitz, above all, you can really see the conflict in the aesthetic position in the announcement where they're dealing with the idea of photography to become art or what have you, and then finally resolved that art or not art, it is photography, you follow me? Photography *is*. But that wasn't enough, you know what I mean, because the sort of premises that they announced in their work tended to keep diverting people more and more away from the idea that there could be any possibility that this is not accessible. Much photography today does: does present work that is very accessible.

Student: That's one of the nice things about seeing Linda Connor's new work.

Yes, isn't it beautiful?

Student: Because it is accessible, and she does go through the same ideas in certain ways with the work that in a way wasn't accessible, but now you can relate to it.

And now you can really sense, or sometimes you get the hankering, or wish that, it's not that I wish I'd taken that but I wish I could be there. You know that kind of thing.

Student: How would you relate that to Talbot, and the difference between now and painting at that point, when Talbot's whole motivation was because he couldn't draw and he couldn't paint, he was forced to create photography...and the thing about it being more democratic is that you don't have to, quote, really learn to photograph.

That's right, but think of Talbot also, like, he saw it as a mode of compensation, and thank god he had that problem. I'm glad that Talbot couldn't draw. (laughs) If you think about the little quirks in individuals that could have led us to another medium altogether. There was no reason why photography couldn't have been functioning in the 17th century, absolutely none, none whatsoever. It just wasn't psychically necessary, collectively. That's why I said I wasn't dismissing that whole left brain, right brain thing, but that gets it back now to either a type of response, or even what you might call a kind of individual's motivation as to whether it's left brain oriented or right brain oriented.

Student: But collectively, it just had to be... If what you're saying about photography has some validity, or makes some sense, then photography had to be created at the point in which the degree of alienation got that great...

Right, and at which one individual, felt the degree of alienation sufficient to act upon it himself and found out we all felt the same way. We felt we were barbaric and uncivilized because we couldn't draw: that wasn't the issue. The point was, the minute his own need to compensate becomes a gift to a need for the collective consciousness to no longer have to feel as though I must be led by the substitute hand and eye, you know? Like I must be led by the master or the elitist artist or what have you.

Student: Which is why photography has always been an outlaw art, because...

But Linda Nochlin, what did she call it? The criminal, what is that essay of hers where she deals with the earlier mimetic visions of Van Eyck and so on and then talks about the principle that photography becomes always outlawed, is like the criminal eye.

Student: And also because of the implications of it, if it is true that it re-integrates individuals and de-alienates them, then it makes the whole processing...

That's sort of what I was talking about, Gil, something just triggered the minute you said it a moment ago, when I was talking about Bruce Davison...and I thought about that later because I wanted to clarify, not as a defense or an apology, but I wanted to clarify one thing. I am not so much talking about where something can radically alter the way people perceive themselves or even the way we should start learning to perceive, you know what I mean? But what struck me is the fact that so much of recent photography does not seem to give its attentions to the stock of photojournalism, or even, like, we have other modes through which we can witness the earthquake or the people in Iran or what have you. It's as though I don't think it's because of a lack of accessibility, that these people couldn't be on location. Nor is it given to things like, dealing with this, with what I call social issues that are extremely apparent. What seems interesting to me, the real social issue that might be the mother lode of the whole sha-bang has to do with things like, sitting around talking about the world and my being in it, or not, you see what I mean? In other words, until we got to that simple point, those other unique dimensions of alienation and separation, and grotesqueries will never disappear. Because again, it's like differentiating out, distinguishing out, the hierarchies of class, type, locale, territory, whatever it is, you know, oil, it can be anything. And that sometimes those more gratuitous issues: I mean to think of someone sitting around photographing chain-link fences and we say how irresponsible, ironically it may be that might be the most responsible act, we don't know, you get what I'm saying? It might be the very act that has in it that subtlety that he thinks is lurking out in nature. It's the obvious that is the subtle. And I don't want to see it as though I have to be victimized by suddenly deciding that I have to declare a photograph around the presumptions of a mirror or a window. I don't like the idea that I'm still having to be forced to put things into classes where either extreme is to default on your experience. Because if I read those, he says they're but parallels to make such distinctions but nonetheless they're drawn in the exhibit and in the text, and then if I'm left with the idea that it is either/or, and that's what people are going to be left with, and maybe we work back and forth between the two but when we do we're still confused. You know there's no reason why I can't presume that I want to extra-ject, meaning *project*, or have that experience out there being more confirmed. I might on another occasion want my feeling state or what have you to be amplified or exacerbated in the image. But above all, what I want is an acceptance that I no longer have to feel that I have to change the terms of my experience as being *of* the world: meaning enough to be in it. I don't want to be absorbed in it or separate from it, as though I felt it wasn't satisfactory and I had to transform it. It's like telling a person, oh don't feel bad, there will be a brighter day. (laughter) But, anyway, whatever.

(laughter)

Student: That was a real note of confirmation.

Student: Yeah, whatever.

A mode of acceptance, not of respect.

Student: It is near four, do you want to keep going?

We can sit around, why don't you all have another beer? Get some cold ones out of the ice box. Let's not talk anymore about this, let's just sit around and...

Student: Should I turn this off?

I want to be involved in the world. (laughs)

Student: Off the record?

Off the record.

Student: I am going to get some fresh air for a second.

That's a good idea.

Student: I like that last statement of Bill's, let's not talk about this anymore. (laughter)

What?

Student: That's how we get into the book.

That is the most brilliant part in...what is the meaning of all this? I never felt so...an admission of vulnerability, that's another thing.

Student: Everything is supposed to end as a flat statement...but there is no such thing.

Student: {Exhales a long sigh followed by laughter, Bill laughs}

Matthew, did you record that sigh?

Student: Yes.

Student: How do you transcribe that?

Resting influence.

Student chatter.

What did you say about the forms you brought? About the exhibit, should I, is that what he was talking about?

Student: For the faculty show?

Yes. The only thing I worry about is that I've become such a testy type among the faculty, I am waiting on someone to blow the whistle and they will say that he is really not up there giving these invited lectures, he is teaching us, because he is in the faculty show. Well that is ridiculous, I don't care about things like that... Roger said that too, he said I'd better be careful about identifying with the faculty there.

Student: What happens then?

Oh nothing, they could state that I am going against the grain of the laws and by-laws... and about five minutes of attention are given to that, and about ninety percent are given to worrying about whether the faculty is going to get out of doing much at all, which sickens me. I am not playing the righteous role, it's been that...for so long, I just can't stand it.

Student: Where is that?

At Uconn. Talk about a privileged group that isolated themselves at Storrs and felt that was the hubcap of the universe...

Student: Are they still tenuring people there?

Oh yes, sure. (laughs) They used to do it by social relatedness, you know, in other words, until a few of us came and finally made it... according to the principle of whether you were teaching and whether you had something happening as a result of your teaching, so the tenuring is not quite as selective on the wrong terms as it used to be. It is getting a little more appropriate. Although I am not a true believer in tenure, but I'll tell you right now, teaching for a state institution, I am glad I have it.

Student: I just read in the campus paper, Friday's edition, did you see it? The student trustees and the board of trustees are rumored that the state is going to cut back,

Grasso is going to cut back the Uconn budget by five million dollars, which means they will have to fire people.

Student: Cut it back by five million?

Student: Yes.

I did read that...

Student: What a culture. It is like, who do you protect? And by that you know.

God, I wish I'd become a disc-jockey, or a football player.