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Oral history interview with Duane Michals, 2016 June 7-23

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Duane Michals on June 7-23, 2016. The interview took place in New York City, and was conducted by Chris Lyon for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Duane Michals and Chris Lyon have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's June 7th, 2016. This is an interview of Duane Michals, at his home in New York City.

DUANE MICHALS: Yes. Welcome.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Thank you for sitting down for this. I wondered if we could ease into this a little bit by just talking about your home that you grew up in McKeesport, with the sense that so much of your childhood in one way or another has informed your art, or I should perhaps say your family relationships have been a big part of your art. [Phone rings.] Well, that was a mistake.

MR. MICHALS: That was not the answer.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Sorry about that.

MR. MICHALS: No, it's true. I should tell you, McKeesport is one of those steel towns down the river from Pittsburgh. I would call it the American Ruhr. It was cheek to jowl little cities, each one with—built around the mill, very much like the Carnegie Robber Baron thing in history. And there was a big social hierarchy. At the bottom of the hierarchy, you know, were the steelworkers, who, you know, worked long hours, got paid badly, and had no other options without education, and many of them not speaking English. I loved it. I just thought McKeesport was the best place. We had none of the privileges, because being at the bottom of the barrel, we didn't have any—we didn't live in Library Manor or Chauncey Circle, which is where the smart money lived, the local intelligentsia.

But I loved it. And during the Second World War, I was positive the entire Luftwaffe would Stuka the hell out of McKeesport, because it was the most ideal place. Forget New York or Washington, you know, get McKeesport, heil Hitler. Anyway—and I still to this day romanticize it a lot, and I feel good about it. And now at 84, as my mind drifts backwards in reveries, it very often settles—I will remember the names of all the people who lived on High Street, which was a big misnomer if there ever was for a street. You want me to continue?

MR. LYON: The house, which is featured in a—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, a whole book.

MR. LYON: Whole book, looks to be one of those sort of two-family things that are so common in Pennsylvania. Is that what it was?

MR. MICHALS: It was a duplex, and that sounds—In New York, a duplex sounds very elegant, but in McKeesport two houses stuck together. My grandfather bought the house, he could have lived on Versailles Avenue, which was much nicer. But this was two houses, and he figured one would pay the rent and the other—But he got what he paid for, which was not much. I mean, High Street is a dirt street, it was never paved. And to this day it never was paved. I mean, to me it was always an embarrassment, living on a dirt street. We didn't have central heating, so we had coal stoves, and to make matters even more Dickensonian, Dickensian—?

MR. LYON: Dickensian?

MR. MICHALS: So it was—still talking about the house. And it had a flat roof. It looked like a box with holes cut into it. And we didn't have a proper bathroom, that came much later, so we had, like, in the basement, there was an arrangement where you could go do your thing. And then we also had, like, when you took your Saturday night bath, it was like in a big tin thing that you bathed by the fire. So it was very basic, I mean, it was really quite—it was entry-level civilization, but it was wonderful. I—my mother was—

MR. LYON: In this, her name was Margaret, is that right?

MR. MICHALS: Margaret, Margaret Matik, M-A-T-I-K. Both sides of the family were Slovak immigrants. My grandparents came from a village in Slovakia called [Chernivtsi -DM], which I actually visited.

MR. LYON: Really?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. And I once said to my grandmother, "You came to this country when you were 15. You lived 70 years in this country. But your English was—15 years, and the next 70 years, your English was serviceable, but it wasn't great." And she said when she first came here, she tried to learn how to speak English, but all the other ladies in the ghetto said, "Oh, look at her, she's trying to be uppity, she wants to, you know, assimilate," and words to that effect, you know. But she was spunky, she was just a wonderful, spunky woman. Feisty, spunky, put a chip on her shoulder, she'd stab you. Although my grandfather did stab somebody. He was very bad guy, a gambler, Steve Matik, tough guy. Very cute. He was about my height, and cleft chin, blonde hair. She said, "But he lost all his hair by the time he was 26." She said, "I married a blondie, but I ended up with a baldy." And she never forgave him.

But there was a wonderful kind of spirit and energy. I didn't really notice how poor we were until I grew up, until I got older, you know. And my mother was a maid to local wealthy people. And that's where she picked up on—she once said to me that, "Do you know that the Shaws have a carpet on their living room floor which is worth more than our entire—the whole family's income in a year?" You know. And she was very quick to pick up manners, to pick up everything. And so she was in an awkward age, because she was—I mean, she was in an awkward position. That first generation of people, the energy of the immigrants, and then you get the first generation who've settled in, and they half speak English, half, you know. And they have to do all the dirty work. And then my generation, which is the second, I suppose, are the ones who take off. I was the first one to leave home, I was the one who did everything, and built on all of their investments in becoming Americans, and then I took off. Although I never felt that we were particularly ethnic, or that we were particularly not American. That was not an issue.

But there were a lot of assumptions made that I would do well. I was smart. And you know, in high school, I was the news editor, the school paper, the Red and Blue. Throughout my tenure, the paper got an award for the best edited high school paper in Pennsylvania. Yeah, la-di-da. And I was already writing, and we also had the work ethic. I had a paper route starting when I was in about the seventh grade, I suppose. I'd have to get up every morning in an ice-cold house at six o'clock, you know, get dressed, go down, pick up my papers, walk my route, which was a long route, in snow and rain, like the post office department. Come home at eight, have breakfast and go to school at nine. I did this for about four years, I don't know how long. Then I also had a job after school. Byer's Children's Shop, two floors of everything from tots to teens. 50 cents an hour, or was it 50 cents a day? Anyway. No, not an hour. It was 2.50 a week, so it wasn't an hour. I don't know.

So there was this whole idea that, you know, my grandmother always said, "If you want something, go get it, nobody's going to give it to you." So the idea was, you know, do that. My mother and dad were completely ill-suited.

MR. LYON: What did your dad do for a living?

MR. MICHALS: He worked in a mill. Yeah, all of our relatives worked in a mill. I had one cousin – one uncle who worked in the post office, and that's the job you wanted because the post office never went on strike, and you were guaranteed. In my socioeconomic background, the most I could have hoped for was—the idea was to teach high school, or to teach school. My best friend taught, he did the route, and I went over the wall. I don't know where that all came from, my going over the wall, but—It was a matter of energy, and my family had a lot of energy. My dad was boring.

MR. LYON: His name is John?

MR. MICHALS: John. Originally his name was Mihao, M-I-H-A-L. Mihal means Michael in Slovak. So my mother did magic tricks with—I once wrote that she liked to play games with names. So I became Duane Michals, M-I-C-H-A-L-S. And the reason was M-I-H-A-L, morphed into M-I-C-H-A-L-S, you know. So I was always brought up Duane Michals, and that's, you know—

MR. LYON: Okay, so—

MR. MICHALS: Now is this okay, what I'm doing?

MR. LYON: Totally, and I'll just, you know—

MR. MICHALS: If I'm getting redundant, you know, let me know.

MR. LYON: No, no, I will. Now you went back not so long ago, and saw the house, is that right? To McKeesport?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. And it's fallen down by now. Literally only the shell's left. But I had a great nostalgia. I've gone back many times.

MR. LYON: Many times?

MR. MICHALS: And I have many idiosyncrasies. One of them is my irrational passion for Pittsburgh. I mean, how you could be so crazy about—I get the Pittsburgh Business Times, I get the Pittsburgh Magazine, you know, I have friends who—today, somebody left me two Pittsburgh Post-Gazettes in the lobby. So you know, it's just bizarre. I know more about Pittsburgh, probably, than I know about certainly New York.

MR. LYON: I once went out with a girl from Squirrel Hill.

MR. MICHALS: You did? Oh, well that's, no, Squirrel Hill, she was pretty classy.

MR. LYON: She was.

MR. MICHALS: She was Jewish?

MR. LYON: Yes.

MR. MICHALS: That's the great Jewish enclave, one of the great ones in the country, I think.

MR. LYON: I don't know much about Pittsburgh, otherwise. [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: No, no, very desirable place.

MR. LYON: Lot of bridges.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, yes. I once wrote a piece about Pittsburgh. It said, "I dreamed"—something about "I dreamed this city that had more hills than Rome, more bridges than Venice, and more rivers than Paris." That would be Pittsburgh.

MR. LYON: So now you've described the feelings between your parents. Was there one or the other parent that you felt closer to?

MR. MICHALS: Mother, mother. My mother dated Jack, and my dad was a big bullshitter. I inherited his gift of gab. And he told her, the story I got, he told her was going to the Kansas City Business College. And she thought, "If this guy can sell anybody anything—" you know. And so I was premature. And I can imagine when my mother at 19, 1931, came home and told Anna and Steve Matik that she was pregnant, the shit really hit the fan. I mean, that—and we had a woman named Cousin Mary, who was—she was a cousin because my grandfather, his father, John's father, was my grandfather's brother. So he was a cousin. And he was the only one with money. He was a boss in the mill, they made good money. But they didn't have any children, and Mary was always—she was sort of like a gossip. And so the story I got was that when mother came home and told the family, she fled the house, and she ran to Cousin Mary's. She knew what to do, and she always told me Cousin Mary saved my life. And she said, whether this is true or not, that she wanted to—You had to cross the tracks to go over to where Cousin Mary lived. And she was so panicked and she was, quote unquote, going to throw herself in front of a train, which, you know. I said, "Mother, Anna Karenina already did that." You know, please, it doesn't work. But in McKeesport it has no—anyway, and so Cousin Mary was always my mother's confidante. But in the end, Cousin Mary betrayed Mother. So that's pretty much the flavor of who and what and where and why.

MR. LYON: So your brother Timothy is nine years younger?

MR. MICHALS: Nine years and nine days younger. But what happened was [ringtone]—So, where were we? Something about—

MR. LYON: I asked you about Timothy.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, yes. The real ships in the night story here is that about a month or so after my mother and father got married, a young, fresh doctor comes to town. And my mother—our family becomes his patient. And he and my mother fell in love, a month later, after she made this commitment to my father. And she would never get divorced, so she waited—he waited for her, for about 15 years, then he finally married somebody else, and then he promptly died in his mid-forties. And so that was a big—

MR. LYON: Sad story.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, terribly sad story. I was in Colorado then, and she called me up and she said he died, and that he called, they had just talked the night before. And he said to her, "Margaret, I'm not feeling well. I think

I'm just going to go to bed early tonight and rest." And he died the next day. And so that was a huge sadness. But the other thing about it was that my brother Timothy is my half-brother, he's actually the doctor's.

MR. LYON: Oh, oh.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, so it became very sticky and difficult.

MR. LYON: And your father knew this?

MR. MICHALS: No. That's where Cousin Mary comes in, who knew. She was the only one who really knew, I didn't find out till much, much later in life. And at the end of his days, my father, who always drank—had more time to drink, and used to hang out with Cousin Mary, because she'd give him booze, and then one day, she told him.

MR. LYON: Oh, Jesus.

MR. MICHALS: And that was it. And he didn't live long after that. It was really—she was just being malicious, there was no reason why he should know that. And my brother always said that, you know, Jack Michals/Mihal, was always my dad, and that's all that mattered. So when he found out, that's, you know. So that's—now you know all the—I've kicked over all the stones in my family history. So it's sad, because my mother—you know, they were just—my mother and father are completely mismatched. In the new movie I made, I talked about—one of the episodes is where I run into the guy who's my dad when he was 25, and that's when they met, and I ask a few questions about this. So I've used, getting back to McKeesport, I've used everything. I mean, I've used—I did a book about being in the Army. I did a book about the house in McKeesport. So I've gone back into—and I'm still a sucker for that, McKeesport. I loved being—growing up there, and I went to, you know, those classes at the Carnegie Museum on Saturday.

MR. LYON: Well, I wanted to ask you about that, but one of the things that strikes me about this is, for you the boundaries between your life and your art are so fluid.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, yeah. I don't go someplace to do my work. I am the work, you know, like some people—Well, I go to my studio to do my work, you know. And it continues, like, you know, I use the house in the country for doing my photographs of the fans and all the locals. So I've used every square inch of myself in the work.

MR. LYON: It struck me that some of your children stories are kind of dark. Funny, but dark. And there's an aspect in some of them of what you might call negative wish-fulfillment [laughs]. Like, you know, saying "No, no, no," until you don't know how to say yes. Or "I wish you would disappear," and she does.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That's true. I never thought of it that way, yeah. No, but I—since my work is in my head, I just—I don't have to go to China to photograph Tiananmen Square. I simply—I've always used my imagination, and – I want to mention, before I forget, one of the—to show you the kind of energy, when I was 15, I read in the McKeesport Daily News, my Bible, that you could go to Texas and work on the wheat crop.

MR. LYON: I read about this, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: And you could go all the way from north of Amarillo, someplace down there, there was a little town, and follow the crop north to Canada. And so at 15, I weighed about 110 pounds, and completely, at 15 going on 7 or 8 at the best. And I was so excited about the idea, I took a leave of absence from my job at Byer's Children's, and I conned my mother and father into letting me go, but they wouldn't let me go by myself. Can you imagine? So I conned Jimmy Connelly, who was a kid I vaguely knew from school. I asked everybody I knew, "Who wants to go to Texas?" Nobody would go. But Jimmy went.

So we boarded a bus, and I had a little bag of sandwiches my mother made. I'd never been away from home. We got as far as Columbus, Ohio, and then—so I had eaten my sandwich that was dinner. And suddenly the sandwiches were like my umbilical cord. My sainted mother made these sandwiches. She actually cut that bread, and put the bologna in there, you know. And it became—and then we ended up in St. Louis, had to stay there in the bus station overnight. I'd never seen mice and cockroaches, and they were there, they were in the St. Louis bus station. And then we went all the way from there down to—through Little Rock, over to Amarillo, where we hitchhiked north through Borger, Texas, and the Panhandle to a little town on the border with Oklahoma, which was filled with migrant workers. And there was, you know, coffee was 50 cents a cup in the one—50 cents?

MR. LYON: 50 cents?

MR. MICHALS: That wasn't—and of course, I was sleeping on the grass, and migrant workers, they were doing stuff I didn't even know about. And every day I would go try to get a job, and the guy who did the hiring said, "Beat it kid." He said, "You know what this—you got to shovel wheat, eight hours a day." He said, "You wouldn't

even make it for the first 15 minutes." And he was right. But I was so stubborn, I kept coming back, and then one day he said to me, "Listen, do you know how to fix flats on trailer trucks?" I say "What?" He said—it's not like today, 1947.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: On one of these roads, there was a gas station, which was a little—you lived in the back, and there was like a flat, what do they call those, little flat stoves?

MR. LYON: Like a hot plate?

MR. MICHALS: A hot plate, and you lived there, and ran the gas station. But they had a lot of trailer trucks come there, and you had to know how to fix flats on trailer trucks. And that was it. And the other thing that saved me was, I ran into this kid who was about 15 or 16. He and his dad were from California, he was a teacher, but the kid was big, he was like a football player. And they gave me a sleeping bag. I'd been sleeping on the ground for about, I don't know, five days. And so they let me have—and that was very nice. So when the guy turned me down—I turned down the filling station job, I decided to go home. And I hitchhiked back with another kid who was going that way. And I remember sitting in the back of a truck filled with wheat, and our legs were dangling off the back of the truck, and there was the most beautiful sky, and I felt triumphant. I was going home, I had lasted a week, had adventures, and having adventures was always my thing, having adventures.

And so we got to Amarillo, and I wired back home for money to get a bus back to Pittsburgh. And then I started getting very cocky. I thought, "I'll bet I could hitchhike all the way back to Pittsburgh," you know. So this guy that—we had enough money to buy a watermelon, and we were sitting on the courthouse lawn, or whatever that was. And a cop came up and—we didn't have any money. So he was going to put us in jail, being vagrants.

MR. LYON: Vagrants, right.

MR. MICHALS: But I had to take him to the Western Union to prove I had money coming. And that's how I did not go to jail. And so when I wired for $35, but they sent me 15, when I got this check, and it was signed—the telegram was signed "Mother," everything broke down. My resolve, my hubris, my, you know, cockiness, dissolved in the letter signed "Mother." And I took the bus back. So that fall, in the—I guess that would be my junior year in the fall, when they said write an essay about what you did last summer—

MR. LYON: Oh, perfect

MR. MICHALS: —I had a lot to talk about.

That trip was important. It made me realize how homesick I was. But it also made me realize, you know, I've got the balls, I mean—

MR. LYON: Yeah. To do something that—

MR. MICHALS: I wouldn't let my 15—today, I would never let my 15-year-old hope on a bus and you don't hear from him for a week. You don't know if he's dead or even got there, you know. So two years later, I got a scholarship. I was supposed to go to Carnegie-Mellon in Pittsburgh. And you had to list three schools, I was trying to get a scholastic scholarship, you had to list three schools you wanted to go to. And you had to make sure you could get into those schools by applying to the schools, you know. And so I put down Carnegie-Mellon, where I was going anyway, and then I put down, I'd already been accepted, I put down the Cleveland Art Institute, because that was supposed to be good. And I didn't know what to put down for the third school. I knew nothing about anything. And I was looking at the list of schools, and they had one at the University of Denver. And I thought, "Oh, Denver, Mile-High City." What an adventure. But it turns out that I graduated, and then I had a call from the high school saying, "Well, they gave you a scholarship to go to the University of Denver." "Say what?"

And I was 17, I graduated at 17 rather than 18. And somebody gives me something free, I take it. Like my grandma said, you know, somebody gives—go get it, take it. So that's how I got to go to Colorado. And I had no money. I had $60 a month to live on. My room was $20, that was $10 a week to live on. So I immediately had to get a job, and I ran the campus pool hall, and I worked in the—bussed tables in the student union, and all that stuff. But that's another story. But—and that's what it was like.

MR. LYON: So, this is completely out of—but just to continue talking about your mother a little bit, I was, you know, you described the end of your mother's life very touchingly.

MR. MICHALS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

Christopher Lyons: Oh.

MR. MICHALS: She was very pretty.

MR. LYON: Yeah, nice-looking. Wow.

MR. MICHALS: And she loved to dress.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: My dad, the only thing they have in common, they both love clothes. Spent all their money on clothes. Their idea was you should always make a good impression. You should always look nice, you should have good clothes and not just clean underwear, but—

MR. LYON: Yeah, you should—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. And so consequently, my only rebellion was, you know, not caring about clothes.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. MICHALS: I was bad.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] The reason I mention this is that you describe, in the book we worked on, having the experience you thought of possibly seeing a ghost, or spirit?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I saw her ghost, yeah. Well, what happened, I was with her when she died. And I did a Tibetan Book of the Dead ritual while she was fading out. And I sat there for two hours while her breathing was going up and down, which eventually slowed down. And at that point, my aunt Eleanor, her sister, arrived. And we thought, "Oh—," I said, "Eleanor." Her breathing stops and the distance between starting again—it's just going to stop entirely, and never start. And that's what happened. And so I did the Tibetan Book of the Dead ritual, which I'm sure if she was conscious, thought, "What are you talking? I'm a Catholic, where's the Extreme Unction, you idiot?" you know. "What is this mumbo jumbo?" And then that night, I went back—Timmy and I bought her a condo, so she had her own place. Her last years were nice, very nice.

Everything she—she got everything she deserved, and she was happy. So we were her caregivers. And so I went back to her apartment, and I wasn't about to sleep in her bed. But her front room, she had one of those day beds, you know, sofa. So I opened it up and made a bed. And there was, like, a light outside the window from a streetlight, which illuminated the room. And I was just lying there, looking, thinking about her and what just happened. And I saw her at the foot of the bed. And she walked around the bed, and then she, like, she was on the left. She walked around the bed, and to the right, and then she vanished. And so I thought, "Did I just dream that, or—" So I began to pinch myself to see if I was, and no. I wasn't dreaming that.

And then I saw a ghost in the country, too. We had a very old house. I went—it was my wont to go to the bathroom at two in the morning. We had a lot of skylights in the house. And I was going in the bathroom, and there was another door where I could see in the hall, and then there was a mirror. And as I looked in the mirror, I saw this white image walk by. And it was like when I do double exposures of ghosts, and if you do time exposure, the thing blurs, the image blurs. And so suddenly I saw this ghost walk by. I didn't know it was a ghost, I thought, "What is that?" So I went in the other room, and I woke Fred up. I said, "Were you in the hall?" He said, "No, are you crazy? I'm sleeping." And so I went around the house, and I said, "I think somebody's here." And then I thought, "Well, maybe it was a ghost," you know. I don't know what that energy was, but that's what it amounted to.

MR. LYON: Well, one of the reasons I bring that up is that, you know, even in the middle of your career, you began exploring notions of death and, you know, the spirit world.

MR. MICHALS: Always. My mother was—she loved the Spiritualist Church, although she was Catholic. But she used to go to the Spiritualist Church, she loved to go to séances and all that. And when she was a young girl, not too far from our house, there was a Spiritualist Church.

MR. LYON: I don't know what that is, exactly, the Spiritualist Church.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, it's where they go and—I guess they're based in Christianity, I have no idea. But they, you know, the head minister, you know, you'll sit in the church and they'll do their ceremony, and then he'll say, "Is there anybody here named Eleanor?" And he'll say, "Well, listen, I think I'm talking to your cousin, do you have a cousin?" And he said—so my mother was at the church, one of their meetings, and being stylish, she was wearing a bright red coat. And the minister says, "The young lady in the back in a red coat, she said your grandmother's here, and you're Catholic, and she's furious that you're at our ceremony." And it spooked my mother entirely. But she always flirted with her interest. I don't know if that came from anyplace profound, or with that curiosity—but she was always interested in that, yeah.

MR. LYON: Good.

MR. MICHALS: My first book, in *Sequences,* I did *Spirit Leaves the Body*, *Death Comes to the Old Lady*, and let's see I think there was a third one. I did, during the Spirit After Death in 1970, an entire book based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead. I did *Grandpa Goes to Heaven*. *The Man in the Room*, which is about somebody who sees somebody in a room. Voiceover.

MR. LYON: The one, the woman reading, and the door just opens?

MR. MICHALS: No, no, no. This is a voiceover, it's a picture of a man sitting in a room, and the voiceover says, "I was shocked when I first saw him, because I had just attended his funeral three days ago." Three days, get it, Jesus, three days? And here he was. And then it said, "The man in the room turned around, and he seemed to be shocked to see me. And he said that everybody was sad, and Helen missed me." And the voiceover says, "When he said Helen," there's a photograph out of focus, woman's face, "I knew the name, but I couldn't quite remember who Helen was." And then, it was when the voiceover—I looked in the mirror, and I didn't see myself, that I realized that I'm the one who's dead, and the man in the room is the one who's alive." And then in the end, he begins to go more—everything gets more and more out of focus. And the last sentence is, "Dying is not at all what I imagined it would be." So there was always a lot of work with those references.

MR. LYON: So let me follow up the Catholic thing a bit. So you were raised Catholic. Did you go to a Catholic elementary school?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, not high school, elementary school, yeah.

MR. LYON: So you must have been just imbued with the stories, the narratives that are—

MR. MICHALS: Stations of the Cross. We were 100 percent—we weren't super Catholics; we were marginal Catholics. I mean, we did church at 9:30 Mass, Holy Trinity every Sunday, you know, and all of that. But there was no—we weren't like super Catholics. Nobody in my family wanted to become a priest, you know.

MR. LYON: The reason I mention it is that you just mentioned, you know, he's been dead for three days, you know, I mean—

MR. MICHALS: With all that symbolism.

MR. LYON: There's the symbolism of Catholicism as, you know, weaves through a great deal of your work.

MR. MICHALS: No, it's true. I wasn't marinated in Catholicism. Fred was marinated in his religion.

MR. LYON: Which was?

MR. MICHALS: One of those—Protestants. I always—this isn't true, but I always tell people Fred was a, what do they call those people, Holy Rollers. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: Oh, no.

MR. MICHALS: He would get very indignant. "We were not." But they went—church twice on Sundays, and, you know, all that. We never did that. We were pretend Catholic. Then eventually I completely evolved out of the Church entirely. Now I'm a raging atheist.

MR. LYON: Okay, good. So a standard question that's always asked. You mentioned your parents, you know, being somewhat stylish or wanting to dress. Did either of them have, or their families, any kind of artistic activity in their background?

MR. MICHALS: No, none at all. Only books we had in the house would have been comic books and the phone book.

MR. LYON: Wow.

MR. MICHALS: But there was none of that. I'm an anomaly in so many ways, and a hybrid of some sort, yeah.

MR. LYON: Well, literature has been so important to your career. To you, obviously, personally, but also it's woven into your work.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I've used it. It was—when I was in high school, I used to enter the scholastic contests, and I entered a painting contest. And in the last year I won nine keys, which was a big deal, and my picture was in the daily news, "Local Boy Wins Nine Keys in Scholastics." And I entered the—last year I entered the literary,

whatever, with poetry, but nothing happened. But I was always winning. When I used to go to the Saturday classes in the museum, the Carnegie Museum, they had a class on Saturday morning for high school kids. And I used to go there, take the 68 trolley all the way to Pittsburgh. And at the end of the week, they would give an assignment, like, I remember, paint the circus.

And then at the end of the week, we would submit our paintings, and the next week, they had something called honorable mentions. And those were, like, the ten best ones. And then at the end of the year, you would go on to—one person would then go to Carnegie Tech, Carnegie Mellon, and that was the big deal, because to go to Carnegie Mellon meant you were taking—I mean I had a college teacher. And my first year there, my mother and father didn't arrive at the ceremony, at the museum, they came, the trolley was late, my mother was always late. And now she's the late Margaret, I couldn't help that. So I won first and second prize, which was wonderful. And so I started going there when I was, I guess that fall I would have been 15, 16, I guess, something like that. And then in the scholastic, I won those prizes. And then when I went to school in—

MR. LYON: Did the prize involve a kind of scholarship to Carnegie Tech?

MR. MICHALS: That was just going weekends.

MR. LYON: Oh, there's a bit of misstatement in here. It sort of implies that you won a scholarship from Scholastic.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, no, no I didn't—

MR. LYON: Or I might be misreading it.

MR. MICHALS: No, but that's not right. That's not right at all. If I'd had a scholarship, I wouldn't have gone to school in Colorado, in Denver.

There was a spinoff off that. Where were we just before that?

MR. LYON: I'm sorry. So you went—

MR. MICHALS: It was something to do with—And when I got out to school in Colorado, where I had, you know, $10 a week to live on, the local—I went out there when I was 17, so I was, you know, just left home at 15 two years earlier, I'm going to Colorado, a thousand miles from home, you know. No money, and very homesick. So there was a contest. It was sponsored by the Denver Art Museum, the Jewish community center, and the Denver Post, and it was for painters under 20. And I entered, I won the first and second prize. And the first prize—maybe three people entered, I don't know. So I won, and the first prize was a $50 war bond, which I immediately cashed for $25, $35, and a scholarship to the little local art school. There was a little school there called something fancy, like the Denver Art Academy. You know, you walk up one flight and it's above a liquor store [laughs.] But it was interesting, I went there for four years on Thursday nights. I was interesting because in this class, there were four of us who became very close friends. One was a guy named Sidney. I don't remember his last name. He was big and fat and slovenly. He was from New York, Jewish from New York, he had been in the Second World War. And he and three other people got together, put up $15,000, and bought this hotel, like, Hotel Le Dump, you know what I mean?

Anyway, so Sidney—and then there was a Japanese lady named Mary who owned a Japanese restaurant in Aurora, which was a suburb. And then there was this 15-year old rich girl, who had already been to Paris, and very precocious, and myself, this 17-year old kid from Pittsburgh. And after—we were the hardcore of art-interested—I mean, we were serious. And we just had these wonderful—after class, we'd go and have coffee and talk, and it was very exciting. We had one guy who went there, this little old Italian guy, and he drew beautifully, he drew like Saul Steinberg. He did not understand how beautifully he could draw. He wanted to draw like Norman Rockwell, and he hated everything, his natural talent, he hated. And it was outrageous because, you know, he was an original, he was great.

So that was the wonderful little—and that went on for four years, they just kept renewing my scholarship, whatever that was. But it was—

MR. LYON: So how were you thinking of yourself at the time? Were you thinking of yourself as someone, you know, aimed at going into the arts, or were you –

MR. MICHALS: No, I—well, I knew I was—Well, this is what I think about it. And that is that some people are born with certain instincts. Like, Mozart was writing music when he was already seven, playing the piano, you know. There's a Hungarian, I like to read biographies, Hungarian mathematician named Erdos, and when he was five, he was playing with Fibonacci numbers, or something. I mean, you know, Mickey Mantle was hitting home runs when he was eight. People have certain instincts to sports or mathematics, science, whatever. My instincts were

aesthetically inclined. I knew I was—I liked to write, I liked to draw, nobody had to say, "No, you go and draw this afternoon." My grandmother used to save me the—Zotter's Bakery used to make the best German rye with seeds, and it came wrapped up in white paper. So my grandmother always saved me the white paper to draw on. I was going to art school and all that, so I knew I was interested somewhere, in the arts. I didn't know what that was. I had an aesthetic itch, I just didn't know where to scratch yet. I had no idea I would ever be a photographer, I mean, that wasn't even on the horizon. We didn't have a camera, so that eliminated that—

MR. LYON: Right, right. I've been fascinated that when you were young, you were—you mentioned this the other day when we were here, actually. You were able to remember the names of all three theaters in McKeesport, and you know, you seemed to have been fascinated by films. Was that a big deal for you?

MR. MICHALS: Well, everybody went to movies. I mean, a movie cost a quarter. But if you went to the Capitol Theater, where they showed Westerns, that was only ten cents. And if you saved ten coupons from Zotter's bread, you could save ten.

MR. LYON: And get something to draw on.

MR. MICHALS: The gift that kept on giving. You could get into the Capitol with the coupons. Yeah, and—I forgot what I was saying.

MR. LYON: Yeah, no, I was just—it's interesting to me that you were so sort of multi—you just, like, were interested in [inaudible]. Voracious, I guess, is the word I'm looking for. Culturally speaking.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, and I didn't need anybody to assign me anything. Like, in the summertime, I would start painting on my own to enter the Scholastic contests in October.

MR. LYON: So you were just—you had an inner—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —clock, and so on.

MR. MICHALS: And the thing is, I never needed assignments, and I never needed anybody's praise. I mean, of course everybody wants you to like their work. But I didn't, you know, I would do it regardless of what somebody said. So I established that. And I worked toward goals, you know. Like doing the Scholastic contest was a goal, to prepare for doing that. And I've always been like this.

MR. LYON: Yeah, so I asked you about that. Now, of the people you studied with at Carnegie, and maybe in Denver, do any of the teachers sort of stand out in memory as being particularly effective?

MR. MICHALS: No, none at all. I longed for a mentor. I mean, and I make a great mentor. But that whole mentor thing comes out of my gay issues, you know? That's another discussion, but where I fit into the gay—what do they call it, not spectacle, spectrum. It is a spectacle sometimes.

MR. LYON: Spectacle spectrum.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, that's right. Where people make a spectacle of themselves.

MR. LYON: Expand on that. I don't know quite what you mean.

MR. MICHALS: Well, this idea of—

MR. LYON: Mentoring.

MR. MICHALS: I make a good mentor.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. MICHALS: I'm—my instincts are to being a caregiver, to taking care of people. To helping people. And this is so corny, I mean, but it's true. I mean, I'm an easy touch. And I always longed for a mentor, and that's part of, like, where I fit in to the gay spectrum is, I'm—I knew Mapplethorpe, and you're no Mapplethorpe. That was never my life. Somebody recently asked me how many people I knew who died of AIDS. Three. I didn't know people—so I knew 20 people, I knew 50 people, I knew 60 people. Fred and I lived in our own world. We were what I'm sure would have been called gay Uncle Toms in those days, because we weren't hip and cool, we weren't hanging out on Christopher Street, going to Studio 54, you got to be kidding. And [ringtone] we wanted

—Hold on. Hello?

MR. LYON: No, this is interesting.

MR. MICHALS: So, what I was saying is that—and for me what's interesting is that while they did that – I'm going off on a tangent now, but they did that documentary on Mapplethorpe.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. MICHALS: And they interviewed me. But I was very critical, so they never used—it didn't happen. They didn't use me. But I said I'm an anomaly as a photographer, and as a gay person, we're anomalies, too. I mean, we never had anything to do with—When you describe traditional gay people, we're not that person. I never wanted to dress up like a woman. Never wanted to go down to the piers and get screwed by 20 guys. I mean, never wanted to put poppers up my—whatever. That wasn't us. We have a whole other life, and a whole other agenda. Are we gay? Absolutely. I mean, the—you're gay if you don't desire women. That's the basic—that doesn't mean—we like them, we get along. Gay people get along very well with women. Women—

MR. LYON: Well, you know, you're—women, lovely women, women, nude women, you know, play a big role in your art.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, absolutely. But women, gay men love women, but they don't want to fuck them. And that's the big difference. When I talk to lady friends, they'll say, well, you know, they love having gay friends because there's no sexual agenda. They like you because they like your company, they want to be with you, they have fun with you, you know. They're not trying to look up your dress. And it's true.

MR. LYON: Let's also—I want to talk about both these things, but I also am fascinated by what you're saying about mentors, because, you know, it does strike me that—you seem unusual in my experience in your being attracted to both historical and contemporary artists, photographers, literary people, and so on. I mean, you seem to be—you seem to have created, in a funny way, a series of mentors for yourself, you know, almost fabricated them.

MR. MICHALS: Well, they have, but I mean, there are three huge influences. One was Magritte, of course. The other one was de Chirico. And the other one was Balthus. And I photographed all of them. And that's another thing that I would do, would be—I never copied anybody. But it's the essence of what their work represented, like, the first time I saw a Magritte drawing, painting. It was in Harper's Bazaar, and I thought it was a photograph, it was so realistic. And it was a nude woman holding a big mirror in front of her, but she was reflected in the mirror, which was impossible because the mirror covered her up. You know, how did—? And then I began to look at it more closely, and then I realized that it was a painting by René Magritte, who I'd never heard of. And I was so stunned by the contradiction, because people believe photographs, but they don't believe paintings and drawings. The most perfectly rendered Dutch trompe l'oeil, you know, the little drop of water on the rose leaf, is not real. It's a two-dimensional surface. But people believe photographs, which gives photographers a wonderful—they can play with their sensibilities, rather than telling what—this still is true for me. I maintain, I don't want photographers to tell me what I already know. I know what snow looks like, I know what streets look like, I know what the Empire State Building—tell me what I can't see.

And that's what I got from all three of these people. There was a certain theatricality and contradiction in my assumptions about what I was looking at.

MR. LYON: That's a marvelous phrase.

MR. MICHALS: It's important, for me, it was hugely important.

MR. LYON: So just to get back into the biographical flow, so you studied design at Denver?

MR. MICHALS: No, I—Sense and Sensibility. When I went off to school, you know, my artistic impulses had water thrown on them, because my mother said, you know, "[inaudible] garret, starving artist, no, no, no, we don't do that. What you're going to do is teach art in, maybe if we're lucky, West Mifflin Township."

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] West Mifflin Township.

MR. MICHALS: My—the thing one would hope for would be to, for me, would be to teach art in maybe Bethel Hills, or something, whatever. And have 2.3 kids, you know, be within distance of home to come there for Sunday, and whatever, and be totally suicidal.

So the practical end of me, you know, kicked in, so I took Art Education. I'm equipped to teach art in the Denver high school – public high school system.

MR. LYON: And you also were in the ROTC?

MR. MICHALS: Oh, yes, that's a whole other tale. So when I got there at 17, the war had just ended in '45, and this was '49, four years later. And you had two choices, you could take ROTC, or you could take gym. So I thought, "I could take gym anytime, the war's just over." And they were teaching—and there was a quartermaster unit. So, I don't mind handing out underwear, you know, it seems reasonable. So I thought I'll try it for a year. Well, that's the year the Korean War broke out. So when I signed up, they were begging people to join, and next year they were around the block to join. I already was—

MR. LYON: You were already in.

MR. MICHALS: I was there, yeah. So timing is everything, but my timing got bad when I graduated, because they sent me to an armor unit. So I got a commission in quartermaster, I'd never seen a tank in my life, and I was sent to Fort Knox to armor school. And that was horrible, that was total—entire armor school, I read Proust's Swann's Way. I pretended I was in France at the fin de siècle, you know, having dinner with – what were some of those people?

MR. LYON: Yeah, right.

MR. MICHALS: But so that's—And then when I was in school, in college, I dated Tilly Bush my first year, and she was a Mormon from Tooele, Utah, Tilly from Tooele. I love red hair, she had fire engine red hair, slightly plump, but very funny. And that's what she sent me, a Christmas—she sent me a picture of herself, and she addressed it "To my little orangutan, Duane." Then at home, everybody started calling me "Orangutan." But she wanted to get married at the end of first year. There I was, you know, 17 going on 12 still, that wasn't going to happen for so many reasons. And then I dated Helen McDonald for the last three years. And there was a little incident where at the end of—when I got my bars—

MR. LYON: Oh, because you were a second lieutenant?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. My parents came out, that was at the end of graduation, and my mother loved Helen. Helen was a big woman on campus. She was president of her sorority, she worked on the college paper, she was class vice president, and all that. I was, you know, a nerd, I mean, I didn't do any of that stuff. And my mother took me aside, she said, "You've got to marry Helen. She will push you to success." And I thought, "Whoa," for so many reasons, that's not going to happen. So when I was in the Army, I got a—when we got our orders, my luck held out, I was sent to Germany. If I'd gone to Korea, I would have been dead.

They used to take bets on how long the new young second lieutenants would—they were taking officers from other units like quartermaster because they were running out of them in armor, second lieutenants. So that was a—So I had a week off, or whatever, before I had to ship out, so I went back to Colorado to see my friends, and Helen and I went skiing. And afterwards, we were having our drink in front of the fireplace, and we're sitting there, I have my arm around her, and she turns to me and said, "Duane, when you go to Europe, don't see everything." And I said, "Why not?" She said, "Well, I thought we'd go there for our honeymoon."

And then I suddenly thought, "Separate checks, please." I'm thinking we're best friends, and she's thinking we're going to get married. And I suddenly realized we were—and that's one of the things I learned about language is that, you know, he says, "I love you," and he thinks he's going to get fucked, and she thinks she's getting married. And we're using the same language, but completely talking about different things. And that was a real wake-up to me.

MR. LYON: Wow. So you didn't—Now up to this point, you haven't really held a camera at all, right?

MR. MICHALS: No, not at all.

MR. LYON: Okay. Where did this come from? [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: Well, I don't know. I really don't know. Do you remember that wonderful series by Bill Moyers with, oh, the great teacher, Joseph Campbell.

MR. LYON: Oh, sure, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: And Campbell says, "Find your bliss."

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: Well, I found my bliss in photography. I found, and I was 28 when I—I was 26 when I went to Russia. Again, the same pattern going to Colorado, going to, you know, Texas, and going to, you know. And I did take—I went to Parsons here, for a year.

MR. LYON: I was going to say, we jumped a little bit there. So you were in the service for two years, is that right?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: When did you—it says '54 to '56 in here, but then you mentioned getting an apartment in the West Village in '55, so I thought—

MR. MICHALS: Here's what it was. It was—I graduated—I went '49 to '53.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. MICHALS: '53 to '55 was in the army.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. MICHALS: And then, in the fall of '55, I came to New York.

MR. LYON: That's what I—that's what I thought.

MR. MICHALS: Right. And it was '58 when I went to Russia.

MR. LYON: Fall of '55. This needs to be corrected.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, well—

MR. LYON: So, then we just fill that in a little bit.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: So, you got an apartment in the West Village?

MR. MICHALS: No, what happened was—

MR. LYON: No?

MR. MICHALS: I had the G.I. Bill.

MR. LYON: Ah, okay.

MR. MICHALS: And I knew nothing about art schools, so I looked in all the art schools—

MR. LYON: But why art school? What drew—

MR. MICHALS: I wanted to—I came to New York, I think, because I wanted to—I liked magazines. I liked books. And I thought, well, I'll get a job on a magazine or a book, or something.

MR. LYON: Okay, so you were thinking about publishing as a career.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I wanted to get into publishing.

MR. LYON: Got it, got it.

MR. MICHALS: I had no idea I would want to be a photographer—anything in the arts, so I was just going to get a job as a—and I said, well, how do you learn magazine—where do you go to school? And I had already had a bachelor bars. I didn't want to go to a four-year program at Pratt or Cooper Union, but I—so I signed up at Parsons. Easy to get in, and it was a big waste of time. I quit after the first year. It was just—but while I was there, there was one photo course, and I—first semester, and there was a woman named Liz Lowenstein, and we were the stars of that—we had an assignment to do whatever, do a portrait. So, I went to Stillman's Gym, of course, and I photographed lots of boxers.

MR. LYON: Wonderful.

MR. MICHALS: And so, it was all there. But I hadn't thought of it as a viable—as a career destination. I didn't know that much about photography. It's always seemed overwhelming, technically, what you had to do to—you know, I mean, I just thought—I just—and I didn't have any, you know—so, I think I borrowed a camera when I did that assignment for the photo course.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. MICHALS: And then, I dropped out. So, when I first came here, I first stayed at the Y, and my father always said, you know, "If you're in a strange town, always go to the YMCA for good Christian fellowship." Oh, yeah. [Laughs.] My fellowship—we'll give you fellowship you don't even want. Fellow—

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Yeah. Different fellowship. But anyway—

MR. MICHALS: Exactly. So, I left—and then, when I was at Parsons, four of us—oh, and then a friend of mine from McKeesport came to town, and we shared an—no, no. At Parsons, four of us shared an apartment at the Whitby Apartment House on 45th, between 8th and 9th Avenues.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. MICHALS: And that was fun. And then, a friend of mine came from McKeesport, and he and I shared an apartment on 79th—78th Street, and—for about—I don't know how many months. And then he got involved with somebody, and rent was $90, and I couldn't carry that. So, then, I found my little apartment in the Village, which was great. $50 a month, Charles Street, four flight walk up, rent control.

MR. LYON: How long were you there?

MR. MICHALS: I was about—I'm not sure. Maybe four years.

MR. LYON: That's a long time.

MR. MICHALS: That's when I met Fred. Fred and I then moved together to 9th Street. So, that was the—you know, everybody comes to New York—

MR. LYON: You met Fred in 1960?

MR. MICHALS: It was—

MR. LYON: Or—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, '60.

MR. LYON: '60, okay. Okay. So—

MR. MICHALS: Okay.

MR. LYON: —So you've been introduced to the camera, somewhat inadvertently, at Parsons. And did you continue working with a camera after—

MR. MICHALS: No—

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. MICHALS: —not at all. I did nothing with a camera until I went to Russia.

MR. LYON: And how did that come about?

MR. MICHALS: I was working at—I had gone from my $50 a week job at Dance Magazine—I went there because Rudy Deharak was a great designer.

MR. LYON: I'm sorry, who?

MR. MICHALS: Rudy Deharak. R-U-D-Y, D-E-H-A-R-A-K. He was a really wonderful graphic designer, and he had many accounts. And that was one of his accounts.

MR. LYON: Dance was?

MR. MICHALS: Dance Magazine.

MR. LYON: Got it.

MR. MICHALS: Not that I was interested in dance, but I thought I could learn the whole—

MR. LYON: Oh, yeah. No—

MR. MICHALS: —production and everything as an assistant. So, when I moved back to the Y—when was that?

That was—oh, when I dumped—when I got out of Parsons.

MR. LYON: Parsons.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, I was still—anyway, I was still living at the Y. So, what I did was, I got all these old Dance Magazine, cut them up, and did layouts.

MR. LYON: Clever.

MR. MICHALS: And so, then I—like Willy Loman, I schlepped my portfolio up to Dance Magazine, and guess who interviewed me? The guy whose job I wanted [laughs.].

MR. LYON: Oh, no.

MR. MICHALS: It never occurred to me he had an assistant already.

MR. LYON: Oh, no.

MR. MICHALS: Talk about timing. It was the Korean War. I came back to the Y with these useless layouts, just sitting there. I had a phone call the next morning. The guy was drafted. And the—there was an opening. And I was—there I was. I got the job. My timing was—I couldn't believe it.

MR. LYON: Wow.

MR. MICHALS: And $50 a week, but I loved the job. I—you know, I—layouts. I went to the printing plant, late at night, looking at stuff coming off—

MR. LYON: Right, right.

MR. MICHALS: And then—but no photography. Nothing. Photography really—oh, I did—I went to Mexico—a friend of mine from Denver was studying at the Mexico City College, which was a very popular destination for Denver people to go there. And so, I went—I spent a week there with Bob Ewing, and he was living with a Mexican family. So, I did borrow—I took some snapshots, but it was nothing. I wasn't functioning as a photographer—obligatory things, but I didn't even do that well. But while I was—when I left that, the next person to take my room with the Mexican family was a guy with the name of Harvey Schmidt, who wrote the Fantasticks, and he was a very, very successful illustrator. And I—when I started to become a photographer, he called me up when he got back. We met, and we got along. And when he was—he did a lot of work with Esquire, and Robert Benton was the assistant art director at Esquire. He was—the three Texas guys, Harvey Schmidt, Robert Benton, and Tom Jones. They all came from Austin together, up here, as a triumvirate. So, Harvey introduced me to Bob Benton. And when I began to become a photographer, Benton then used me, and introduced me to Henry Woolf, who was then the great art director. So, there was a real bom, bom, bom, bom, bom thing happening. That's a whole other story.

MR. LYON: That's a part of the story, though, that I don't know at all, really. And I was very—

MR. MICHALS: Well, this is a good place for me to get this on record.

MR. LYON: —very curious to know about it.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. I often wonder, when people come to New York, what door do you put your foot in? Do you—how do you—where do you scratch? Who do you—who do you have to fuck around here to get a job? That never worked for me, but you know what I mean? How do you get off the Greyhound bus with a suitcase?

MR. LYON: Well, it sounds like you were—but it sounds like you really were motivated. You know, that you made yourself a layout, you know, to show somebody, you know? I mean, you were going to find a way to communicate who you were.

MR. MICHALS: I was building on when I was drawing and painting in the summer, to enter the Scholastic contests I would be very—when I went to Denver and I entered that contest for painters under 20, you know, nobody said, Duane, why didn't—you know, I did it, and I came to New York. It was get a job, do this. Do—you know?

MR. LYON: It's great. It's great. So—okay, so what motivated you to go to Russia? Oh, no, no. Oh, you know, I know what I wanted to ask you. When you were stationed in Germany—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —did you run into Soviet soldiers at all, or any kind of thing like that?

MR. MICHALS: We only necked. We only dated once.

MR. LYON: Only dated once, yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: No, no, nothing—

MR. LYON: Nothing like that? Nothing like that.

MR. MICHALS: —no, please. If I had, I would've dropped my rifle and surrendered. You want a tank? Take a tank.

MR. LYON: Germany must've been kind of strange and interesting at that time.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, it was very exciting. I had the shit end of the deal. I mean, my mother would write me and say, "Mrs. Schwartz's son is stationed in Germany, and he goes to Paris every weekend. Why don't you go to Paris?" Are you kidding? I mean, people are clerk typists. I would've been very happy to be a clerk typist. I would've been very happy to be a prol in the ranks, you know, doing—last thing that I wanted—I was the most unlikely officer in the entire world. The last thing I wanted to be would be to shove in front of these people, a group, and tell them what to do and—I was a total fuck-up officer.

[phone ringing]

Well, it's the Army calling me back.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Get them over with.

MR. MICHALS: I did.

MR. LYON: Okay, so you were a reluctant leader there.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, terrible. I was really, totally, a fish out of water. But I did have my triumphs. I took care of the men. I saw—my platoon always had their mail. I saw everybody got fed. I knew all the names of all the guys in my platoon. Other officers didn't know the names of the guys in their platoon. But I was—what was I, 21? I was their age. I was a—you know, and I—my first sergeant was an alcoholic. He was totally useless, and my dad was a big drinker, so I didn't find it amusing to have to deal with a drunk. But it was—it was a triumph. I triumphed. I really did. The men loved me. They really did. I have a letter from one of them—it's in my book, you know, he said how all the men, you know, respected me, and would do anything, even today, anything I—you know, because I took care of them. I knew their names, you know, and it was the toughest part of my life, in a different way, as tough as right now, taking care of Fred. But profoundly tough.

MR. LYON: We're getting—we were—how your trip to Russia sort of materialized?

MR. MICHALS: Oh, yeah. After I left Dance Magazine.

MR. LYON: Why did you leave?

MR. MICHALS: Well, $50 a week.

MR. LYON: Oh, that's a good reason.

MR. MICHALS: I was there a year. At the end of the year is when I went to Mexico to visit my friend, Harvey Schmidt. And then, I had a friend named Ben Hall, and I liked him a lot. He lived by his wit. I love people who live by their wits, and he wrote a book on – remember the grand old movie theaters, the great movie palaces? The last one ever built was in McKeesport, was the Memorial. And so, when I met him and I said I was from McKeesport. And he said, "Well, that's where the Memorial Theater is, isn't it?" Wow, how did you know that? He ended up very badly. He was murdered—he got involved in drugs or something. And Ben had a friend who worked at Time Inc., in promotion. And he got me a job, through this friend, in promotion department at Time Inc., where we did advertising for Sports Illustrated, Time, Life, all those magazines. You know, you do a layout for an ad for Time, and then you do insert cards for whatever—Fortune, you know. And I went from $50 a week to $105 a week. We're in the money. And so, I was there for two years, I think, or so. And while I was there, I found out that you could go to Russia, which—that's the height of the Cold War. And we weren't talking to them, and you couldn't get on a plane and fly to Moscow. But it was an—you could take an Intourist tour. It cost $1,000, which was—

MR. LYON: That's a lot of money.

MR. MICHALS: Huge. I mean, that's 20 percent of my income. So, I decided to go, and I literally ate sandwiches for six months to save up $500—and I borrowed $500 from my mother and father—

[inaudible dialogue]

She cleaned it up?

[break]

MR. LYON: So, we're back to Russia.

MR. MICHALS: Okay.

MR. LYON: So, you borrowed $500 from your parents. You saved—you ate sandwiches so you could come up with $500, and you went an Intourist—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Well, what happened was, you had to—I had to fly to Copenhagen, to get a flight from Copenhagen to Helsinki to get there by Friday night to get a train, the last train left at 9:00 p.m., to get to Leningrad. But the plane—I got to Denmark okay, but the flight from Denmark to Helsinki was late, and I missed—I missed the train. And there were no trains until Monday—Sunday night, so I had to spend two days in Helsinki, which was also not a nice thing to do. So, when I got—arrived at midnight in Leningrad, it was so glamorous. First of all, you take this train, and on this—this is 19, what was, 58? I was 26. You take this train, but there's only one car for foreigners, and there were only two foreigners in the entire car. It was an English diplomat and myself. And when the train arrives in—crosses the border to Finland, everyone gets off the train. You have to go into this big building. And the guy was so nice. He said – in Russia, you know, when you first arrive, it's tradition that you have to have a shot of vodka—you know, a glass. Well, in Russia, a shot of vodka is not like a—you know, it's like a—not a shot. It's a glass of vodka.

MR. LYON: Wow.

MR. MICHALS: And so, of course, I got to—I got so loaded. And we finally pulled into Leningrad. It was at midnight, and these—all these tourists—they looked like NKVD agents, black coats, you know, and fedoras. And they put me in the back of an old car that looked like a Hispano-Suiza, or one of those great 1930—and sitting in the backseat, next to me, was this woman—very reminiscent of Marlene Dietrich. I could not believe it. I mean, she was glam—I don't know who the hell she was, but I'm sharing the back, 26 years old, going through the streets of Leningrad at night, and no traffic, nothing. Dead. And I thought, wow, what a way to—you know. And then, I got to the hotel, and you don't have a private room with a bath. There's a toilet down the hall. So, I go—I have to pee; it's 2:00 in the morning. I go down the hall, and there's one room that has no cute Cossack or a cute ballerina. It was like—it's a four and seven backwards, and it's eight, J upside down and a K. I didn't know which was the ladies' room, and which was the men's' room.

So, I finally went into one, and while I was – I didn't see any urinals—I mean, they don't have urinals here. And as I was washing my hands, I noticed a lot of long hairs in the sink and I thought, "You know, I'll bet some dumb Russian woman just wandered in the men's' room by mistake," and then, the light went on. I think some American one—and if a woman comes in here, and I'm in the ladies' room, international incident, I could see it. But the whole trip was a great adventure. There were only five people—five Americans I saw the entire time I was there. My tour was around summer, but because I was late, they didn't add me to the tour, so I would come down every morning to the desk, and they'd say, "What would you like to do today?" And I said, "Well" you know, what—and they said, "Well, you could go see the Hermitage." And they would have somebody take me there, and then leave me. And then, I could wander—I spent so much time wandering around. It was a great, great adventure, and I—you know, the camera. I took a camera—

MR. LYON: But, your—the photos, the portraits you took on that trip seem very skilled. I mean—

MR. MICHALS: They were very mature.

MR. LYON: Very mature.

MR. MICHALS: They were—yeah. No, they were good. Those were natural instincts. I hit them out of the park like Mickey Mantle. No, what happened was, I learned how to say in Russian, "May I take your picture?" [speaks Russian]. And I would stop these Russians and say [speaks Russian]. And sometimes, they'd be embarrassed, but most of the time, they'd say yes. And that's what I did, and they were great. I mean, I was good. And I didn't know how to expose film. I refused to take a light meter. To me, a light meter became the symbol of everything I hated about photography. You know, technical—and so, this is what a friend of mine said. When you buy Tri-X 400, when you're out in a bright sun, you put the little knob on 16, and you put the other knob on 500. When you're outside, but it's no sun, you turn the knob—let's see. No, you leave it on 500—I'm trying to remember

now, and you put the other knob—I mean, you leave it on 16, but you turn the other knob to 60.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. MICHALS: And when you're inside, you go by the window, and you go all the way to 2.8-- the other hand, and you put it on 60, and if it's really dark, you put it on 30, and you go by the window.

MR. LYON: And you try to hold it steady.

MR. MICHALS: I did—well, at that point, I was steadier than I am today. And it worked. I would say, with rare exception, I didn't fuck up.

MR. LYON: Wow.

MR. MICHALS: And so, that—and there was a whole spin off that happened after that, but I still didn't think of myself as a photographer.

MR. LYON: In the years that followed, did you continue to use Tri-X?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Yeah. I know—you know, the Hindus say you don't want to be too rich, too thin, too—I mean, you just want to be rich enough. I knew enough about—I still—I never learned how to use strobe. All kinds of things I can't do. I always had to find my light, but I made a grand career, for me, doing commercial work of first class, with minimum knowledge—I once wrote that I was the most unprofessional professional photographer I could think of. You know, I always maintained my amateur status. I always thought of Avedon and Penn as being seniors, and myself as a freshman. I will never be a senior. And I—and when I got work, I was way over my head. I mean, I did major, major campaigns, and made more money than I ever dreamt I could have in my whole world. And photography gave me everything, but I never—this is important. I never expected my private work to support me. And that's the big mistake kids make.

When they graduate from photo school, "I'm going to get a gallery, and my proverbial 100 pictures of the girlfriend's ass." They rush off, and to Pace—they don't get a show, and they're out of business. And they disdain doing commercial work. Well, I was thrilled. I remember, I was—when I was making $100 a week at Time, and I announced that I was a photography, and I had been doing all that work for Sports Illustrated, it was—well, I ran into one of the guys, and I said, "I'm a photographer now!" And he said, "What do you do?" And I said, "I take portraits." And he said, "Well, you know, let me talk to the art director." So, one of my first jobs was doing a series of portraits for Sports Illustrated of—it was for "Business Week Magazine" of different—I don't know who they were. Portraits of advertisers. And I found myself on an airplane, going—first stop was Fort Wayne. But I was making $150 a picture.

MR. LYON: A picture?

MR. MICHALS: I had been making $100 a week—$105. One day, I took two pictures—

MR. LYON: You made $300 [laughs].

MR. MICHALS: Do the math. In one month—

MR. LYON: Christ, what would that be now?

MR. MICHALS: I don't know, but I was thinking—

MR. LYON: That's a lot.

MR. MICHALS: —how long has this been going on? $100. You know? But the big thing, I was—because I never had an agent, I never knew anything about money. So, Corning Glass gave me work. And I would fly to the Chemung Airport in Corning, to work for Corning Glass. And I was getting—I charged them $150 a day. And so, years later, after I'd worked there for a while, I became close friends with the art director. And he said to me, "You know, I always wanted to ask you, why is it that you charge so little?" And I said, "You mean you would've paid more?" He said, "Sure." "Well, then, why didn't you pay me"—I didn't know what to charge. And I thought $150 a day still sounded good to me, rather than $105 a week. So, I was always completely out of—always bumping into things. I never knew what I—I never had an agent until the very end. And lovely woman—she was terrific, but she didn't do me any favors. Once I got an agent, I stopped getting work—or crummy work, you know. I bumbled my way through photography. Go figure.

MR. LYON: I once asked—I was interviewing Rudy Burckhardt for a newspaper—

MR. MICHALS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Yeah.

MR. LYON: —and we were in this kind of—in Chicago, in this grim, November day, almost no light, sitting in this coffee shop—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —you know? And I asked him this naive question about, you know, did he use, you know, flash and this—and he just sort of looked at me and said, "Look at the light in here. Look at how beautiful it is."

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. LYON: You know? It was just like, oh. Okay.

MR. MICHALS: For me, it was always about light. Always. And if—and I'm very good at going places and making do. I did a campaign for *Scientific American* that went for five years. I did at least 60 portraits. We went around the country—they ran in the New York Times, the back page, full page of the Times, I got a credit. It was fantastic. And then, I would go to Detroit, and then they would say, "So and so has a huge collection. He's a Shakespeare enthusiast." I get there, he had three little Shakespearean—you know, like—

MR. LYON: Like folios, or something—

MR. MICHALS: No, no, no, no. Like when you were in school, and you had to read a—

MR. LYON: Oh, no. Really?

MR. MICHALS: He didn't know anything about Shakespeare. I mean, he was—you know, and I had to make do. And I was—that's—I have to say, I'm really good at that. I could make—

MR. LYON: So, you gave him a skull? No, I just kidding.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. I made him wear some tights [laughs.]. Oh, Yorick. And his name was Yorick, to be—and—

MR. LYON: I'm sorry.

MR. MICHALS: —it's amazing how I had no connections to the photo world. I knew nothing about—if I had known anything, if I had known the odds against me having a career, a guy who didn't even know how to expose film properly or whatever—

MR. LYON: Did you ever print your own film?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I did and—that's a very interesting story. When I went to Russia, and I did a magazine as a portfolio, and I had to learn—I had to print pictures. And that course that we—that one month—that one semester I took at Parsons, we had a printing thing. I just knew the rudimentaries of that, but I—didn't make my photographs. I couldn't afford to have prints made for my dummy magazine. So, in my little—you walk into the kitchen, bathroom, and that was the apartment. The floor went like this, and I realized, in my kitchen that [inaudible] was in all my pictures—I had to do this.

Anyway, so I was doing my own printing. So, one day, again, fortuitous. One day, I had a little party, and I invited somebody, and they said, "Can I bring a friend?" And I said, "Sure." So, the friend showed up, and my prints were like the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were all rolled up because I didn't flatten them properly. So, this guy's name Danny Entin, and Danny was sitting around, unrolling my photographs. And he said, you know, "Who did these pictures?" And I said, "They're mine." And he said, "Well, you know, they're good." He said, you know, "I'm a professional photographer, and I have a little studio on 17th Street, and it has a skylight. I never use it on weekends. Why don't you come over? I'll give you a key, and you can take pictures." Hello, thank you.

So, Danny made me a key to his studio. And on weekends, I began to take my friends over there. With the sky light, the whole thing. And then, a disaster happened. Somebody got me a celebrity. Do you remember Robert Morse?

MR. LYON: Very well.

MR. MICHALS: He was in like—I can get it for you, whatever—

MR. LYON: How to Success in Business.

MR. MICHALS: And before that, he was in a Wilder play that became the big hit, with Streisand—Hello, Dolly became—that Thornton Wilder's. Anyway, so he needed a head shot, and he came over. And I had it—but it was like Hurricane Helen or somebody was coming through. There was no light. The sky light was as dark. But I used

my traditional formula. Everything was very badly exposed. And my friend Danny was doing my film for me, and I screwed up the shooting. And Danny—no, that's it. Kicking and screaming, you're going into the dark room. And so, he taught me to how to print and do everything.

MR. LYON: Wow.

MR. MICHALS: So, Danny was my one great mentor and—

MR. LYON: He's not related to Eleanor Antin, is he?

MR. MICHALS: Entin, not Anton. E-N-T-I-N. Like—

MR. LYON: Oh, E-N-T-I-N.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, yeah. And—not A-N-T-I-N.

MR. LYON: That's a serious mistake in the catalog.

MR. MICHALS: Yes. Yes. They said Antin?

MR. LYON: A-N-T-I-N, like Eleanor.

MR. MICHALS: Well, didn't they fact check it with me?

MR. LYON: No, kidding.

MR. MICHALS: Well, that's wrong.

MR. LYON: Like this, E-N-T-I-N?

MR. MICHALS: Dan Entin.

MR. LYON: D-A-N-N-Y. Like Danny—

MR. MICHALS: Danny or Dan.

MR. LYON: Dan.

MR. MICHALS: Daniel, Dan.

MR. LYON: Daniel.

MR. MICHALS: I call him Dan.

MR. LYON: Jesus.

MR. MICHALS: But the interesting thing about Dan—he was a sweetheart. He was never destined to be an important photographer, in that sense. He made his living as a photographer. In those days, he used to do head shots, and half the actors never paid him. He was always there for me. And suddenly, I was, you know, getting these interesting people to photograph. But he taught me how to expose film, and use a light meter. We never—I never learned how to use strobe, or flash. And eventually, he went on to work in a big studio. A big catalog house.

MR. LYON: A photo studio.

MR. MICHALS: Which was fine. Big cameras doing products. And then, he went on to leave, and became involved with the Roerich Museum. Have you ever heard of the Roerich Museum? There was a guy named Roerich—R-O-E-R-I-C-H, I guess. He was a Russian painter, very reminiscent of Rockwell Kent, in the '30s and whatever. He's very big in Russia. And they had a little museum in here, like on 106th Street. Danny ran the museum. And we still talk. We still—you know. He's just—he's just the sweetest guy. So, that was my mentor. I would say Danny—if I had—not that he taught me how to—he taught me how to take photographs, not what to photograph.

MR. LYON: Right, right. Right.

MR. MICHALS: And he was—I never felt, when I was having big success and doing the Paris collections, I never felt that if I called Danny up and said, "You won't believe this. I'm doing Life covers" that he would think, you know, "Oh, yeah. Right. Well, there wouldn't be Duane without"—you know what I mean? There was never—he

was always there to applaud me.

MR. LYON: Of the—of the people you worked with on the magazines, you mentioned Robert Benton. Who were the ones you would say were just, you know, that you admired, that you thought they had, you know, really, really good head for what they were doing?

MR. MICHALS: The great, great art director, to me, of my generation was Henry Wolf.

MR. LYON: Henry Wolf.

MR. MICHALS: Henry—do you know anything about him?

MR. LYON: Not really, no.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, you must. He was huge. And also, of course, I never worked with him, but Milton Glaser—Milton is a genius, but Henry Wolf was a—and Lieberman. Although Lieberman always scared me. I found him frightening, I really did.

MR. LYON: Did you work with him?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Oh, a lot. And I always found him very Machiavellian. And he came to me with such a bad reputation from people I knew who worked there, that I was always—he made me nervous. I was never comfortable around him.

MR. LYON: So, he was like the eminence grise of Condé Nast—

MR. MICHALS: Yes, yes, totally. He was like the great Oz. Do not pay attention to the—behind the counter. He was very kind to me. One of the fantasy moments—what happened was I left my—I had this—Andy Warhol told me how to make my portfolio. Now, I met Andy Warhol through a friend of mine, Tom Lacy, who I went to Parsons with, at—Tom was doing layouts for Bonwit Tellers. Andy did advertising for Bonwit Tellers.

MR. LYON: Yeah, I remember. Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: This is before Andy became super Andy. When he was still Andy, Andy. And we hit it off because we both were from McKeesport—he told me was born in McKeesport. He lied—I never knew what he—to believe. He told people some—I think he was very—felt very awkward about, you know, being Slovak and the whole ethnic thing. And he wanted to distance himself from many ethnicity—that too. But so, Andy said to me two things that I remember. He said, "When you make a portfolio, make sure that your pictures are big because everybody shows small pictures." And so, I did 16 by 20 prints. I still have the original portfolio, actually. And the other thing he said to me was "Be careful with your ideas because that's the most important, valuable thing you have, and people will steal your ideas." And of course, he was the biggest theft—thief in the world. He stole everybody's ideas. I mean, there was nothing original came out of his mouth that he didn't pick up from somebody else. So, those were my two bits of wisdom.

And so, Bob Benton replaced Henry Wolf at Esquire, and then Henry Wolf needed an assistant, and I was still—where was I? I guess Time, Inc. Where was I? Anyway, yeah. And I was looking for a job in editorial, doing layout. So, I made a magazine. I invented a magazine called "Contact" and the idea was contact with literature, contact with life, contact with art, contact—you know, and each issue would be devoted to a single subject, very much like *Du* magazine in Switzerland, which is my favorite publication in the world. And so, I made a whole issue of Contact on Russia, and then I did four other covers on different subjects. And Henry looked at my Russian issue, which he loved, and he said, "Who took these pictures?" Again, I said, "I did." He said, "Well, you should be a photographer." And it was, again, it was between me and a guy named Sam Antupit for the job. And Sam got the job, and that was the right thing because he went on to become a well-known art director himself. And then, when Henry went onto Show Magazine—do you remember "Show?"

MR. LYON: I do, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: The first—that was the hot magazine. It was like pre-Vanity Fair, that kind of thing. In the first issue, he gave me six or seven pages—out of nowhere. I mean, I hadn't done anything. And then, I saw Lou Silverstein at the Times, and he said, "Who took these pictures?" He said, "You should be"—and then, Lou began to give me work at the Times. I had nothing else but that portfolio. I don't think you could get away with that today. Because everything's on the computer. You never meet the art directors. And so, I would meet people, and you know, and they like—I remember one day, I walked into Henry Wolf's office, which is always thrilling. And he was speaking French on the phone to somebody. And I was—first of all, he spoke French. Of course he did. He came from—and I was just thrilled [speaks French]. And he hung up and he said, "I was just talking to Cartier-Bresson."

[Laughs.]

That was it. I had to sit down. You know—no, this is overload. You know, my lights—alert, alert, alert. You know? That was as good as it got. French, Cartier-Bresson, in Paris. You know?

MR. LYON: Fantastic.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: That's great stuff. Wow. Well, it's 4:30 p.m. We've been at this for about two hours.

MR. MICHALS: Want to do another half hour? Are you—am I wearing you out?

MR. LYON: I'm okay, if you are.

MR. MICHALS: I'm fine.

MR. LYON: Okay. So, let's—

MR. MICHALS: Has this been going okay?

MR. LYON: Wonderful, for me. I don't know—I don't know what he thinks.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, dear. I hope he's thinking.

MR. LYON: Okay, so, let's at least broach the subject of sexuality in the work, and you know—let's see. How do I want to talk about this? Can you talk a little bit about sort of like your emerging awareness of your sexuality—?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —you know, and the role that your, you know, that your reading, or your cultural awareness played into that.

MR. MICHALS: You mean how I got—how I came into sexual consciousness?

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah. I mean, if that makes sense, as a question?

MR. MICHALS: My rite of passage? Rite of passage—write that down for me. See, I did that sort of thing all the time. It's really—

MR. LYON: Well, I'm mostly interested in it, you know, for how—your sort of evolving sensibility—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, no—

MR. LYON: —which is very distinctive.

MR. MICHALS: No, it's interesting. I agree.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: First of all, in my day—

MR. LYON: In my day—

MR. MICHALS: —exactly. Being gay wasn't an option. I didn't even know what that was. I mean, it was just no—19—we, in high school, we had sissies. I—and I wrote someplace, we didn't invent gay when I was—we only had sissies. But sissy was—you didn't want to be a sissy. You didn't want to carry your books like this, across—that's the way girls carried their books. My best friend, Art, and I—we still talk to each other. He was—he was straight, but it was like Dumb and Dumber, in the sense that we both were just so naive. He had a—they had a stray dog—what—rescue. His name was Teddy, and Teddy was some sort of mongrel—I hate the word mongrel, but he wasn't a breed.

MR. LYON: Mixed something.

MR. MICHALS: And when we would walk down the street, Art—on our way to the library, of course, we saw some kids we deemed to be tough, or suspicious, or bad. As we walk by the vicinity of these kids—we would—and

have Teddy with us, we would call him Fang. Art would say, "Fang, be good! Fang, no, no. Don't attack." I mean, you know, I mean, it was this—you know. So, we were both equally kids. And we didn't even begin to talk about women's anatomy—I mean, it was just—we were retards. I mean, we were just—I remember, when I was in grade school, there was a girl in my class named Martha. She had prematurely big jugs, and there was a bad kid in our class. His name was Robert Doctorik, and he used to sit across from her, and [laughs.] look under the seat and go like this, you know? And she'd be sitting there—she'd be sort of looking like—

MR. LYON: Oh, my god. That's so pathetic.

MR. MICHALS: But I began to figure out—I thought, what is he doing? Because Art and I didn't know anything about jacking off—jacking off, or anything. And we thought, "What is he doing?" And then, I thought, "Is he playing with it?" And I thought, "Oh that is so stupid. Only little kids play with—how stupid. Only little kids play with themselves." But he was certainly prematurely—he was precocious. He was sexually precocious. And we were, sexually, retards. And I remember, when I first began to hear about what people did to make babies, I thought, "My mother and father would never do that, ever." We were just—and the idea of somebody would be attracted to other men—I mean; I didn't even know what meant. So, I did have an Uncle Bill, who died when he was about 23 or 24, very tragically. He came home—he was still living at home. He came home, and he said to his mother that he wasn't—he said, "I think I'm coming down with a cold. I feel tired. I'm going to go to bed early." He woke in the middle of the night, and he had streptococcus spinal meningitis. He was dead the next day. And that's before—today, they—and it was huge shock. This feeds into the death—

MR. LYON: Right, right.

MR. MICHALS: I was about eight, and I only remember Uncle Bill because he gave me a firetruck. You know, like a big firetruck. So, there we go. In those days, people used to display dead people at home. If you walked down the street, and you saw a house with a big bouquet of flowers in front of the house, that meant somebody died there, and they were on display. And so, let's see, he died—how old was I? God, I was seven, maybe. Seven or—

MR. LYON: 1940ish, something like that?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, yeah, '39. And there, we go back to my grandmother's house, and it's filled with people, a big bouquet of flowers, and everybody was crying. And then, they bring me the casket, and there's Uncle Bill, deader than a door nail. And my—I think my father's mother never got over it. They said she never recovered, years later. And she was completely bereft. I mean, she was just—well, you're a seven-year-old kid, and you walk into the valley of darkness, you know, it's very upsetting. But the secret is, Uncle Bill—I'm almost—as sure as I can be without knowing, I thought, was gay. When I was in high school, Art and I used to call everybody queer. We didn't mean gay. We didn't—we meant nerdy, or, you know, or "Hey, freak." We didn't say freak, we said—everybody called—but there was no sexual implication. So, Art and I were calling each—[inaudible] be queer. And my dad took me aside and he said, "You must never call anybody a queer because queer people cannot help themselves." And two things.

First, he brought my attention to it, and it's something. And the second thing is he was so sympathetic, and I think that he knew that Bill was—so, years later, I went back to my—my father was born in Duquesne, Pennsylvania. D-U-Q-U-E-S-N-E, after Ford Duquesne in Pittsburgh, you know, a little town. And I was bored, so I said to my aunt, Eleanor, do you have any family pictures, you know, of Uncle Bill? And she showed those photographs. And now, my father's side of the family was very fair, and there is Uncle Bill, looking like Truman Capote, blonde hair in his face. I took one look and I thought, "Oh, my god. Uncle Bill was gay." So, then, I went to visit Aunt Mary—Margaret. And I said, "What do you remember of Uncle Bill?" She said, "I remember when he was in high school and he went downtown, and he looked in Kelly's Dress Shop, and he saw a blue hat, and he bought me a blue hat." And I said to mother—first of all, can you imagine your brother, Cyril or your brother Steve, let alone looking at a lady's window, going in and buying a lady's hat for—no, no, no. That never would've happened. So, I'm almost—as sure as I can be, that Uncle Bill was gay. So, that was very interesting, and too bad that he died so young. But he must've been miserable to be gay in a Catholic family, with no references, with no—he must have, you know. I'm sorry I never knew him. I think it would've been interesting to know him. Now, you know too much. I might have to kill you.

MR. LYON: All right. That's all right.

MR. MICHALS: It's worth it.

MR. LYON: It's been fun.

MR. MICHALS: It's worth it.

MR. LYON: But you, then—

[Crosstalk.]

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. So, I'm in high school. The saving grace was nice girls didn't fuck. So, you know, I could date Tilly in school. Once, I had to spend the back seat of a car with her because the people in the front seat were necking, so I opened—you know, I checked out her tits, and they were just lumpy and soft, and kind of floppy. I didn't find it at all interesting. So, I just—I have not a single shred of curiosity about a woman's body. I have no interest in pussy, shall we—nothing. Just nothing. So, I know I am 100 percent interested in men. I am—I have been programmed, in my DEA—DNA—DEA [laughs]. Department of—here they come now! All right, stop, flush everything!

MR. LYON: Quick, quick [laughs.].

MR. MICHALS: You know, and so—when I began to come in consciousness, I dated a girl in high school named Sue Mathis, who was so beautiful and so cool. And the girls I knew, all loved my mother. My mother worked at Kaufmann's, which is like Bloomingdale's in Pittsburgh. She worked there for years.

MR. LYON: Like Edgar Kaufmann, like—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, the same one. I dedicated my Pittsburgh book to Edgar Kaufmann. Sue got married three times, and every time, she would come back, she would always go to Kaufmann's to visit my mother. She kept in touch with her, and then, on her third marriage, Sue lived in Dover, and Mother, by then, was living in Philadelphia, where Timothy had moved, and we bought her the condo. And Sue came—Sue became a decorator. She came up to Philadelphia to help my mother decorate. Her husband was a carpenter. He built in all my mother's closets. She always was very close to my mother, and Sue always kept in touch with me. And in the end, I was doing a job for the New York Sunday Magazine, photographing wedding stuff for the Times—you know, in the magazine section. And Sue came to New York with her daughter, and they came up to Bergdorf's, where I was doing the shooting. And we had a wonderful lunch at Bergdorf, and then she died about a year later. And it turns out that she had cancer, and I think she knew she was dying. She didn't tell me, but she wanted me to meet her daughter, and to see me. And that's so funny, it's still—I still find it very touching. And then, when her—when she died, her daughter called me to tell me about it. She said, "Mother would want you to know." But she loved my mother. I—you know, that was—that was always—all the women, girls, all responded—but Art and I were—we never—we didn't mess around. You know, we didn't—you know, like we didn't jack off and nothing. Nothing like that.

MR. LYON: Experiment.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, nothing. We were total retards. Now, you really do know too much.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Well, I—what's interesting, I think, in part is, you know, how you're—how this gradually became part of your creative thought, you know, and it's not—

MR. MICHALS: I absorbed it.

MR. LYON: —just a social issue, but it's something that you're starting to deal with in your art.

MR. MICHALS: No, it comes back to that same fabric, that everything comes out of—I remember that—when I was about 15 or 16, we—across from Art there was this girl who was older, and she said that we—is it going?

MR. LYON: I think it's going fine.

MR. MICHALS: I don't see the red light.

MR. LYON: God, I hope so. See, this is the—

MR. MICHALS: Oh, I thought we—

MR. LYON: —when you speak, the—

MR. MICHALS: Oh, that goes. Oh, okay.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: So, she said to us one day—well, here's what happened. You know, one day, all you want to do is play basketball—which we never wanted to do. But one day, you know, we wanted to play basketball, 24-7. And that winter, your glands do something, and then, next year, all you wanted to do was rip blouses off of girls. I said, all right, okay. I mean, yeah. So, 16 came and went, 17 came and went, 18 came and went. When I was reaching 19, I began to figure, I think that train left the station. And besides, I was developing crushes on my

friends. You know, and there was a sexual component, although being a good Catholic boy, I would never act on it. But I mean, there was sexual interest. I'm not quite sure what I thought I really wanted to do, but there was some interest, but it wasn't focused. I didn't know—nobody did, you know. And Art being straight, nothing we ever talked about. So, at 17, I went to school in Colorado. I was suddenly getting hit on by a lot of—I was shocked. One day, I went to the library, and the library—from the upper floor, you get an incredible view of the mountains in Denver. And so, I was waiting for the library to open at 2:00 p.m., and this guy comes up to me, and—I was 17, or 18, came up to me and he said, "I'm from out of town. Is there anywhere around here where you get a good view of the mountains?" And I said, "Well, there's a big bay window upstairs. You can see the mountains." And he said, "Oh, how do you get up—well, how do you get there?" And I said, "Well, you just go down—and go up those"—yeah. He said, "Well, you mind showing me where this"—like he'd never done this one before. So, I said, "Okay." So, I went and I showed him, and I said, "Well, here's the view." And as I started to leave, he said to me, "Oh," he said, "you know, I have to go to the bathroom. Is there a bathroom here?" I said, "Well, there's the bathroom there." And he said, "Well, wait a minute." And he said, "Well, why don't you come to the bathroom with me?" He said, "Do you have to pee?" I said, "No." He said, "Why don't you come in anyway?" And so, I thought that was strange. So, I went in the bathroom. And when I stepped in the door, he flicked the lock on the door. And I immediately unflicked the lock, and walked out. And that was it. But half an hour later, I'm down in the stacks, looking for books. And he comes—he followed me to the stacks, and he groped me in the stacks. And that was it. I mean, I just—you know. So—you know, I mean—I mean, I just fled.

God, this is very personal. But, so what happened was—you know, I start telling this other roommate. I said, you know, this guy came up and groped me and all that. And he "oh, he's just a faggot. Stay away" or something like that. So, I came back home, and I thought, all these people are—all the—everybody I knew is jacking off. Wonder what that's like. So, I thought, maybe I should try it, just once, just to see—so I tried it, and I thought, "Whoa how long has this been going on?" So, being very Catholic, I said—I made a deal with God. You know, that's it. I'm not going—why would I want to do that again; you know? And then, the next day, I thought to myself, you know, that may have been a fluke. Maybe that—

MR. LYON: Better check it out again.

MR. MICHALS: —I could double check, make sure it's still working. Maybe I didn't do it right. You know? And so—and the rest is history.

[Laughs.]

Oh, that's spooky. Look at that. I saw what you did. Stop, stop, stop, stop! Don't trip on the wire. No, I saw this—I saw this rubber glove, just a hand, opening—

MR. LYON: It's a little spooky.

MR. MICHALS: Well, this—okay, I'm sure that's—that will hold you for a while.

MR. LYON: I think that will hold me for a while. So, let me stop this—

[Audio break.]

MR. MICHALS: —about that. It's not been—and they should do an exhibit. The period when I came on the scene, after the first—Second World War, you know, in the '50s and '60s and '70s, were hugely transitional. A major paradigm shift occurred. So, now you hear all these—you know, the Cindy Shermans, and all the stars. I was amused by something I read in the Times last weekend, and not in a nice way. The Zwirner Gallery—

MR. LYON: Zwirner?

MR. MICHALS: —yeah, has just announced in—it's in a piece in the Times, Saturday Art, that they represent—what's his name? Eggleston?

MR. LYON: Eggleston. Yeah, I saw that.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, and they announced it now he's having a contextualization shift, or something like that, where he is now, as an artist—he's a photographer anymore. He is now an artist who takes photographs. And it's official now. They—it's the same ploy that they used for Cindy Sherman. Eggleston, whose whole career was created in the photo department at MoMA by John Szarkowski, who only shows photographs. As Cindy Sherman [inaudible] photography school, did all—who only shows photographs—oh, not photographs. Photographers. That's double think. That's 1984. And I—makes me angry because it's insulting to Robert Frank. Does that mean that when you're an artist who takes photographs, that means photographers who are artists are less than artists who take photographs? It's this—it's the title of the door has shifted, and it's very demeaning to photography, and insulting to people like Robert Frank, and any great photographer. It's insulting. So, I'd like to

get that out there, somehow. Or where can I write something, to get that published?

MR. LYON: Well, I mean, a place that you can always get things published is the Brooklyn Rail.

MR. MICHALS: Is what?

MR. LYON: You know, the Brooklyn Rail, that—

MR. MICHALS: I don't know what that is.

MR. LYON: Oh. You know, they've gotten—

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MR. LYON: It's June 14, 2016. I am interviewing Duane Michals at his home on 19th Street in New York City. This is our second session. So, today, as I mentioned, we're going to look at your body of work, using publications as prompts, and it occurred to me to try and outline a kind of umbrella of techniques and motifs that appear in your work so that we can, you know, reference them as we walk through the work. And I wanted to start with something that I found really striking; you referred to your photographs in a 1969 piece that you wrote for *Camera* magazine as anti-decisive moment—

[They laugh.]

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —which I thought was really interesting, and I wonder if you could talk a little bit about what you meant by that.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, the decisive moment which defined what photography was has been about for some of the 20th century. It comes from that moment of trying to get the quintessential instant when something—all the ingredients of the photograph, or of a problem or whatever, all come together in perfect alignment. That's—I forget what that's called, when everything is lined up perfectly, but—and that case, it's—and that's built on the idea that photography is about walking around, looking for interesting things or important things, or whatever catches the photographer's eye that happens out there, on the street or wherever. Mine is completely opposite because I was not interested in capturing—I hate that term—word, capture, but that's the—the kids say it today, capturing reality and the perfect moment that defines that perfect instant. My work really deals with something a little bit long term than the moment. It's the moment before, and the moment after. And even—and that gives me wiggle room. That gives me the ability to expand an idea, or bring nuance to an idea, or change the direction of an idea. And again, this is part of the liberation process of my being able to talk—express myself in any category.

So, I'm the opposite of that. You know, I have moments involved, and that called for reconfiguring the paradigm of what photography was. And it's a major shift.

MR. LYON: And so, I brought this up because as I say, the more I read of, you know, interviews with you, and statements especially in the '60s and '70s, I was just really struck by the clarity of your aesthetic purpose. I mean, it's just—it's not that usual to read artists talking about themselves, and for them to be so clear about what they're trying to accomplish. I mean, it was almost a manifesto quality to it.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: So, reading—and to be specific, reading the 1974 interview with William Jenkins that's published in the Carnegie book, it's—I was just taken with the confidence that you—

[They laugh.]

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Almost combativeness.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. LYON: I almost would put it that way.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, yeah. No, it's true. I don't know where that chutzpah, as we say. I don't know where that came from, why I should even have that confidence because I was certainly a pipsqueak, or a—you know, I had fallen out of the nest of the photo world, and you know, I was down there on the ground—I don't know what that

means, but I was simply peripheral to—and yet, I was confident. I mean, I felt very sure about my ideas, and I don't know where they came from, either. It's just that I was what I was talking about; I wasn't adapting somebody else's concepts, or picking up—I mean, I was—those were my direct impulses, and I think they came from maybe loving language.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And also, you know, writing in high school, and all that business.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: But it was also a philosophy. It wasn't just, you know, picking up the camera, but it came from an idea that photography should be other things than observations.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: That photography should deal with the entire range of experience.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: It was—but the basic idea was that reality was a very selective choice for street photographers, or other photographers. And it only meant one thing: observable reality.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And I felt if you looked at the pie, that was only a quarter of the pie, or a half of the pie. But what about my reality? Was my dreams, my anxieties, my sexual fantasies, all which I thought more legitimate. And they're the only thing I ever knew anything about, with—through empirical knowledge.

[They laugh.]

I didn't—I could photograph black people in Harlem, and that's terrific, but unless I brought insight, or understood something from the inside out, so therefore, the range of subjects I chose were things that I knew intimately.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: You know? Are my own anxieties, so there was—it's a whole different take.

MR. LYON: There was a mention—I think it's in that interview, of almost a kind of—a different kind of decisive moment for you, and I hesitate to bring this up.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: But you're—you mentioned that several friends of yours were killed.

MR. MICHALS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LYON: And I think this is 1966 that this had a profound effect on you. And I'd—you know, already in that 1969 little, you know, introduction to your sequence in Camera magazine, you talk about, "At the age of 37, I am already aware of my death."

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: And that just strikes me as so unusual—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, it was, and—

MR. LYON: —for—

MR. MICHALS: —you know, it was, but I've always had a very deep awareness of things metaphysical.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And certainly, death is part of that whole—for me, it was like turning a glove inside out. You know, photography was a glove, and then I simply turned it inside out, and started doing interior monologues and—then, I became the alpha and the omega of the work because whatever came to my mind, if I could figure it out, I could do it. And that was very—so, everything's been a constant liberation from—starting with the

decisive moment. So, I bought into the original definition of what photography was, but I don't know why I so quickly completely, you know, put everything into reverse and began to drive off in a different direction.

MR. LYON: One of the things you say in that recollection of your friends is, you know, on Thursday, they were there. On Friday, they weren't.

MR. MICHALS: Oh yeah.

MR. LYON: And I just—you know, that's such a motive, you know, through your work.

MR. MICHALS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LYON: This idea of disappearance—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —of something is there, but then it's not there—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. I wrote a piece, which I really liked. I'm trying to remember more of this—that was a long time ago.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: But I wrote a piece about a room, and it said—it was in this room on whatever the date was in the afternoon that the world ended, and—ended for this person—

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —who had been killed.

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. MICHALS: So, we didn't—nobody noticed. You know, I mean, nobody noticed that he had died. But his world was over. It was the end of the universe. It was the end of—and so—but if you looked at the room, it just looked like an ordinary room. The traffic kept going, and you know, people turned on the television. But his world had completely ceased, and that's what happens when you die. Your world ends—literally ends. And I found that a very intriguing notion that we're—that—

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: —the universe didn't miss him.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: Nobody missed him, except his intimates.

MR. LYON: You're bringing something up that I had wanted to touch on a little further on, but just let me mention it was [laughs] and I'm looking at the box that says Empty New York.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: You—I'm intrigued that you created rooms.

MR. MICHALS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LYON: You were just talking about one, that are almost existential—

MR. MICHALS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LYON: —in their bareness, their—you know, it's not—the rooms where things take place in your work, and even now—

MR. MICHALS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LYON: —in your videos, tend to be these kind of empty, a little haunted, a little strange—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —a little out of time. What—does this—and then, of course, I had to mentally think, oh, that's a little

bit like Magritte.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Well, yeah—

MR. LYON: Where does this—where does this come from?

MR. MICHALS: —I came—I don't know where. I always viewed rooms as being stage sets.

MR. LYON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And what was it that led me to that? Oh, when I was doing Empty New York; the reason I did Empty New York because the minute you put a person in the room, you look at the person.

MR. LYON: Mmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: You don't notice the environment. And if I would want to photograph a bodega, and I'd walk in and I'd say, "Can I photograph your store?" They'd—what's this for? What do you want? You know, you got to pay me—you know, no, so I just began to do empty interiors, early Sunday mornings, where I could put a camera lens right up against the glass when nobody was there, and they began to look more and more to me like stage sets. And I always—I always mention the example of a barber shop, and on the hook is the little white jacket that the barber wears.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And I have this image of him coming up and putting on his jacket, then doing this barber act. [Laughs.] And you know, and he would cut hair all day—

MR. LYON: Do what barbers do.

MR. MICHALS: —and then take would take—and you know, and that was—so, that was his literal theater, his—where he did, you know. And that became central, and I realize that the more—the more bare, the more—the room became more a background that I could play against, the more I loved it. I mean, I didn't have to worry about, you know, the style of the furniture. I didn't want it to be dated. I want it to be the generic room, or something like that.

MR. LYON: And yet, there is a kind of pervasive New York or European apartment quality—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —to many of them.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I'm drawn to that look, that style. It just instinct. It's built into my DNA taste—my—whatever that taste be, my DNA taste.

MR. LYON: Right, right. Right. So, I want to get to these quickly because, you know, that's where the meat is, but as we look at them, I'd like to pay—

MR. MICHALS: Sure.

MR. LYON: —particular attention to some of the devices you repeatedly use, like doubling, mirrors, and reflections, and scale shift—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —which is particularly interesting.

MR. MICHALS: Well, that comes back to the notion that people believe photographs.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And that gives the photographer the wonderful advantage to play with those perceptions and contradict them. So, when somebody shows me a car on the street, I know exactly what that is. But suddenly, if the car vanishes and it's in a photograph—of course, today, with computers, we're also used to movies with mega tricks and you know, all that. But I still do it the old fashioned way. You know, the primitive cut and paste. I don't do any of the tricks because I'm not capable of doing them. And I don't want it to look slick. I don't want it to look the Hollywood-ization whatever of photography.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: But I want it to look like it was done by a photographer.

MR. LYON: As we look at these, I'd like to try and put them into a couple of larger contexts, and see what you think—it strikes me, as I look at this, and even in your quip about the anti-decisive moment—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —that time is, in some deep way, at the center of what you're doing, your concept.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: But it's not one concept of time. It's like this multiplication of ways of thinking about time.

MR. MICHALS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LYON: And I was—you know, I was—started trying to categorize this, you know, in my own sense, from like the briefest moment to the longest duration.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: And they're all there, in your—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —in your work, from—you know, blurring to imply motion, to double exposure, to the—

MR. MICHALS: To sequences—

MR. LYON: —to the sequences—

MR. MICHALS: Every time.

MR. LYON: —and the unseen time between—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —the moments. But you also tackle decades of time in your work. Like, the image from *Homage to Cavafy* with the man who's confronting the portrait of his youthful self, you know?

MR. MICHALS: Yes, yes, yes. Yeah. I love that picture. I think it's a—

MR. LYON: Yeah—

MR. MICHALS: —very profound moment—

MR. LYON: —it's really—

MR. MICHALS: —as one gets old.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: Cause I wasn't older than I thought. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: If you weren't old, you wouldn't—yeah, yeah. And it even transitions to another temporal dimension —

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. LYON: —as in the pictures of some—

MR. MICHALS: The human condition, the guy—

MR. LYON: —you know—

MR. MICHALS: —in the subway turning into a star, yeah.

MR. LYON: For example. For example. And then, the other sort of big umbrella concept that I'd like to, you know, talk about—

MR. MICHALS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LYON: —as we go through are all the different ways you use writing—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —in your work because it's not just narrative. Sometimes, you'll—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Pure poetry.

MR. LYON: It's poetry.

MR. MICHALS: Well—

MR. LYON: Or sometimes, it's description in a—where it's almost like a short story; we're being given the feelings and the smells and the sounds—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —as well as, you know—

MR. MICHALS: It's something that it's like in—there are things in this photograph I'm not seeing.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: I guess—I think I have a—excuse the pun, See Dick, See Jane brain—you know, See Dick, See—spot, "See Spot Run." So, my writing tends to be of that school of writing. It's very, very basic. I once thought—I thought that, you know what was so—the primitive painter, Rousseau is to painting. I feel like the primitive—I'm the Rousseau of writing—you know, I write in a kind of basic, simplistic pattern.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: I don't have pretensions to literature. So, even if the writing is very much in the See Dick See Jane kind of photography I do, yeah.

MR. LYON: And that raises an interesting question because there've been comments, from time to time, about the—this—the awkwardness of the—

MR. MICHALS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LYON: —of the writing sometimes.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. LYON: And sometimes, you'll just—

MR. MICHALS: I usually get chicken scratch.

MR. LYON: And sometimes, if you decide to scratch something out, you just leave in the—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I leave—well, I leave mistakes in. I—

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: —don't certainly want to manufacture mistakes when they occur. I leave them because it's part of the imperfection. I hate the perfect photograph. Photographs are always perfect—perfectly exposed, perfectly printed, perfectly dodged, perfect—the perfect presentation. And I once, years ago, wanted to buy an Atget print I saw, which I couldn't afford. But I wanted this one because he had annotated it.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And marked instructions on the printing, or whatever else he had made. And I loved the idea that the writing was on there. It took it from being anonymous—anyone could have printed that, to very specific.

MR. LYON: It also seems—and this has been talked about, that in a certain way, your insisting on your

personalizing and your insisting on your authority as the maker—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —when you—when you write on a picture. It's not an objective object out there—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —any longer.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. I just had a thought about that. Yeah—oh, when you go to a movie, and you find yourself crying at the end of a movie, or if you just close the last page of a book, and you feel somehow satisfied or strangely moved, that's the triumph of the writer, or the movie people. They have taken your senses, and totally manipulated them that you begin to believe every fiction and every lie they tell, and you're moved by it. And that's the power of the work. So, when I—when I do something, I like for people have—I don't want twenty interpretations. I like them to have my specific idea.

So, when I did something like *Prodigal's Son Return*, which is a classical story, but I interjected and changed it by putting myself in it. And then, originally, the son comes home, and he's vulnerable and debased, and you know, and the father takes him in.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: But in my case, the son comes home—all those things, but nude and defeated. And in the process, the father takes his clothes off, and clothes the son, and makes himself nude and vulnerable. They did an exhibit up in Yale on *Prodigal Son Through History*, and I think I was the only contemporary person. She said I was the only one who changed the story line, to make the father participant—

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —to make the father the ultimate protector by making himself nude, which, to me, is the ultimate state of vulnerability, to be nude.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] You've also talked about that impulse to control, as one of the reasons why you're something of a lone wolf, as a creative person.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: You know, like you couldn't imagine yourself being a filmmaker because you would need all this—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I would have a terrible time, collaborating as much as you need to do. But you couldn't do a film without it, you know. And now that we're making films, I've begun to understand that better, but—and you do—you do need all that input, but I respect it more now because I feel—actually, when we do films, I expect something to happen that I'm not expecting.

[They laugh.]

Something will happen, or there'll be a—like when we did the last film, the Somnambulist. I came in with a concept of a woman—the man walks down the hall in this anonymous apartment, the hero of wherever. And he hears violin music, and then he goes into a room and he sees this man playing a violin. And as he plays the violin, flowers begin to float from the violin and cover her with flowers.

But when we—it looked awful.

[They laugh.]

It was terrible. She was too beautiful. It looked like a cheap perfume ad for something called Tabu, you know? Ta-booboo, in this case. And I just had to dump the whole concept on the spot. It was too perfect, and she was too perfect. I said, you know, "I'm having a problem because you're too beautiful. And this isn't about your beauty. This is about vulnerability." So, then, I had brought a mirror, and I turned it into a man walks down the hall now, but he hears somebody crying, or laughing. And when he walks in the room, he sees this woman looking at herself in a room, laughing. But she's a little—she's very much involved with herself in the mirror, but she's, you know, demented—I don't know what her problem is—

MR. LYON: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: —but something's wrong.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: Anyway, so, that's somehow on the spot, being free to completely dump something and come up with a new concept. So, I'm not so wedded that—I'm not so dumb that if I see something not working, I will do something else, yeah.

MR. LYON: It sounds, though, that when—both in your art and your editorial work, that you were pretty alive to the—to the possibilities of props, furniture—

MR. MICHALS: Yes.

MR. LYON: —chairs, somebody that happens to be there. I mean—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —you've always had an improvisational aspect to your work, haven't you?

MR. MICHALS: Yes, and when I do commercial work, I—what I—I could work in studios, which I didn't like, but I could do it. But what I was best at was going on location, and making something happen. The series I did for *Scientific America*, and we did for five years, went around the country—I think I did 60 of them. And we would go to a location, and somebody was the president of Westinghouse in Pittsburgh, and then we had—he claimed that, you know, he was something or other. His avocation, a stamp collector. And then, I would photograph him as a stamp collector, but I had to go to his house and, you know, put it—make it happen. So, it was that impromptu improvisation that I'm good at. That's one of my strengths.

MR. LYON: So, why don't we start—I don't know what Josiah's brought—ah, perfect. So, he's brought—

MR. MICHALS: Ah, here it is. Sequences.

MR. LYON: —Sequences down. So, this book was published by Doubleday in 1970, is it?

MR. MICHALS:
Yeah, I think it was '70, or '69.

MR. LYON: '69—not sure.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. LYON: It says copyright both years. So, now, maybe we can also just talk about books a little bit—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —as a vehicle for your work.

MR. MICHALS: My—I love books. I don't—I'm not that much interested in—why don't we just leave this like that for a minute. I'm not—of course, I do exhibits. But I'm not interested in exhibits. I love books, and books have been central to my pleasure in life. That's how I get my information. That's how I get my poetry. Everything. And so—and also, you know, when you have—the show comes down, but the book stays. You can take it to the bathroom when you need to. You could do anything with it. And books could be powerful. There are certain books that really were pivotal, or quintessential to opening of something for me. There was a wonderful book put out—I think MoMA put it out on Japanese art.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: I found it—I remember, a little book store in Santa Fe. I remember seeing it. And I was so thrilled because it introduced the reader to all the major Japanese painters and their prints, and it just blew my head off. I just thrilled, you know, to—and then, when I first became a photographer, I found a very obscure book on Atget, printed in 1960, printed by a company in Prague called Artia, which was a house. And it was a little monograph. And in those days, Atget wasn't that well known. I'd say, occasional with it. And this was just—thrilled me, just thrilled me, it was so—such an amazing—I mean, I would go to sleep with it. It was just lovely. So, there've been—and certainly, you know, *Leaves of Grass* did that.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And they've been quintessential books that—that was it.

MR. LYON: So, when you're—let me ask you—

MR. MICHALS: Sure.

MR. LYON: —how involved you were with the layout.

MR. MICHALS: Okay. I'm not.

MR. LYON: Not?

MR. MICHALS: No. Here's what happened. That's an interesting story, how that book came about. In the '60s, I had begun to do sequences, and when I was doing that campaign for *Scientific American*, you know, [inaudible], I worked with a guy named Milton Ackoff. And he was a wonderful, wonderful—we collaborated. We became friendly. And Milton was going off to—it was either Geneva or Zurich. And *Camera* magazine, that wonderful—it was edited by—his name was Porter. He was from Philadelphia. It was a house organ for a printing company.

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. MICHALS: And the way *Du* magazine was for [inaudible], well, I don't [inaudible] but they used it as a sample of their printing—

MR. LYON: Oh, I see.

MR. MICHALS: —so, it was the magazine. It was the one you wanted to be in. It was the one that went around the world; everyone saw it and respected it enormously. So, Milton was going to—and I said, here, take these—take these sequential photographs. You know, go to the office, since you're there. And he did. And when he came back, the guy, Mr. Porter, loved the work—this is 1969, and did a—practically a whole issue about it, with fold outs and you know, it was amazing. And then, I had a call from Doubleday, saying "we're thinking of doing photo books," and they had seen that issue of Camera, and "we loved these, and we'd like to do a book of them."

MR. LYON: Doubleday. Wow.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. And then, I'd only gone to MoMA twice in my entire life. I mean, go to see Szarkowski, who was in—Szarkowski was the—

MR. LYON: I knew him.

MR. MICHALS: Alas. So, but it was really Peter Bunnell—

MR. LYON: I knew Peter.

MR. MICHALS: He was Szarkowski's assistant.

MR. LYON: Ended up at Princeton.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, and he ended up, and he—so, I hit the trifecta. You know, the *Camera* magazine published, to an international audience. Doubleday approached doing a book, and then MoMA gave me an exhibit.

[They laugh.]

So, you know, bada-boom.

MR. LYON: Well, that's like one of those rockets with three—

[They laugh.]

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, let me have a liftoff here, yeah. But also, don't forget, it was completely alien to what photography was.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: It violated all the rules, setting something up, telling stories, and not looking—inventing everything.

MR. LYON: The MoMA press released, reproduced in this guy, has another young—

MR. MICHALS: Oh, yeah. William Burbach.

MR. LYON: That's it.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, he was the specific guy that worked with me on the exhibits.

MR. LYON: I see.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. But it—but it was—

MR. LYON: But it was Peter who was—

MR. MICHALS: —Peter who gave it the okay, after, of course, Szarkowski gave it the okay. Peter was looking for new kinds of photography.

MR. LYON: Mmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: He initiated a series of—like, they were doing photo sculpture. He was doing radical things for that time.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: And what I thought was interesting was Szarkowski was showing Atget, who was not modern. And Peter was the only one trying to introduce new concepts of what photography could be. And Szarkowski was still spinning his wheels in reportage with Friedlander and Winogrand and Diane—*Dee*ane, excuse me. And she was, in a way, a reportage photographer, if you think about it, where she—

MR. LYON: Yeah, well, that's true.

MR. MICHALS: —people. Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah, but just—

MR. MICHALS: But that was—that was what it was then.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: And so, ironically, I knew a guy who worked at Doubleday who ended up being the art director of the book.

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. MICHALS: And his name was Alex Gotfryd. And I didn't see the book until it was designed.

MR. LYON: No kidding?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: That's so unusual because—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I know.

MR. LYON: —I mean, today, you know, artists are so—usually so involved in their books, which is not necessarily a good thing.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Because I don't think all artists, though, necessarily—they can't view their work objectively.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Well, this is what I'm dealing with now, with our friend Whitfield Lovell.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: I did want to show you one of these because it struck me that one of the things I like so much about this book is that all of the images are exactly the same size.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. LYON: For the record, I'm talking about the *Sequences* book of 1970. Yes, I'm sorry.

MR. MICHALS: An aside about the same book. I sent them two sets of prints, one for publication, and work ones

—you know, for the—and then, work prints for the layout. Well, they published the work prints because I knew the difference, but I wasn't going to quibble. But the prints in the book were not my prints for publication. Anyway, somewhere, they got shuffled around, and got—

MR. LYON: Oh, my god. I just—there was this one—one of my problems with this book's design [referring to Carnegie retrospective catalogue -CL], if I can be so bold—

MR. MICHALS: Of course.

MR. LYON: —is that there is not a consistency in the sizing of the images—

MR. MICHALS: Mmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LYON: —or the presentation. And this sequence struck me as being particularly wrong-headed. Like, if I were laying it out, I would do bottom, next up, next up, next up. How would you look at—

MR. MICHALS: Well, yeah, because—I mean, it doesn't diminish the work. I mean, you get the idea.

MR. LYON: You get the idea, but—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —but shouldn't we be rising up the page?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I suppose.

MR. LYON: Just a question. [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: Okay, yes.

MR. LYON: But what's interesting—but what we're talking about is the sequence is arranged vertically. But what happens in the *Sequence* book is—except for the cover—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —as far as I can tell, is the—is its narrative.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: It's a sequence.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: It's one thing follows another.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. One of the things I hate about photography books, in principle, is that they're picture, picture, picture, picture, picture, picture—which is what—like, that's what this is about. And in some way, I think there's—I maintain that books should have a surprise. And like, dare I say, *ABC Duane*. It's filled with surprises. You don't know what the mix up is. It's going to be—you don't know. But there's a—there's a consistency in style of the layout.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: But there's a lot of play within. And I think the thing that I hate most of all is when something becomes too predictable.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: It's hard to avoid, but yeah, I like that. I like unpredictability.

MR. LYON: So, now, this book—this book does not have writing—

MR. MICHALS: No, that was the first book—

MR. LYON: —on the image.

MR. MICHALS: —is when I—it also was published in Italy. There is an Italian edition.

MR. LYON: Oh. So, each sequence has a—has a title page? Part title?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: And can you talk a little bit about the rhythm—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —of the images, versus the moments we don't see?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Well, first of all, what I like about—I don't like sequences in exhibits, especially when people put them all like a cartoon. I want you to actually walk from picture to picture so that you don't take the whole thing in. There has to be a certain element of surprise, you know, where you—this is destroyed if you go right to the end and you know the—it's like telling the spoiler alert. You know, you're giving it away.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. MICHALS: But this worked very well because when you look at the first picture, you have no idea what's happening here. Two men—you know, and then, very little—very slowly, it unfolds. So, this worked very well, in terms of—and it doesn't say cartoon, it doesn't say, you know, because—I thought of this as a different genre.

MR. LYON: And the piece we're talking about is *Chance Meeting*—

MR. MICHALS: *Chance Meeting*, yeah.

MR. LYON: —yeah.

MR. MICHALS: And also, there's a lot of power that you could—like making movies that are seven minutes long. You could express a lot in six pictures. This is—some of these express a real lot, yeah. It's more like haiku than—

MR. LYON: This is nice.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Were there others that were made around this time that you, for whatever reason, didn't include in this?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. There are some that were—that didn't work. And some of these are not quite—some are more perfect than others.

MR. LYON: Do you have a favorite?

MR. MICHALS: Oh, there are so many, but I mean—

MR. LYON: I mean, in this book.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, well. You could go from—*Young Girl's Dream*. That's—I mean, they're all terrific. There's some that are less terrific that I wouldn't reproduce again—that I wouldn't republish again. But this is probably the essential body of good pictures I had. Good ideas that I had, you know.

MR. LYON: And this—was this done with double exposure?

MR. MICHALS: Yes, double exposures.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. MICHALS: I was always quite willing to use the whole vocabulary of the camera. You know, I didn't mind double exposing. I didn't mind blurring. I didn't mind using dark room tricks, as long as they were within the context of—now, at that time, Jerry Uelsmann was a genius printer, and his photographs were all built on his ability to—each photography was a tour de force. But I'd use tricks, but they were more—they weren't about the tricks; they were to further the idea, or to help, you know, promote the idea. But they weren't about tricks in themselves. If—I would look at Jerry's, and I would think, how did he do that? He must've done this, or look where this—you know. But in these, I think were a little more incorporated into the idea that you don't figure how did they do—how did he do that?

MR. LYON: Right, right. It's the narrative is most important in—

MR. MICHALS: I actually shot *Young Girl's Dream* twice. The first time I did it, every time the girl got touched, she giggled, and I had to redo it. She completely ruined the shooting.

MR. LYON: This is a nice touch. He's—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —touching her breast, and she—

MR. MICHALS: She touches herself.

MR. LYON: —replacing—same place?

MR. MICHALS: Now, if I would re-shoot, if I would redo this same thing, I might come in on it—I might come into the actual touching because that's the point. You know, I kept everything as camera sat in a certain spot [inaudible] removed, you know—

MR. LYON: This is also kind of—a little bit of the power of it, isn't it? I mean—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah because—

MR. LYON: —because you're made to look for details.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, and each—yeah. And you wonder well, what happened in this frame? And I keep the frames as few as possible. I try to get rid of any surplus fat.

MR. LYON: Do you have a—or did you, at this time, have sort of an ideal number of images for a sequence in mind?

MR. MICHALS: No, I didn't like go over six pictures, but if something needed it, you know—but I liked to—also, I felt people's attention span isn't that great, so you should be able to tell something in—like haiku, in six pictures—or four lines or something.

MR. LYON: Right, right.

MR. MICHALS: And the light is very beautiful. I was always very particular—it's all daylight. And once I found my light, I was okay. But my light was my big concern.

MR. LYON: Did you have to wait for a particular time of day for this to work?

MR. MICHALS: No, because I knew what time of day would be [inaudible]. It's like Ansel Adams. If I told you this, I read—I saw a documentary and he said—and he would drive, you know, to get to this site because he knew in two hours, the sun would set there. And so, he'd get there like two hours early. Yeah. I thought, why don't you just come a half an hour early? You know what time it's going to set. Why sit there for two or three hours? You know—anyway, I just thought a waste of time.

MR. LYON: So, this is the picture that Joseph Cornell liked, right?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah—

MR. LYON: I mean, not this particular picture, but—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, yeah. But he used it—I gave him—he cut it up and put it in a collage. When I first met him, I didn't know whether he was gay or straight, but I knew if I would flash female nudes or male nudes, you know, you could tell—which picture people linger over.

MR. LYON: Mmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: Smart.

MR. LYON: Clever.

MR. MICHALS: Too.

MR. LYON: He must've been an odd duck.

MR. MICHALS: Very odd. Very odd duck. Yeah, it was a wonderful adventure, meeting him and being there, but yeah, he was the real thing. There are people I consider to be authentic artists—Joseph Cornell, Robert Frank. And then, there are people I consider to be—I consider Cindy Sherman a product of the art world. You know, she's—she fit in the system. You know, it was a symbiotic relationship, hitting the museum circuit, knowing where to go, going to show—and Joseph Cornell. You have to—did some of that, but he was such an oddball. You

know, whether or not he ever got exhibited, it didn't matter. He was an artist—

MR. LYON: Mmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —you know? I think if Cindy Sherman—only existing because of the construct of the art world. She would be a photographer, but never to the degree that she's, you know, viewed as the seminal artist of this period.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] What are—I'm trying to—I'm just wondering about photographers that you, in your view, are also kind of a little bit outside the game, and—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Well, they'd be like Meatyard, certainly.

MR. LYON: Mmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And so, my favorite artists were people like Cornell, Saul Steinberg—people that were their own categories—

MR. LYON: Mmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: De Chirico was his own category. There were other surrealists—and Magritte, too. But these were people—I like that idea, that they defined their own genre. And when you say, you know, like Morandi, you know exactly what that is. Then, there're people part of movements like Abstract Expressionists, and all those people.

MR. LYON: Mmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And everybody. But the peripheral people are my favorites.

MR. LYON: Can you talk about competition a little bit? Did you feel, ever, competitive with another photographer, or—

MR. MICHALS: No, because nobody did what I did. I mean—if there was like another guy out there, telling stories and doing sequences, but there was—I had my own—nobody dealt with metaphysical issues and dreams, or death—you know, photographers photograph death, they photograph tombstones, you know, corpses, people crying. That's what that looks like, but that's not the idea of what are the implications of death, you know—

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —and these are all things you can see, like the bogeyman, you know. That's, for me, scary, but I grew up with a bogeyman, and everybody—all cultures have a version of the bogeyman, but you know, with photography, if you can't see it, you can't photograph it.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: But when I did the bogeyman, I could only suggest why this girl was frightened by this coat that nobody was in. So, it's an interior dialogue.

MR. LYON: [Telephone rings.] It keeps doing that, sorry.

MR. MICHALS: Showtime.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Sorry.

MR. MICHALS: Same guy?

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Or gal. Good, okay. And sort of the passenger in the same—in the same taxi. Ambition. Did you—

MR. MICHALS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Oh, yeah.

MR. LYON: —did you—I don't know how to ask the question. I mean, clearly, you were ambitious—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, of course.

MR. LYON: —to accomplish something.

MR. MICHALS: What it was—I once knew a painter who was very good, and he lived in Brooklyn—not Brooklyn, New Jersey. But he never came to New York with his work because he was afraid of being rejected. So, he never

showed the work, but he wanted, somehow, for Castelli to come and kick down his door and [inaudible] drag him, kicking and screaming, to 57th Street or whatever. You have to have an ambition, of course. If I didn't have ambition, I'd still be sitting at in McKeesport and settled for what my—the heart—the hand I was dealt as a kid. But the Hindus say, you have to have just enough—not too much, not too little. And I have enough. Like, then, you get over.

Andy Warhol—

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —you know, people who are just driven with ambition, or like people like Jeff Koons. Any of the higher echelon of art world, they're pretty much driven by—but you have to have—my principle always was—it's like writing a hundred love stories—I mean, writing a hundred poems, but nobody ever reads them. You know, they're useless. So, I love the idea of having one other person look at it, and get it—or not get it, but just—yeah, yeah. So, I have enough ambition. And I'm not—if, with any ambition, I could've, you know, opened a studio.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: You know, and commercial it—you know, at one point, the art directors at *Harper's Bazaar*, they wanted to make me into their next big fashion name. But I don't—I didn't have—I didn't have those instincts. Would I get published? Sure. I love it. I love it. It's fun. Hold up a magazine, there's your picture. What do you know?

But I have—yes. Anybody who said they don't have any ambition—but then, there's a really almost self-destructive ambition that—you know who's very ambitious, but you never read much about it, was Diane Arbus. She was extremely ambitious. I used to know her. And I would run into her—we were both appearing in Esquire at the same time. And one day, I said—there was an exhibit at Eastman House. And I said, "Oh, are you going to be at that exhibit this fall?" And she said, "What exhibit?" And I said, "Well, they're doing this exhibit." She said, "Oh. Wonder why they didn't ask me. When is it? And who else is in it? How many pictures are there?" I mean—

MR. LYON: [Whistles.]

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. She was—she was not this little, "Hello. Hello, Mr. Fat Man with no head. Can I take your picture?" You know? Oh, no, no.

MR. LYON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Okay. Thinking—I haven't asked you much about Warhol.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: And you knew him quite well, I think.

MR. MICHALS: Well, as well as anyone could know him, I suppose.

MR. LYON: How do you mean that?

MR. MICHALS: Well, Andy was pretty much, you know, an enigma, you know, wrapped in a cloud of farts or something—I don't know, but Andy was just—I told you my classic Andy phone call. Talking to Andy was like talking to a phone off the hook. Ring, ring, ring, ring. Hello? Uh, uh, uh, uh—oh, hi, Andy. Uh, uh, uh, oh, hi, Duane. What's new, Duane? Oh, Duane, you're so fabulous. Uh, uh, uh. He was one of the most boring people you'd ever meet. Totally boring. Yeah, I mean this—Andy Warhol, and he—we had lunch—I don't know if I told you this, but we had lunch one day. And he said, "Be careful with your ideas because people will steal your ideas." And of course, he stole everybody's ideas. He classically would say, "Tell me what to say. Tell me what to photograph"—I mean, paint. "Tell me what to do." You don't know about it? He was a real piece of work. And talk about ambition. He was very much an arriviste when he was courting Capote. Capote really disliked him. And ironically, Capote went on—Andy is bigger than Capote now. You don't ask anybody in the culture who's Andy [inaudible] Capote? They wouldn't know who he is. You know, some will, but not—Andy's in the public domain.

MR. LYON: Yeah, totally. Totally. Wow, interesting. And his—I mean, his background is not miles away from yours.

MR. MICHALS: No, hardly. We're very similar. We both came from—he told me he was born in McKeesport, you know, a little still town. And you know, he was part of that whole generation of Croatians and Russians and Slovaks and Yugoslavians, who did all the dirty work in the in the mills for nothing. And we were both Slovak. They were a certain kind of religion.

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. MICHALS: Carpathians, or—I think there's a name for that religion. But that was—it was Slovak.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: —but I could talk to his mother in Slovak—

MR. LYON: Really?

MR. MICHALS: —because my grandmother brought me up to a certain age. So, we got along very well, you know?

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: He was always upward mobile, always trying to connect. Always trying to, you know—

MR. LYON: Right, right.

MR. MICHALS: —get there. And he did.

MR. LYON: And he did. He did.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah. So, here is another example—is it double exposure?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: But used for a really different purpose. And the piece we're talking about is—

MR. MICHALS: *The Spirit Leaves the Body*.

MR. LYON: —*The Spirit Leaves the Body*. And so, here, that—the time element that we were talking about—I mean, this figure is—

MR. MICHALS: It's a little bit too long, actually. This sequence is too long.

MR. LYON: This one's a little harder to read, but—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, but—

MR. LYON: But it worked. But you end up with a blank at the end.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Well, it's a very simple thing. It's—I literally, at that point, thought that when you died, the spirit walks away from the body. And See Dick, See Jane—see the spirits, see the body, see this body, walk away from the body, see the spirit walk away from the body. But I could really only do that with double exposures. So, the guy would have to lay down, and then get up, and then lay down, and then get up. And luckily, this guy was a photo editor at—art director at the *New York Times*.

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. MICHALS: And I was showing him what I was doing, and I said, "I'm looking for empty apartments." And he said, well, he had one. And so, we went to look at the apartment, and then he volunteered to do the pictures, so that worked out well.

MR. LYON: He looks—I don't know if I'm seeing it correctly, but he looks fairly emaciated.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, he was very skinny, which even contributes to the idea of death.

MR. LYON: Yeah, very much so. I mean, he's a believable corpse.

MR. MICHALS: He was painfully thin.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah. And then, the other thing about this, though. I mean, there's a different aspect—you're also working with scale.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: And it's almost as if the—as the spirit leaves, it takes on this scale, and the body shrinks in relationship to it.

MR. MICHALS: Well, because as it gets bigger, and it becomes more and more transparent, it fills the room—

MR. LYON: He's simply walking toward you, yes?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, that's all.

MR. LYON: That's all?

MR. MICHALS: That's all.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: We could've had roller skates, but that would've been a different concept.

MR. LYON: A different thing, yeah. Okay. I see. I had a—I had a little list here of—okay. Om—

MR. MICHALS: Ommm.

MR. LYON: Okay, so, the—now, *The Journey of Spirit After Death*—

MR. MICHALS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] No, I don't see it there.

MR. LYON: Let's see.

MR. MICHALS: That—

MR. LYON: I don't know what it looks like. That's the problem.

MR. MICHALS: That was the second book I did. It's skinny, and about this big. Let me—oh.

MR. LYON: It may be here.

MR. MICHALS: It might be—no, I don't see. Maybe—is that it? No. I don't think it's there.

MR. LYON: Got your upside down book.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. It was one long sequence of 20—but maybe, at the end of this, I can get Josiah to find a copy.

MR. LYON: Okay. So, one of the—now, this is 1976?

MR. MICHALS: No, no. I think it's earlier.

MR. LYON: Earlier?

MR. MICHALS: Is it—what does it say?

MR. LYON: Must.

MR. MICHALS: [inaudible] like '74—

MR. LYON: '74?

MR. MICHALS: —'73.

MR. LYON: Hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: What about—look at the end. No, I mean—might be a column. No? That's strange.

MR. LYON: It's—I think—

MR. MICHALS: Here.

MR. LYON: What's that one called? That's *Real Dreams*.

MR. MICHALS: Well, here's a picture I took in 1969. Well, no, this is—yeah, 1969. The photograph was—

MR. LYON: Oh, for heaven sakes.

MR. MICHALS: How could they do that? Well, here's some stuff down here. Is that any—

MR. LYON: Oh, that—yeah, there we go. '76.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, it's that late? Yeah, because I did *Journey to Spirit After Death*. And then, I did that little one called—the little—I think [inaudible] Mount Fuji, I think, came, and I came onto that.

MR. LYON: So—

MR. MICHALS: I don't remember exactly.

MR. LYON: —the first book with the writing is *Cavafy*? No?

MR. MICHALS: No. Oh, it was a little book of poetry called *Sleep and Dream*.

MR. LYON: *Sleep and Dream*. Okay. Yes. Ta-da. *Sleep and Dream*.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. This, I self-published, but I had to use Lustron Press, as they did all the publishing stuff. And then, this is a very, very flawed book, but it has lots of good stuff, too. This—god, I hadn't realized I had written this this long ago. It's called *If You Should Die Before Me*. Death. "If you should die before me, I would build you a pyramid, and each stone would be a memory of a moment that we had shared, and I would remember you. And when you awaken from your dream of death, should you find this pyramid in your travels, remember me, and how I once loved you, long ago."

MR. LYON: That's wonderful.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, it is. Very sweet.

MR. LYON: It's a real love poem.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: "He wades into the waters of the night. In the darkness, far beyond the light, and slowly, softly, sinking deep, pretends his death and drowns in sleep." Yeah. "Sad thoughts upon my brow, I close my eyes for now, with broken promises yet to keep. I rest my head on the breast of sleep."

MR. LYON: Lovely.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. They're nice little pieces.

MR. LYON: How would you have done this differently?

MR. MICHALS: Today?

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: I don't know. I wouldn't—I mean, I wouldn't redo any of it.

MR. LYON: I mean, I understand. I'm just curious about what—okay. And for you, what are the sort of the signal books of the, you know, first decade or so that you were making books? What are the ones that are—see *Sequences*—

MR. MICHALS: Well, that's a hard question. Well, *Homage to Cavafy* was important because it was the first gay book I did—not gay book, although it was not a typical gay book. There wasn't any fucking or any, you know, transvestites. It was just—well, like that photograph we mentioned earlier about the man looking at a portrait of himself. And it says when he was—when he was young, he could not imagine being old. And now that—now that's old, he cannot imagine being young. And that's a very—and the poems in this are by Cavafy—

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —but this is the one. And the man living with a cat by himself, and looking at a portrait of him when he was young.

MR. LYON: Now, did you—did you produce images of this, and write on them, or was this strictly the photo and the set—type, set, type?

MR. MICHALS: No, no. I did the photographs. The poems are by Cavafy.

MR. LYON: Oh, yeah, what am I saying? I'm sorry. Okay.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Well, you know, like—I loved that one.

MR. LYON: But this is you, right?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, that's my writing.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. My—

MR. LYON: That's what I meant.

MR. MICHALS: —the photographs to go are my text.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. MICHALS: But this is about a father who comes home too late—I mean, the son who comes home—his father already died. If you look at the figure, you know, the one hand is clenched, and the other hand is opened. It's this—

MR. LYON: Oh, sort of push/pull—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, ambiguous—

MR. LYON: —ambiguous, yeah. Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: And you know, that the son helps him be very beautiful. You know, there's erotic tension in this. And in the age, youth—

MR. LYON: Right, right.

MR. MICHALS: —you know. But—and this, actually, I got so much feedback from people who, over the years, I don't remember when this was done, but people, over the years, had seen this, you know, a long time ago, and how—it's gay people. It meant something to them—

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —beyond the *Hustler* magazines and all that. But this—see, I always maintained you have to bring insight into what you're photographing, not just showing what it looks like. So, I was bringing insight, my insight, into these various ideas, yeah. But there's a—there's a common—like, this is father/son relationship, or mentor, or whatever.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And then, there's—like this one. It's I could—I could read it quite clearly in this palm, and there would be a tragedy, and my love could not have, you know, protect him. So, it's just—you know, somebody's reading somebody's palm, and could see the future, and—

MR. LYON: So, the notion of fate and the notion of—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —predestination, and—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —you know, these things. God, you could be a Presbyterian.

MR. MICHALS: Really? Oh.

MR. LYON: Though, this one—this one, I could read it quite clearly, is unusual for the floor—

MR. MICHALS: The debris?

MR. LYON: —the debris.

MR. MICHALS: You know what that is?

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Negative.]

MR. MICHALS: Two things. In my mind, it's the accumulated knowledge of the old man.

MR. LYON: Ah.

MR. MICHALS: Those are his books, the debris of his life—the memories and all that stuff.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And the young guy is just sitting there, you know, wrinkle-less, having just—fresh out of the box.

MR. LYON: Mmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And—but I like the idea of using—and I did it once before, in another book, where it had to do with fortune telling, where somebody could see something.

MR. LYON: Oh, that's interesting. Yet another dimension of your—this engagement with time and all that's—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, yeah. Totally.

MR. LYON: Yeah. And interesting, it's followed by a poem with the title "Half An Hour."

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Oh, that's a lovely poem. Have you ever read it?

MR. LYON: I never have. I have a book of his poetry at home.

MR. MICHALS: Let me read this for you.

MR. LYON: Please do.

MR. MICHALS: I don't read well, but I like doing it. "Half an hour. I never had you, nor I suppose will I ever have you. A few words, an approach, as in the bar yesterday—nothing more. It's sad, I admit. But we who serve Art, sometimes with a mind's intensity, can create—pleasures that seem almost physical -- but of course only for a short time. That's how in the bar yesterday—mercifully helped by alcohol—I had half an hour that was totally erotic. And I think you understood this and stayed slightly longer on purpose. That too was very necessary. Because with all the imagination, all the magic alcohol, I needed to see your lips as well, needed your body near me." And that's just a—a lot of this—Cavafy's writing is about longing.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And a lot of my writing is about that. There's one—I'll see—I'll see if it's in here. Sorry. Oh, here it is. It's called "It's About Time, An Afternoon Sun." "This room, how well I know it. Now, they are renting it, and the one next to it, as offices. The whole house has become an office building for agents, businessmen, companies. This room, how familiar it is. The couch was here, near the door, a Turkish carpet in front of it. Close by, the shelf with two yellow vases—vases [sic]. On the right—no, opposite—a wardrobe with a mirror. And in the middle the table where he wrote, and the three big wicker chairs. Besides the window the bed where we made love so many times. They must all still be around here someplace, those old things. Besides the window the bed; the afternoon sun used to touch half of it. One afternoon at four o'clock, we departed -- we separated for a week only—and then—that week became forever." But that—see, the room?

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: And I respond to that, the room was a staged set.

MR. LYON: The sudden expansion of time at the end—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —a week became forever.

MR. MICHALS: And remember, in the *House I Once Called Home*? I photographed all those rooms where life had been lived.

MR. LYON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: You know, when I was a kid.

MR. LYON: Oh, here it is.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, here it—

MR. LYON: *The journey of the spirit after death*. That's what I was looking for.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, that's the German—this is the German version.

MR. LYON: Ah.

MR. MICHALS: It was also published in Germany. Oh. Do you want me to—

MR. LYON: The—

MR. MICHALS: Well, it's a—I think, the second book I did.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: And it's based on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. It was my most ambitious one. It contains 26 pages—pictures, rather. I think that's the longest. And it had, no, *The House I Once Called Home* is longer. But it has to deal with the concept of the transition of death, if you just subscribed to Buddhism, and you know, those eastern ideas so that the energy—first of all, there's no heaven or hell. I mean, that's, you know—you know I'm an atheist, so I don't believe any of this. But in this case, it's based on the concept that we are pure energy. The Buddhists say our true identity is a clearness, and this clearness believes what it experiences. And the person dies, go through the four bardos—I call them conditions of being.

And the first bardo is the transition—there's a lot of confusion, you know, you don't realize you're dead. You don't realize what's going on. There's no—we have no experience in our culture to prepare people. And at any point, if you understood the true nature of what was going on, you could free yourself. And as you go through the transition, you begin to see the white—the corny white light, which some people said that it's probably a function of the brain, firing off certain synapses, for some reason—I don't know. And it's all—this is based on the concept that the body is really like a radio. It's a receiver. So, when you turn the radio off, that means it can still [inaudible] whereas individual receivers picking up the energy. When this—when this—my Duane suit evaporates, the energy's still there, except this particular receiver isn't there.

So, the second stage is after you go through—you go through which I call the wandering—well, that's—you go to the second stage would be what Catholics would call Purgatory.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And they say you have to go through there to cleanse the soul.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: But the Buddhists say that what happens is your mind becomes manifested. So if, indeed, you spend your whole life believing in Jesus and fire and damnation, you're going to get your fire and damnation. As real as this is—

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —this is my mind become manifested.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: This reality. And that reality is just as real. So, you better have pleasant thoughts, my dear. You really will get a kind of hell, of your own making.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: But if you realize that, oh, this is—I know what this is. This is the bardo. This is where my mind is playing tricks on me, and I don't believe this. You can free yourself from it—

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —at any point. Like, right now, I could free myself. And then, I forget, but then the last one is the return. Most people have to come back, and again, if you subscribe to reincarnation, the energy is recycled—

MR. LYON: Oh, so it's a cyclical—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, until it gets to a point where you realize you are it. So, this is the spirit wandering.

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. MICHALS: And the spirit goes back to visit where he lived, and he visits his old—his friends were crying, but they don't know where he—this is where the spirit dies.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: He falls down a flight of—well it starts here. He falls down a flight of steps.

MR. LYON: Ah. Oh, and this is—so, this is an early instance of writing on the—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Well, I—it's probably maybe one of the first.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: But it's not about writing. It's just—now, this is where he's losing consciousness.

MR. LYON: Oh, I see.

MR. MICHALS: And when he loses consciousness—

MR. LYON: It gets darker.

MR. MICHALS: —and then, that's his—

MR. LYON: Ah.

MR. MICHALS: —energy, consciousness. He's left. And then, he absorbs into the consciousness, and he becomes —that's who he is. And then, he comes out—yeah. And then, he comes out, and he—

MR. LYON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —out of the consciousness. He's on the death plane now. That level of—that dimension. And here, he begins to come awake in a new consciousness. And he says, "How can I be dead?" He doesn't understand.

MR. LYON: Mmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: He doesn't know what's going on. He looks in the mirror, and he—you know, he's—

MR. LYON: That's a wonderful picture.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. That's my great friend, Danny Maffia. And then, he—this is *The Wandering*. He visits. He's going around. Like, when you see—like—

MR. LYON: Look at this. The bareness and the stage set aspect of the setting.

MR. MICHALS: Are those the stairway to heaven? I don't know. And then, here, he—he visits his friends, and they're crying, but they don't see him there.

MR. LYON: Right, right.

MR. MICHALS: And he—oh, my friend, Esta called up. She knew I was doing this. She said, "The lady downstairs in the apartment below me died. And all her stuff's there." So, that's the—

MR. LYON: How perfect.

MR. MICHALS: —the debris of an actual dead person. So, he goes back, and he's visiting his things in his former life. That's a metaphor for his former life. And then, he hallucinates—that's the bardos. And he thinks he sees Adam and Eve, but it's all a hallucination. His mind becomes—and then, he sees his friends, but they're a hallucination. They're—you know, they're not real. See, there's a room again. And I love the wallpaper—

MR. LYON: It's great.

MR. MICHALS: —because the wallpaper comes through the blur. And then, he goes into despair, and he's like an animal, like an egg with feet.

MR. LYON: He looks like a chimera in that.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. It's like he wants to come back. He wants to—there, he prays for the light to come back. And he's—this is—in the large print, he's double exposed, so he's in the earth, actually.

MR. LYON: Oh, oh.

MR. MICHALS: You can see the leaves, and he wants to return. And this is the spirit in ignorance. That guy could actually balance on his head, upside down. And that's our true condition, [yawns] excuse me, is ignorance. You know—

MR. LYON: Funny, it looks like the Tarot figure. You know, the—

MR. MICHALS: There's one like that?

MR. LYON: —The Hanged Man.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: And so, he's in—and then, this is the light, of course.

MR. LYON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And he meets a teacher, and he realizes—he says "I am." He realizes he's liberated when he realizes that he's actually the universe. And here's where he—"You wicked witch, I'm"—

[They laugh.]

—see, he begins to vanish.

MR. LYON: Weave, and to vanish, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: And he's absorbed into—and then, he comes back.

MR. LYON: Oh, that's nice.

MR. MICHALS: And then, you'll see, he comes back. It's an oversimplification of a very complex idea. An ode to be the light.

MR. LYON: Ode to be the light.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: It's lovely.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: Went—you know, it went nowhere.

MR. LYON: It's the fate of much publishing.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, well, but the ideas are very relevant.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: And actually, revelatory.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, were you, at that time—

MR. MICHALS: Meditating.

MR. LYON: —when that was done, taking Buddhism pretty seriously?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I was meditating. I meditated for 10 or 12 years, and I still—I stopped doing it because it had become a pose. I was doing my shtick—

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. MICHALS: —you know, it's time to meditate, okay. It had lost relevance. It was just—become a bad habit. It was a posturing.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And I thought I had to just stop, and go back to zero, start all over. But I also realized, you can't make this happen. Monks would meditate for 45 years, and nothing ever happened. And I have a recent friend who did have illumination. It was this amazing—he just startled. He'd only been thinking about these things for a couple of years, and he had it—the real thing. And I thought the best way to get it was stop wanting it.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: So, what I want, actually, before I die, is to know it. You know, direct experience, and not reading a love story about the universe, but actually being the universe, which we are, we just don't—you know what I think it's like? You know a figure ground—

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —you know, where you look at a picture, and it looks like a vase?

MR. LYON: Right, right. The heads.

MR. MICHALS: And then, you look again, and you realize it's the two profiles. Well, that's what it is. We spend our entire lives looking at it as two profiles. I mean, you have that moment, when you suddenly see everything, all along, has been a vase. It's that flip. That's what happens. You can't make it happen.

MR. LYON: Yeah. And you can't see it both ways simultaneously.

MR. MICHALS: Maybe, in some condition, you can—

MR. LYON: I guess some people can, but I—

MR. MICHALS: —but I don't know. I certainly would like to turn the switch, and I'd like to see the vase for a change. I'm tired of looking at the profile—especially your profile.

MR. LYON: I know. It's hard to take, but—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: —it'll get better. It'll get better.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, one of these days.

MR. LYON: You know, I was actually MoMA—no, Debra and I were at—in Chelsea, and there was a John's show, and John's monoprints at Pace, maybe? And you know, he's deploying his usual motifs, and there were a lot of images of the vase with the heads, you know? And I was like, you know, boy, does he go on a mileage out of not very much. [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: You know, if he sticks to flags, numbers, maps, beer cans, he's great. Ask him to draw anything, he can't draw his way out of a paper bag; he's really awful. And the compositions that the man—compositions aren't very interesting. And if they weren't by him, nobody would look at them twice. Like, he's only good at, you know, public domain stuff. I'm not totally sure, but I'd like to find out, you know Bonwit Teller's used to be the hot store, and they used to have the most interesting windows. And who was it? Who was the great window trimmer? He went onto Tiffany's.

MR. LYON: Oh, who was the boss of—

MR. MICHALS: Tim Moore.

MR. LYON: Rauchenberg and Johns?

MR. MICHALS: [inaudible] but it was their work—

MR. LYON: Then, who was there? Who hired them?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, exactly.

MR. LYON: That guy.

MR. MICHALS: I'm sure—and I don't know it, but I don't know whether—he had all those flag pictures in the fourth of July windows at Bonwit Teller's. I didn't know if those were commissioned by Bonwit's, or if he just happened to have them, but the idea—and he also showed Rosenquist in the windows. And then, after he left, I did the windows one year with sequences—

MR. LYON: Really?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, second echelon.

MR. LYON: That's interesting.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, but that was very exciting. Bonwit's was—and now it's Trump Tower, of course. Yeah, anyway. Oh, the stories I could tell.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Well, the only thing I would want to be in Trump Tower for is to do a certain deed.

MR. MICHALS: Memorial service.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Memorial service, exactly.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: So, this *Real Dream* starts with this—a failed attempt to photograph reality, bringing us back to this, you know, question about, you know, the relationship of your work to the mainstream.

MR. MICHALS: *The* reality, yeah. Yeah. The—yeah. No, it's true, because people photograph reality, regurgitating street reality. So—and I maintain that you can't photograph *the* reality; you can only photograph, you know, a version of observable facts.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: But the essential reality, the reality—the other three quarters of the pie, the dreams, the anxiety, the heartache, the loneliness, the wistfulness.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: That's ignored. And so, I say, you cannot photograph the ultimately reality. You can only photograph this particular version. So, that's what that's about. That's a manifesto.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] It is. It is. So—and how—what was the reception of this book, *Real Dreams*?

MR. MICHALS: I don't remember. I really don't. And what I simply did was wrote down all the ideas that I talk about in my talks—

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —because I figured, at least there'll be a record someplace, you know.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: But that was ages ago, like in '70—early '70s. That's 30, 45 years ago. Can you imagine?

MR. LYON: No.

MR. MICHALS: And I'm still talking about the same stuff, with variation.

MR. LYON: Well, that's interesting, in a way. You know, you hadn't—this goes back to what I was trying to get at, when we first started—probably not very articulately, which is that you really seemed to have an unusually clear concept of what you were doing, and did it—fueled your work, you know, every bit as efficiently, as you know, maybe Sol LeWitt's concept of what he was doing. He knew—

MR. MICHALS: Totally, except my concept was much more complicated than his. But if you—let's see. "Most of these things are things, you know, things are what we will them to become." That's interesting. "It is important to stay vulnerable to permit pain, to make mistakes, not be intimidated by touching. Mistakes are the—are very important, if we're alert." Well, these—I still say this. People believe in the realities of photographs, but not in the reality of painting. I mentioned that. I would like to take a walk with William Blake and Thomas Eakins. "The

sight of these words on a page pleases me. It's like some sort of trail I leave behind, clues, strange marks made, that prove that I was once here. We are mental constructions, change our chemistry, our point of reference, and reality changes. Nothing is what I once thought it was. You're not what you think you are. Nothing that—and you are nothing you can imagine." So, I'm—that same bag of tricks I'm still employing. You know, luckily, they're unsolvable—I mean, they don't have solutions. Well, the book—well, and I'll talk about the book, the one I really loved, and was very particularly proud of is *Questions Without Answers*.

MR. LYON: Ah.

MR. MICHALS: And it's a big one, down below, somewhere. Under that one, I think. No? Oh. It's not here?

MR. LYON: That's the essential—that's the portraits book [grunts].

MR. MICHALS: Heavy.

MR. LYON: No, that's the Walt Whitman book.

MR. MICHALS: What about on the—

MR. LYON: Oh, here it is. Here it is. I found it.

MR. MICHALS: I kept spending a lot of time with my assistants. And I said, you know, we're traveling, "Why don't you ask questions? And let's get a"—and they never did. So, then, I asked the questions. And they are, "What is life? What is death? What is God?" and all the essential questions. And I answered them all in rhyme—I love rhyming; it's fun. I like playing with the words—I especially like difficult rhymes. I admire Ira Gershwin. You know, "Maybe Tuesday will be my good news day." I thought that was lovely. Or heart—or is that heart? You know, "She dances overhead on the ceiling above my bed in the night." You know, those are just—now the lines are, "Up your ass, mama" you know? There's no—there's no—the guy looks in the mirror. There're—I didn't want to publish this, but he insisted. I was trying to mat but it's when you wake up in the morning—

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —you know, and you start—you open your eyes, and you start—oh, yeah, it's time—and you look up, and you see a chandelier on the ceiling, and then you turn your head, and oh, then you see the window. And then, very slowly, you evolve back. Well, I didn't want to—and I did want to write what was homosexuality, but he wouldn't, and he's the biggest—I mean, certainly a gay guy, and I never understood why. But let me—I like "What is the Universe." I'll just read the first paragraph because that's always the hardest one to write.

"The universe is a solid emptiness, a bizarre event, an issuance of energy witnessed as colossal globes of constellations floating in the sea of swelling space. And such numbers and dimensions as to dwarf our modest comprehension. This peculiar enterprise, which defies the logic of our eyes, is the Chinese box of concentric worlds, each inside of one another that extends in all directions, ad infinitum. This swirling spectacle fills our night skies with stars, like strings of pearls, and has this center everywhere, and this strange conundrum—this vacuum of—this cabinet of curiosity expands in some exotic vacuum, void, where alchemist tricks are employed. How else to explain why the light of refracted prisms is detained in black prisms? And what of missing matters rate, and the fate of red, giant stars, those enormous bloated monstrosities? Perhaps, the Hindu myths are true"—I'm on a roll. "Perhaps, the Hindu's myths are true, surging like an explanation from the silent Bindu. That point of potentiality, in repose, the cosmic order unfolds to actuality, then deflates upon itself, and inhalation to a close. Reason retreats from such astounding feats and man's conceits are humbled. The cosmos is our home, and will always be unknown to us, lost children of the universe, exiled in the garden—this garden of Eden, Earth."

Then, there's a poem within a poem. It's called "Lost Among the Stars." "Those giant spinning wheels in space, spinning stars like spider's lace. Will they miss my upturned face, when my soul has left this place?" I'll just read you one other one. And here's "Old Age." "Old age is that place in time of life lived long, of a life when all has passed, and the future's gone. Now, a different song is sung, and the world is viewed from a higher rung. The soul is closer to the sun, which melts the body of its youth—sinew, bone, and yellowed tooth. At the age—at this—as the arch of age descends, reality is less real. Vanity cannot protect, nor failed ambitions be concealed. The tooth has left its grand—the tooth has left grand dreams bereft. So much in life has been its—lost its worth. The body stoops to greet the earth. The soul's geography has changed. Lines that once were streams have become—been replaced by the wrinkled rivers of the face. The body wakes one night in pain, a new sensation it cannot explain. The sturdy youth now needs a cane. At dawn, he felt death say his name. The young man has no time to waste. The elder does not move in haste. Old age is a fragment of its prime, a summer rose now in winter's climb. Like all experience, old age, by nature, is innocent. We define what it will be, comic, turn, or tragedy. Are audiences dead? With a nestling—settling of the dust, as in time, all things must, the echoes of our lives are heard. It made no sense. It seems absurd." Yeah, there are all kinds of things.

MR. LYON: It's wonderful.

MR. MICHALS: Last one. I'm sorry. I'm taking advantage of your patience.

MR. LYON: That's—

MR. MICHALS: This is a hard one.

MR. LYON: —it's a privilege. It's lovely. Please.

MR. MICHALS: This is a harder one. "Who am I" This was the hardest one.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. MICHALS: "I am what is being experienced. The universe focused, in the eye of the beholder. There is a quality of sensation, felt, as myself, which, like the eye of the hurricane, is a calm center of awareness. The exact point of myself in this calm is held as if it were in the black hole, where my purest reality cannot escape itself, the absolute. I am tethered to the absolute by the cord of consciousness. Again and again, I gaze hard at my reflection in the looking glass, then blink without acknowledgment, for my stare reveals no one is there. All descriptions of me are like barnacles attached to me, for nothing is really mine. My name is a word, like any other sound which, when repeated, blows to babble. My pride enjoys the false luxury of vanity, a cosmetic decoration that casts me into the furthest ring of self-delusion. I distract myself with novelties, but they are not me. I identify with follies, but they are not me. I am accomplice to my own ignorance. I'm a magnifying glass of attention. My personality has the permanence of fog. I communicate with myself in monologue. My questions echo in my mind. All this thinking exhausts me, and I must rest, but who falls asleep in dreams?" Yeah. Well.

And I did the "Four Ages of Man." I mean, "Six Ages of Man." This is—oh, this is—all right, really, only the first—this is "What is Memory." "Memory is the cemetery of our histories' spent days. It is the prologue to the moments seen in our lives, one act plays, where ghosts perform their turns upon recall, and we are the author and the audience of it all."

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And here's "The Seven Ages of Man."

MR. LYON: Ah, nice.

MR. MICHALS: And then, "Old Age." This is brief. "Pain denies that pleasure which once was, and cheats life of all its meaning. His dear wife has gone ahead. Old men sleep alone in bed. How quickly it all came down to this, a sad goodbye, and a memory of a kiss." "Middle Age."

MR. LYON: [Laughs]

MR. MICHALS: I'm touched by all this. I really am. "Middle Age." "So, this is who he came to be. Perhaps, he should've gone to sea. It's true, he never was the best, and doesn't talk much to his wife, but it's more or less the life he chose. He's more or less content. Perhaps, he should've gone to sea. It's all irrelevant." Okay, done. So, this is my favorite one, I think.

MR. LYON: Okay. *Questions Without Answers*. With Twin Palms.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: This fellow appears in some other—

MR. MICHALS: Oh, he's in two books. He's in *Walt Whitman*. That's John Painter. He's in *Walt Whitman*, and he's also in this one. The whole book's about him—mostly. Mostly, yeah. There's a magic act, and—

MR. LYON: You used a magic image on the front of your Bulfinch book?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, the one with the pulling the head out of the thing?

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: That should've been a little bit better. I couldn't see because I was, you know, self-timer. But it's—it was good.

MR. LYON: It's pretty effective.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah. That was actually the first book by you that I had looked at very carefully. I worked for Bulfinch for a while.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, you did?

MR. LYON: Yeah, and that book had come out, I think, just a year or two before I got there. Janet Bush was the photography editor there.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, yeah?

MR. LYON: Yeah, I don't know if they bought your book in from another publisher, or what the story was, exactly.

MR. MICHALS: No, Bulfinch was—what was that?

MR. LYON: Little Brown.

MR. MICHALS: No, but what book was it? Was it—

MR. LYON: The—

MR. MICHALS: —was it the one right there, *The Essential Duane*?

MR. LYON: *The Essential*, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, that was published originally—that was published in England—

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: And I think French and Germany, and then America.

MR. LYON: Right. Because so—I thought that they had bought it in from another publisher because she—you know.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. But you know what I loved about this book? See this?

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: That's an accident. I couldn't see that when I did it, but I just loved that—I think that's very elegant.

MR. LYON: It is perfect, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. I could've have planned that any better. That's John. John, I met, was 19. We're still friends—he's 40 something now. He has two kids. I was the best man at his wedding. That's interesting—that's about—it's called *The Mirror*.

MR. LYON: *The Mirror*.

MR. MICHALS: It's about—all this talk about transgender, so when this guy looks in the mirror, he sees himself as a woman, and when he puts the mirror back down, he becomes a man again.

MR. LYON: So, this is more—there were more vertical presentations here.

MR. MICHALS: I suppose. I didn't—never thought about it.

MR. LYON: Who designed this?

MR. MICHALS: It was done in London. It's written by—

MR. LYON: Oh, Marco—

MR. MICHALS: Marco Livingstone.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: He's done a couple things with me.

MR. LYON: Oh, it's Thames & Hudson.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, Thames & Hudson.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, of the—of the writers who have written about your work, who stands out for you?

MR. MICHALS: Marco Livingstone. He's—we've done a number of projects. He was the curator at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, and he did the catalog for that exhibit that I had. And then, we became friends, and then he began to freelance and do other things. He's done many, many books with Hockney, so he's well positioned in English art—

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: —I mean, in the English art world, to know everybody, and—

MR. LYON: Well, it seemed that your work, in a way, would be particularly attractive in England. I mean, just there's something, you know, kind of a like a crossover sensibility, and working in multiple mediums, and a literary sensibility.

MR. MICHALS: But in France, it's—

MR. LYON: Is France the—

MR. MICHALS: That's the—that's the place. But I think it's because I deal with surrealism. I deal with language and metaphysical ideas. I deal with—that realm of, you know, I'm not going to compare myself because I'm not, but they're famous for their intellectual philosphique [ph] and all that—philosophy. I don't know. So, yeah, I'm very popular in France—England, too. But I mean, France—I'm more popular in Europe than I am here. And it's not to say I'm not known here. You know, I am to a degree, but—

MR. LYON: Why do you think that is?

MR. MICHALS: Well, because I do—nobody reads.

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. MICHALS: I do a lot of writing. I remember once, a student sent me—well, you look at your work, and have to read it. And then, you have to think about it. And I have to look at it, and—

MR. LYON: Too much trouble, huh? [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: Camels taste good like a cigarette should. Now, that makes sense. You know, but it's [inaudible] line—a killer line, but no, so, my work is more demanding, and you know, kids don't want to be bothered. But for those who deign to read, probably, I expect, after I'm gone, somebody down the road, will really start really reading everything. Like, nobody's read that stuff I just read to you. They don't even know that's there. And even if they did read, they wouldn't know what to do with it.

MR. LYON: Well, I think what's part—part of what's interesting to me is that we are so imprisoned by genres.

MR. MICHALS: Yes, totally.

MR. LYON: And even more, mediums.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: You know, you're a photographer, so here are your boundaries—

MR. MICHALS: They're easier to label and handle, and deal with.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: And define.

MR. LYON: Yeah. And you've embraced your identity, as a photographer, too. I don't mean to say that your—but your work leaks out—

[They laugh.]

MR. MICHALS: No, no, it's—

MR. LYON: —into other areas.

MR. MICHALS: —it's not virgin photography. It's, you know—

MR. LYON: Compromised photography. [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: So many—so many ways, yeah. Let me count the ways, yeah.

MR. LYON: Other critics? Max [Kozloff], for example.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Do you feel he has a handle on—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I love Max. And he's so brilliant, he intimidates me. It took me four times to finish reading the text he wrote in—oh, as a matter of fact, we had a lot of trouble with Twelvetrees [Press]—it's called—it's underneath.

MR. LYON: Underneath that—okay.

MR. MICHALS: At the bottom of that. It's called *And I'll Be Coming Then*. But Max's title was *The Duane Michals Story*. No, that's not it.

MR. LYON: No, that's not it.

MR. MICHALS: It's underneath that.

MR. LYON: Here it is.

MR. MICHALS: There it is. *Now Becoming Then*. And he wrote an extensive text—look, and you'll see—

MR. LYON: Oh, wow. Yeah, it goes on and on.

MR. MICHALS: Look!

MR. LYON: Jeez.

MR. MICHALS: I mean, I took me three times to read the whole thing, and I felt obligated to.

MR. LYON: Yeah, after all—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. But I like Max enormously. But I kept a dictionary next to me so that I could look up things quickly, the words that I didn't know. And he's really, really brilliant, but he's deeply—a deep intellectual. You know? Marco is lighter, you know, and he writes with a lighter style. But Max is—he's more French intellectual, if you know what I mean. And we had a hard time with Twelvetrees, they treated him very badly. Jack Woody treated him badly. And I like him enormously. And that's why I was so happy—did you see that thing we did at SVA?

MR. LYON: Yes, I did.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah, it was great.

MR. MICHALS: I was happy to be a part of that, and to salute him.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah. No, we—there was a—it would make a great subject for a photograph, actually. It was this—Max has this ancient crew that he plays poker with.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, yeah.

MR. LYON: And I've been joining them for some time now. I'm much valued because I have a car, and I can drive a couple of them home.

[They laugh.]

But—

MR. MICHALS: Is Charlie Traub one of them?

MR. LYON: Yeah, we play with Charlie in the summer sometimes.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: But I think he and Charlie—I mean, they like each other, but they had some kind of poker falling out at some point—

MR. MICHALS: Oh, okay.

MR. LYON: —that preceded my involvement. So—but I've played poker at Charlie's a number of times, so I shouldn't be going on about this. It makes me seem like—

MR. MICHALS: It's always about you, isn't it?

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: The other two books, which—well, each book has, certainly, private importance to me. But *The House I Once Called Home*, I really loved, and was very important. And my army book, which never went anywhere—

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: —was very important because it was—the army was the worst time of my life. It's called*The Lieutenant Who Loved His Platoon*.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: And the army was the worst time of my life, and so, to deal with it—I was so thrilled, after all these years, to get this off my back. [Laughs.] It was just a killer. Can you believe that's me? That's my tank, 25. I was best man at this wedding, too. Dave Burkett. Sweetest guy in the world. I lost touch with him; I'd like to—I hope he's still alive. Yeah. That's the—this is wonderful photography. This day, in the forest, in Germany—here it is. All these old, old memories.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: These are—look at the size of that tree. This is in Mainz, on leave. Let's see.

MR. LYON: Let's see, you were in Germany for how long?

MR. MICHALS: Two—oh, no, a year.

MR. LYON: A year. I like the look of the other guy.

MR. MICHALS: No, he's—he was—he died not too long after that. The guy was a real nut job. He ran the orderly room, and he had huge power, but he could never figure me out because I was such an oddball. So, I don't want to get in—waste time on army stories, but—so, you know, *The House I Once Called Home* was extremely important. Now, these old houses are, you know, what all photographers love. That's McKeesport in better days. And—but they never know who lived there.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MICHALS: They're photographic, you know? I didn't realize—

MR. LYON: Is that your Uncle, Bill? No?

MR. MICHALS: No, no, no, no. This is my aunt, Helen, and that's my uncle, Cyril—no, that's Steve. I didn't realize, she really had great legs. You can see them better, before the double exposure. That's my grandmother. So, although my aunts and uncles seem to do just as they pleased, they never ran away from home, and were tethered by their telephones to my grandmother, their eminence grise. [Laughs.] So, that's my grandmother.

MR. LYON: I see. So, it's—you're combining, in this book, period photos, showing what the house was like when you lived there, and then—

MR. MICHALS: With people in it.

MR. LYON: —and then you go back—you went back, and you photographed the interior.

MR. MICHALS: The same room today, and then I took back the same photograph I'd taken there years ago, and double exposed it.

MR. LYON: Oh, wow. Look at that.

MR. MICHALS: So, that was very exciting. Hello.

UNKNOWN MALE SPEAKER: This is your 5:30 p.m. notice because I think Elliot's coming [inaudible].

MR. MICHALS: Okay.

MR. LYON: Okay. Well, shall we—we've come full circle. We started out talking the other day, talking about—

MR. MICHALS: We did.

MR. LYON: —your house.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. And here we are again.

MR. LYON: Here we are again.

MR. MICHALS: Well, we had a useful and eventful event.

MR. LYON: Very pleasant.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: So, let me turn this off.

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MR. LYON: This is June 23rd, 2016. An interview with Duane Michals by Christopher Lyon at Duane Michals's residence in New York City.

So this is, again as we said before, any direction you want to take the conversation, you should feel free to do that.

MR. MICHALS: We'll go with the flow. Yeah.

MR. LYON: And I have some things to throw at you, but probably you would prefer I didn't do that. Anyway. One of the things I was struck by last time—I spent some time Monday looking at, you know, some of the books I hadn't seen much of before. But I have to say I just love this—

MR. MICHALS: Oh, thank you.

MR. LYON: This book *A Pittsburgh Poem* by Duane Michals. One of the thing that struck me about it is that your —you can tell me if you think this is completely off-base—that your strategies as writer, you love puns, rhymes, near rhymes—

MR. MICHALS: Faux-rhymes.

[They laugh.]

MR. LYON: Right—are interestingly parallel to some of the techniques that you use in your photography: double exposures, mirroring, and so on. There's this—words or images that resemble and yet are different from one another. Is this something that I'm just imagining or do you think there's some—

MR. MICHALS: No, it's the way I function in the world. Incidentally, there's another rhyme, the rhyme river—

MR. LYON: [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: —I'm sorry. You see that's a good example. No, it's the way I function in the world. There are puns in the photographs. And even with serious things, I like playing with double-entendres and things like that. It's just—yeah, I do that all the time, even when—like, without—I can't stop it. It's just, you know—

MR. LYON: Compulsive.

MR. MICHALS: —it's like having a twitch, yeah. But it applies. It fits photography, you know, one size fits all. It also fits my writing and the way I think comes like that.

MR. LYON: I was struck by one of the poems, "Number Seven" in *A Pittsburg Poem*. "Andy One dined at Skibo as the Pinkertons came to call and so on. Andy Two made himself into a fool." And do I take it that that's Carnegie and Warhol?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Andy One is Andrew Carnegie. Skibo was the name of his castle in Scotland. So there are a lot of esoteric little things like that. And Andy Two of course was, you know, Andy-come-lately. But they are very much a part of Pittsburgh. And I like the idea of those both Andies. One being, they are both of immigrant stock, Andrew Carnegie. And Andrew Carnegie of course being an entrepreneur—he was recently a secretary to some—I forget who it was. And that was first job—

MR. LYON: Carnegie was?

MR. MICHALS: Carnegie, yeah. That's how he got into the business. But if you go on, I think that's where I talk about—

MR. LYON: Well, you do some really interesting things. The near rhymes, the echoes, the Swiss cheese of Swiss Vale—

[Telephone rings.]

MR. MICHALS: You know who that was? Frick. Could you hand me the phone? Only because I'm—it's right there.

Female Speaker: Call from S. Raymond.

MR. MICHALS: I'm sorry.

MR. LYON: Yeah, so the Swiss cheese—

MR. MICHALS: Swiss cheese.

MR. LYON: I didn't get that one.

MR. MICHALS: You wouldn't. Swiss Vale is right next door to where Frick had his mansion. So—and I called him Swiss cheese because he was Swiss.

MR. LYON: Got it. Okay.

MR. MICHALS: So it's all, you know.

MR. LYON: But you do something fun with Warhol, too? He was a shopping cart disguised as art.

MR. MICHALS: Yes, I mean all the stuff with ketchup bottles, whatever, you know, Campbell Soup cans, just, you know, stuff.

MR. LYON: That's such a nice like epigrammatic, you know, encapsulation of Warhol. I mean, it's really nice. Just sort of capturing him in a word.

MR. MICHALS: And not unkind.

MR. LYON: No.

MR. MICHALS: True. Anyway—

MR. LYON: Anyway, I was really struck by that reading through this. And you know, it's got—

MR. MICHALS: And then the Pinkertons. You know what that is?

MR. LYON: The—

MR. MICHALS: The Pinkertons.

MR. LYON: Oh, the Pinkertons as in strike breakers, right?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, and the famous Homestead Strike was—Carnegie went to Scotland and let Frick do the dirty work. So Frick was the one who hired the Pinkertons. So, you know, at the end—later on, they had a huge split. But Frick did the dirty work. And they broke the strike. And there wasn't a union. Now that was, I don't know what, 1850-- I mean, '78 or something. They didn't get a union until 1939. They destroyed the unions for all those years. And the strikers learned that the Pinkerton were coming down the river in a barge to attack them. So the strikers got armed, and there was a big battle.

And then because the governor, who was in Carnegie's pocket, sent the militia in to break the strike effectively for Carnegie. And they destroyed the union, and then they went back to working 12 hours a day for two dollars or something, which is just really nasty. So Carnegie always had the illusion of being the working man's friend. But he never was. And giving back the libraries was his way of atoning.

MR. LYON: And then also his institution giving an exhibition to Duane Michals down the road. [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: Oh, he knew that was—hardly pays for it, but it's good. It's a good beginning gesture. Cash would have been nice too. Yeah. That's why I like—I like that intertwining, the fact that I'm not sure if Andy's—too—if his family worked in the mill, I'm not sure about that. But almost everybody did. Anybody who was an immigrant, their family worked on the mill, you know.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah. That makes sense. So this brings up an interesting, just general subject, about memory and the role that memory and remembering and historical memory plays in your work, which I think maybe hasn't been talked about as much as it could be. You know, your work references not only historical art, but literature—

MR. MICHALS: Fact.

MR. LYON: —and fact—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, history.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, that's what the Pittsburgh little, my little Pittsburgh conceit, you know. The Pittsburgh issue and that history is very important to me. Why? I have no idea. I don't know anybody else from my high school gang has any of the nostalgia I have to the point of actually doing a little book about it, you know. So—I draw upon everything, you know. In my family's history, my history being in the army, you know, my history as a gay guy. Yeah, that's—I don't thrive on a typical photographer reportage guy looking for a photography. You know, I don't walk around with a camera. I often get the question, you know, well, do you walk around with the camera. No, I never do that. You know, I simply pay attention to the amusements I find in my head.

MR. LYON: Well that's—but isn't that one of the principal differences between you and the photographs of your generation, that you were bringing history—whether personal history or invented history, dreams—but time, in all of its dimensions into your art.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. I was asking questions—different questions than the photographs—normal photographers would ask, and that is the photograph casting role, the spectator, and saying, this is what life looks like. This is a wonderful accident I happen to—this is a chance meeting I had with somebody, you know.

MR. LYON: Right, right.

MR. MICHALS: With me, it's completely the reverse. And I could do that work, but it was never who I am. So right from the very beginning, I—if you look at, you know, sequences, I mean everything in there—there's a little minor sequence called *Memory of a Kiss*. I didn't want to photograph two people kissing. But I wanted to suggest that, you know, you enter a room, and then you remember, oh this is where we first kissed. You know, so that's a whole different take on photographing somebody kissing and then suggesting that, no, this is actually a memory of something that happened. So that was in, you know, 1968—whatever that was, yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah. This is somewhat related, since you were talking about it. But I was intrigued by whether you would think that politics was a subject for you or maybe just a symptom. You know, I'm thinking of the *Beirut 1984* piece that you did. And that was in response to the bombing of the Marines.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, the Marines, when Reagan was—and then my most favorite one I thought was about *Sarajevo*, which is—that really is a—I love it. Let's see. "In Sarajevo, there's a mountain of meat, made of dead people unfit to eat. And with each hour, this mountain towers higher something to the sun, and it throws its shadow on everyone, not just those whose lives are done." And so, yeah. I don't—doing that I don't expect to change anything, or you know what I mean. But it was simply my annoyance and anger—more than that, I

mean. You know, expressing it.

MR. LYON: I guess, it's interesting you're focus is on loss, you know.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: And on the human loss. I mean, that seems to be consistent.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Loss of everything, everything. And eventually, you know, we lose our lives in the end. Everything is lost. It's all gone. So I thought that—I love this *Sarajevo* poem. I spent a lot of time thinking about it. And I was outraged because, you know, they were—Sarajevo apparently was in a valley and the surge was in the hills around it. And they were just bombarding the city and at night too. So there was no respite from the bombardment. Anyway. I've always maintained everything as a subject for photography, not just mere observation and the plight stuff.

MR. LYON: And then the other—sort of the other side of the loss and death and so on is you seem to have this remarkable rapport with children. And children are, you know, are interesting presence in your work, too.

MR. MICHALS: I thought my children's book was I really loved it. I had a great deal of fun writing it. And most children's books are one story, The Train that Went Choo-Choo, or something. But mine, every other page is another story. And I just like to share variety. And a lot of them are probably more for me than for the children's themselves. [Laughs.] But it's all about the act of doing something, not the destination. You know, the pleasure of the doing, that's always been the bottom line. Having fun writing something, playing rhyme in my head and matching up, you know, different disparate thoughts.

MR. LYON: And you did an extensive photography, commissioned photography series that involved children, right? For the insurance—

MR. MICHALS: Oh, yeah. Well that was—yeah. I did a campaign for MassMutual.

MR. LYON: Ah, that's it.

MR. MICHALS: That ran for nine years. But it ended up being—as the concept got refined, it ended up being essentially about grandparents and children, yeah.

MR. LYON: Ah, so it's sort of generational, [inaudible] insurance. [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, and the copy was we've been making—no, no that was somebody else. Eli Lilly. I did one which was also about grandparents and children, and said we've been making medicine for, what, four generations, as if other people's lives depended upon it. And that was the copy, yeah. I'm trying to remember what the copy was for MassMutual. I don't remember.

MR. LYON: That's great. Yeah. So enough about you. [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: No. I'm just getting warm.

MR. LYON: No, as I said before, you know, go in whatever direction you like.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: I thought it might be fun, speaking of epigrammatic takes on artists and so on, to ask you about some of the more prominent of the various artists and writers and so on that you have known. And just to hear your thoughts about them. And in no particular order, except slightly historical. I thought of Manet, whom you've talked about.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. It's interesting. Manet was born in 1832. I was born in 1932. So immediately—you know, the whole story. Vermeer was born in 1632. Haydn was born in 1732. Bentley was born in 1832. And I was born in 1932. Am I the only one that sees the pattern? It's so obvious to me, you know [laughs]. And so I can't wait to see who's going to be born in 2032. Obviously somebody extraordinary. So I've always loved just that amusement. But I got very much into Manet, and I did a little—one of my best friends, Philippe Stoeckel in Paris, knew members of the Manet family, descendants.

MR. LYON: Oh, wow.

MR. MICHALS: And so, I spent an entire afternoon in their house, photographing all the things they had. And it was wonderful. One of my favorite paintings that he did was simply—what do they call that? Violets. Then there's another one with a violet. Anyway, these people own the actual painting. It was still in their possession.

So that was really exciting. And I went—I visited where he was born in Paris and went out to the cemetery to take flowers to his grave, and it was a wonderful—I've done that. It's something I do.

You know, like my passion for Magritte or going to photograph Balthus or photographing de Chirico. I for reason have been drawn—I don't know why—to have some kind of tangible presence, you know, like visiting the grave or visiting the house or—and then, I went back to visit Magritte's grave in Brussells and his wife and—but Manet was particularly interesting. A lot of people—oh, and he died very badly of syphilis. It's amazing. You know, all this talk about AIDS being god's punishment on gay people. God certainly punished straight people with syphilis. It was incurable. And so many of them died. Manet died very badly. They had to amputate his leg. And they did it on—he had gangrene—they did it on the dining room table in his home in June, when it was not—it was a horror story, a total horror story. Fauré died, almost anybody who was anybody died of—and Manet picked up syphilis on his first—this is what they think. He did a cruise when he was a young man, as a cadet on a sailing ship that went to Brazil as a port of call. And apparently he visited a prostitute. And first trip out, he gets—yeah. Anyway.

MR. LYON: Continuing with the M's, let's talk about Magritte a little bit. So you—the last—earlier in our interview as you described visiting him a little bit.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. But Magritte was a seminal person. When I encountered him, he just knocked my socks off because he contradicted me. And up to now, I was still thinking of reality as being a given. But then I began to realize, you know, it's not a given, and we can do our versions of it, or we can—you know, it's what we make. It's what we call it. You know, it's not just something called consensus reality. But then there are also other versions. And I think all poets and whoever those people are, they always do their version of reality. That's essential to the poetic vision, to invent your own reality and get away from consensus reality.

MR. LYON: Well, what about an artist like Morandi. You know, it seems prosaic and yet—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, that's another good one. Yeah, I always found Morandi the most intimate of all the artists because he lived—he worked on such a private scale. Literally, he kept rearranging those same sets of objects as his career went on, whole new variations. And the subtly became in the—the work becoming more and more abstract, you know. I think of people like—who's the British painter who does just plain color swaths? He's very big. Contemporary. He's still alive. Howard Hodgkin.

MR. LYON: Oh, Howard Hodgkin, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: Although he doesn't—he doesn't paint with objects at all. But it's that same pieces of color. Morandi's pallet was always beige and very much like hitting certain notes on a piano. I think of Morandi, I think of a wonder piece of music, one of my favorites by Ralph Vaughan Williams called the "Lark Ascending." That's one of my all-time favorites. And if you could see Mirandy, you would see it would sound like, if it was visible, I mean it was audible, it would sound like a lark ascending.

MR. LYON: Well, that's a lovely thought. And then you—a moment ago, you mentioned Balthus. And the Balthus that's reproduced in your ABC book is the MoMA picture. I mean, is that the first one that you sold as the street—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I love that. And it was very influential on me when I kept going back to it. And I was so—not satisfied—but I was so mystified by it and not knowing why it held such an attraction for me. And I think it was because it was based in reality and yet it was totally abstract. And also the ideas involved included certainly eroticism, mystery. So it went just beyond what it appeared to be. And on closer examination—it would be very easy to dismiss, but upon closer examination—I kept going back to it all the time. And it was fortunate, because that's when I began to photograph empty New York, and all these states began to look like sets. And then that came together with the Balthus street scene. That's one other element, of course, I was completely fascinated by.

MR. LYON: And speaking of stage-set like urban places, De Chirico was also someone that attracted you.

MR. MICHALS: Before any of the others, I think De Chirico. And always—he lost fascination for me when he became a serious artists and began to, one, to reproduce the old masters and abandon—when he became heroic. And he abandoned his original vision, his original originality. Not the fake originality, but anyway. But, when I first saw the work, I really disliked it. And I just thought—[yawns] excuse me—this makes no sense at all, what the hell is this? Magritte made sense in a nonsensical way. But that was just totally nonsensical. And then, once I broke the code, I think all good artists speak their own language. And I spoke DeChiricoan, and I didn't speak it at all. I mean, I couldn't interpret it. But then, when I broke the code and began to speak with a very bad accent, the pleasures that—it's hard to describe the subtlety of—for me, the rewards. I get the feeling of that afternoon. I've been in Turin on a summer afternoon when everything is very hot and the shadows are very deep and the arcades are very deep. Bologna is all arcades. And there's that real sense—and there's that historic sense of ancient Rome, or maybe a statue in the park, or the shadow of a children playing. You don't see the

children, but there's a profoundly, profoundly enigmatic.

It's all demanding work. It's not for the light-hearted. You know, Warhol I completely dismiss because he regurgitates the easiest of public symbols. You know, Marilyn Monroe, all prepackaged, you know. But De Chirico invented his own vocabulary. And the secret—the surrealists fell in love with him too. And the secret—the secret in the work was—one of his quotes, which I'm not quoting properly is "What else is there to contemplate but the enigma?" And that—and also the titles have, you know, the afternoon of—things like the afternoon of the poet's solitude or—I mean, they're just very poetic titles. The titles also add to the mystique.

MR. LYON: So are the artists, like De Chirico and Magritte, in some sense sort of colleagues so to say, artistic—

MR. MICHALS: That would be pretentious for me to say that, but I would say that they liberated me. And the best thing anybody could do is to be liberated by the work. So, you don't—you don't repeat the work. Henry Wolf was a great designer, began doing paintings that were variations of—Magritte paintings with the curtains and the Magritte vocabulary. So it's a big mistake to reproduce somebody's vocabulary. That's just regurgitating their style. What you do is you absorb the idea behind the style, the essence of the style. And then you bring—you reuse it in some way into what you do. But you never—well, there's a—I did—in the early days, I did a photograph called, *Illuminated Man*, which is a man and his head is all lighted. And later, I ran into a book where Magritte had done a painting like that. And I was thrilled, because I thought, unbeknownst to me, we had arrived at—that's the only time it ever happened—a similar solution to an idea. And then, I began to—in fact, a writer recently said to me, "Oh, I see that you were inspired by that Magritte." No, no, and I knew people would say that, because it's so obvious. But the real power was that that's the only time that I ever came up with an idea similar to his. And I found that very exciting, you know, that we—for that moment, we spoke the same language.

MR. LYON: Sort of on the same track, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: That's lovely.

MR. MICHALS: I'm trying to think of—well, the same thing happened with writers too, you know, Cavafy. I went into a great depth. I spent a lot of time with Walt Whitman. Both of them, I did extensive books. And—so, it was the same principal, it's that I was dealing with language here.

MR. LYON: Right, right. Paul Cadmus is an interesting character in relation to you.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I don't know if I told you my entire Paul Cadmus story, but—

MR. LYON: Well, you had written to him, right?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, well I was a sophomore, well that would have made me 18. I was in school in Colorado. And I don't know how I got his—I think I sent it to his gallery.

MR. LYON: To his gallery?

MR. MICHALS: Which was the Midtown Gallery, which was a precursor to D.C. Moore. Which is funny. So I came home with my simultaneously coming out of the closet friend, Bob Ewing. I went to get my mail, and there was a letter from Paul Cadmus. So, it was just—I couldn't believe it. It was just—and he wrote me a very sweet, kind of, bread and butter letter to the young artist. And I forget even what I said to him. And when I came to New York, I looked him up, and he lived on St. Luke's Place. And I—it was Saturday. I had it on Charles Street. It was like five blocks away. So I walked over there, and I buzzed the doorbell. And nobody was there, so I thought, "I'll wait," you know. I could have been—who knows. About 10 minutes later, he comes walking down the street with groceries. And I said that I'd written him a letter, and he didn't remember the letter at all.

And so he invited me upstairs. [Inaudible] it was his apartment. He lived on the top floor with skylights. And there was painting on the easel he was working on. It was an October afternoon, faintly brisk out that early. And then he gave me scotch in a little blue Venetian glass. It was just unbelievable, you know.

What would have made it really perfect would have been if he had made a pass at me. But I was apparently wasn't interesting enough [pretends to cry]. But fast forward—fast forward 20 years, no, longer. I'm doing a portrait of a guy who runs the Hudson River Museum. And we're talking. And so I said, "What's on your schedule with exhibits?" And then he mentioned, well we're doing a Cadmus exhibit. And I said, "What? Paul Cadmus?" You know, so. He invited me to the opening night. Fred and I went to the opening. And when I got there, it was the most amazing thing because I introduced myself, and he did not remember anything.

But he said, just that afternoon, he was talking to his friends at lunch about my photographs, unbeknownst, you know, any kind of history. So that was very nice. And then about 4 years later, or who knows, I went to

photograph him. At that point, he'd been photographed by everybody. I mean, he became very—later generation of gay people like Bruce Weber discovered him and made a model out of him, and did all that.

And when I went to photograph him, I have to say that my photographs were a big disappointment. Sometimes, if I try too hard, I'm so anxious, you know, I'm—he's so huge. Luckily, that didn't happen to me with Magritte. It happened to me the De Chirico. I was so intimidated by De Chirico that the photographs—I was just, you know, couldn't ask him to do things. How do you ask De Chirico that, you know, would go over there and sit upside down on a chair, you know?

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Oh, come on. Just stand on your head.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, come on. Do something surreal. You call yourself a surrealist.

MR. LYON: Yeah, come on [laughs].

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, big deal, right? Maybe in 1912 you were surreal. Now he's just a fat, old man [laughs], which is surreal. So, I've lots of wonderful experiences with these various painters, some of whom I would never meet. You know, I loved Joyce. I like the idea of Joyce. And I like the—[yawns] excuse me—the puns. I like his heroic figure—

MR. LYON: Oh, that's interesting, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: —and his modernism, but his play on words, you know.

MR. LYON: Constantly.

MR. MICHALS: Quark. What was that one? You know the term "quark" comes from Joyce, the one we use nowadays in physics, particles of quark. Certain particles called quarks. That comes from James Joyce.

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, see. He's written. I've read their biographies. Joyce is particularly interesting, his biography. He had a great singing voice.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: He could have been—he could have been—I'd loved to have heard him sing something.

MR. LYON: Who's his biographer? Ah, what's his name?

MR. MICHALS: It wasn't Kaplan, was it?

MR. LYON: Hmm?

MR. MICHALS: Kaplan?

MR. LYON: No. The really great Joyce biography. What was his name? [Richard Ellmann -CL]

MR. MICHALS: That's the one I read.

MR. LYON: Yeah. That's enthralling. I remember spending a summer, part of a summer reading that.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I like biographies a lot.

MR. LYON: Yeah. Yeah. And a more recent artist besides Warhol, and we've already talked about him enough. You've done some—did a terrific picture of David Hockney.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, that was interesting. That was a long time ago, too. [Inaudible] my first apartment was on Ninth street, 27 West Ninth Street, between 5th and 6th. And two doors down—next door, Maurice Sendak. We used to walk our dogs at the same time in the evening. And next door to Maurice Sendak was Geldzahler's apartment, where Hockney often stayed. And I never travel in those circles, but Geldzahler—you know, I knew him to say hello to. And then, I discovered Hockney was there. But the one picture I really love of Hockney is—hopefully it will be in our next book—would be the one where there's a young guy in the foreground with his shirt off. And in the background, you see Hockney looking at him. I would call that one of my prose portraits because it shows you what Hockney was about. Not what he looked like but it was about that part of his life that dealt with—a huge part of his life that dealt with being gay.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So you've mentioned several writers. Your taste in literature goes back even

further than Whitman. You've mentioned Shakespeare in the past and Cervantes.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, well not Cervantes, but just Shakespeare.

MR. LYON: Well, Don Quixote being a—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, the concept of Don Quixote.

MR. LYON: The concept of it—yeah, okay.

MR. MICHALS: I also like very much – Anna Akhmatova.

MR. LYON: Really? I didn't know that.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I read everything. I read one poem by her, and then I read everything she wrote. What a life.

MR. LYON: I'm a big, big fan. We've got all the Akhmatova books. And yeah.

MR. MICHALS: Oh yeah? I'm not sure how to pronounce it. Is it on the second syllable?

MR. LYON: It's on the second syllable. Akhmatova, yeah

MR. MICHALS: And there was one thing she said—when she was in her Gulag, she liked looking at the full moon because she knew that her husband in his Gulag—well, they were sharing the same moon, and then by extension, you know, that's the same moon that Napoleon looked at, the same moon that cavemen looked at, the same moon that Cleopatra looked at. And I like that very much about the moon, you know.

MR. LYON: She is incredible. Other Russian writers? Is this you—

MR. MICHALS: No, she's—I mean, I wish I could say that because I have great admiration for any of them. I mean, they're all very profound, you know, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoevsky. I mean, all of them—that whole generation of Russian writer. And Tolstoy was such a nut-job, pretending he was a peasant. And, you know, living with his money and comfortably dressing up like—I picture him standing there with a scythe, you know.

MR. LYON: Well, speaking of going back to nature, Thoreau is an interest.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, yeah. Thoreau, too. Of course, I have my favorite Thoreau quote. And this was when somebody came to him at Walden Pond and said, "Have you heard the big news? You can now send a telegram all the way from Boston to Texas," which was the great technological breakthrough. And Thoreau said, "That's amazing." And he said, "But does Boston have anything to say to Texas?" And that applies to all the new computer gizmos we have, and instant this, and selfies, and memes and everything, you know, what's been exchanged, "hi, hi," "best friends forever." People don't even write anymore.

MR. LYON: No, that's true. And I'm just, you know, looking at some of the writers that you've talked about. Other—among poets, is Rimbaud.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, I love Rimbaud. I read his biography and *Illuminations* to me was just extraordinary. I mean, just extraordinary. And I love Patti Smith's take on him. She was—you know, the funny little bit in her biography where she goes to—I forget the name of the town where he was born—to visit the museum. And the museum is closed for the day. So she has to spend a night, and she finds a little hotel where she's in the attic, and it's very romantic, and other [inaudible]. And then she goes to the—as I recall—she goes to the museum. And then, she comes back, you know, sits at the desk with her pen and paper waiting for the inspiration from Rimbaud to speak to her.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: It's like when—to me that was such a give-away, that idea. And then the other one was when Cindy Sherman, in reading some of her texts, she talks about—she—I forget the context—but it was about surrealism. She said, "And I hated that cutesy surrealism stuff. To call surrealism cutesy, if that's not high school. Dear Diary, I was looking at some cutesy surrealism stuff today. I think I'll do self-portraits, but not cutesy." But the term cutesy is so—people who make smiley faces, you know, sealed with a kiss, I mean, cutesy. I will never forgive cutesy.

MR. LYON: Never, never. He's off your list forever.

MR. MICHALS: Ever.

MR. LYON: And I—we're going to get to this. I'll give you a preview—and if you want to bow out, you can. But I was completely taken with the Questionnaire Marcel Proust that was published in your Egyptian book that was published in Paris, and thought it might be fun to revisit some of those questions. Anyway, among your answers to the questions, I was surprised to see you citing Eliot as a favorite poet along with the ones that I was aware of.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, yeah, you can't avoid Eliot. I mean, one of my favorite pieces is the *Four Quartets*, which I think—and it's very metaphysical. I mean, it was really very Eastern. That other part of Eliot—I mean, he didn't end in my vocabulary. But you can't avoid him—you know, I mean, he was just very important in literature. He spoke to that era. But I didn't take away from him. With Cavafy, I took away. Cavafy was take-out.

[They laugh.]

MR. LYON: What about Beckett?

MR. MICHALS: Beckett is probably—I respect him and I admire him. I find him problematical because when the work gets so sparse and gets so spare. But what was the wonderful thing he wrote? It was a wonderful poem. I can't remember it now. But—and also, it was that play of language. I always thought he was in the Joyce school of literature. Yeah, very much. Very much.

MR. LYON: Very much, I think except where Joyce is like, you know, an effloresence or something, you know. Beckett is like a stringent—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, he's much more tight-assed.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] I wonder if it's the French in him, this sort of epigrammatic thing of the French, you know?

MR. MICHALS: Well—

MR. LYON: Trying to capture it in a—just in a—

MR. MICHALS: He wasn't as painful.

MR. LYON: Now what is your background in French?

MR. MICHALS: Whose?

MR. LYON: Yours.

MR. MICHALS: None.

MR. LYON: You read French.

MR. MICHALS: No, none.

MR. LYON: No?

MR. MICHALS: No, which is the big shame. You've touched my Achilles heel. When I was in high school, I was so stupid. I could take German, French, or Spanish. But being practical and being 16, I thought, "Well, I'll probably get to Mexico before I get to Europe. So I should learn Spanish." And of course, that was the stupidest thing I ever did. I should have—because I have such a passion for things French. But also Fred and I used to teach each other French. We used to get those records and play French records. And before we'd go to sleep, we would practice our French with each other.

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, that was fun. I love all things French. I really do. Of course, I'm a sucker for the romance. One of our best friends is French. And he said, "You Americans," you know, if I get annoyed, there's a really ugly skyscraper in—where is that? I know exactly where it is. It's the one by itself. I forget what it's called. And he said, "I was offended by it. I don't mind La Défence because, you know, that's the skyscraper city." He said—everybody you want, Americans, and everybody else wants Paris to only exist, you know, in the 19th century, you know.

MR. LYON: True

MR. MICHALS: You don't want us to become. I remember the Japanese once said when they were in charge of everything they were saying that Paris would be their boutique. They had divided up the world. And that would

be the Japanese—that's why they would go to Paris. No, but it's the romance of Paris. You just can't the traditional story of somebody comes there with just mere ambition, you know. And at that point, at the turn of the century, you had—everybody was there. You know, everybody. I think that was tout le monde.

MR. LYON: Tout le monde. Right, right. I think—we did talk about photographers in a previous—in our previous —

MR. MICHALS: Well, did I mention that thing about—recently in the Times, there was a piece about Zwimmer Gallery—

MR. LYON: Zwirner.

MR. MICHALS: —had mentioned that they represented Eggleston. And they mentioned now that Eggleston had been decontextualized, and he was no more a photographer. He was now an artist who used photographs, which I found really pissed me off. Because completely devalued photographic artists. Like Robert Frank or Bresson. That immediately said, well of course, they're photo artists, which is not the same as being an artist who uses photographs. And that comes from the school of don't piss on my shoes and tell me it's raining, you know [laughs]. That's 1984, art-speak, the worst kind.

MR. LYON: Well, you—and you made this book *PhotoFiles: How Photography Lost its Virginity on the Way to the Bank*. And maybe this is a moment to sort of segue into that a little bit. And you know, there's a particular—there's a section of this book called "Tattle Tales from the Land of Faux-tography."

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: And you know, I wondered if you, you know, cared to comment on that a little bit.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, yeah. Sure. One of my favorites—number 12. Art is never boring. Andy Warhol is boring. Therefore it's not art. This is the era of photo-fast-food. Too many Tillmans will give you heartburn, high cholesterol, and a fat ass. Nobody's sacred. And museums should never exhibit photography of visitors looking at photographs in museums, while looking at photographs in museums. I mean, that's what's his name, Struth or one of them who photographs people. That is so self-serving.

MR. LYON: Struth.

MR. MICHALS: Struth. Yeah, I can't even pronounce it. And I say, I never trust photographs that are so large that they can only fit in museums, because they're aimed for museums. They're not aimed for the real world. They're already designed to fit into a—unless you're Eli Broad, you know, and have huge walls.

MR. LYON: You said walls right? Not balls?

MR. MICHALS: Walls. Bill Brand's nudes give me an art-on. [Laughs.] That's pretty funny.

MR. LYON: So what was the impulse for you behind this book. I mean, we talked again a little bit—I talked to you about—you know, especially when you were younger, you're at a certain. You know, this confidence and also this a bit of combativeness really toward—it's an interesting side of you. This kind of determination and confidence.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, it is. Well, if you love your field. If you're passionate about photography, passionate about poetry. If you—in literature, you know when you asked Truman Capote what he thought—Truman Capote was on Johnny Carson's Show. And Johnny Carson said, "Truman, what do you think of Jack Kerouac's writing?" And Truman said famously, "That's not writing. That's typing." Now that was sensational. If you ask Gore Vidal what he thought of Buckley. I mean, if you ask—you know—in other fields, people are quite willing to—Gary Winogrand said almost every other what they do is not photography. But it's—I don't know what it's so sacrosanct.

If I think that a Cindy Sherman is a hugely over- a talented but way blown out of proportion and promoted by the photo museum critical complex, you know. So what? First of all, nobody cares what I think. I'm not a power broker. I don't have an influence. You know, you care what Szarkovski thought. You might what Peter Magill thinks. There are certain people who—I have no power. And I don't know why everybody tiptoes around. I remember I was some place, and what's her name was there. Ingrid Sischy there.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. MICHALS: And she was an apologist for Cindy Sherman. And I said, you know, I think it was highly overrated. And when that whole machinery, you know, that whole kind of—it's like saying "fuck" in front of the pope or something. You know, they're sacrosanct. Everybody knows—you know, I have opinions about everybody. You know, Robert Ryman, try black, try yellow, try blue, get over white, you know. I heard somebody tell me a story

that—this is a second hand—that they were at the Rymans for dinner and he had a particularly difficult teenage son, and there was a problem. And the son stomped out of the living room and turned around in his—looked at his father and said, "Besides, what's so great about white?"

And you know, I met Ryman. I liked him.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: But I just can't abiding spending 40 years painting white. You know, I mean, that really is beyond —

MR. LYON: It's funny, I know his son now.

MR. MICHALS: Well, he has a number of sons.

MR. LYON: A couple of them. But I know one of them fairly well. He too had various careers and finally decided he was artist.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, no, he's painting white.

MR. LYON: And he's actually doing okay.

MR. MICHALS: But there are all sorts of people. You know, I mean I take on everybody. Uncle Rudy as Nazi.

MR. LYON: Gerhard Richter.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, and then there's that wonderful, what's her name? Pipilotti Rist, the darling who goes down the street and breaks windows and cars. You know—

MR. LYON: That's quite a sequence you've got there.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, it was a really good too. And then there's my—from the neo-Nazi [inaudible] snatch series from the Saatchi collection *I like Pussy*, by this year's brilliant, 17-year-old Turner Prize Winner, skinhead graduate of the Royal College of Art Damien Damien. And anyway, and that's from "I like Pussy." And I love Dr. Duane. That's his cheeky—it's called *Infernal Tongue in Cheeky Journal*. And then these are the great black and whiters of that generation. No, this was a lot of fun. I had a great time writing it. Mapplethorpe is not a poet modi. He is an old-fashioned fairy, who unwittingly legitimized Leviticus by describing homosexuals as terminally hedonistic queers. Jerry Falwell could not have—Jerry Falwell would agree.

I'm much more subversive because when I did my work, it's not about all the gay clichés in a row. It's about the reasonableness, the legitimacy of affection between people of the same gender. And showing them not as skinheads with whips up their ass. He did a self-portait with a whip up his ass. So I have complete disrespect for him because it was such a self-indulgent visual masturbation.

This is funny. Stump the collectors. I took that picture. Okay. Now who took this picture? William Eggleston, William Christenberry, Steven Shore, Robert Polidori, Dr. Duanus, or Joel Meyerowitz? You guess. One from category A.

MR. LYON: I like the sign next to it. Sale antiques collectable items. And it's also the same color as the wood.

MR. MICHALS: Somebody bought that house and completely redid it.

MR. LYON: Where is it?

MR. MICHALS: It's in a little community—I don't remember the name, driving up to the country.

MR. LYON: Yeah, it's funny.

MR. MICHALS: I like that name.

MR. LYON: Yeah, stump the collector.

[They laugh.]

In search of Sartre sex.

MR. MICHALS: Oh yeah, this is great. This is that wonderful, I call her Sally Cally. Sally the French artist who went to the hotel room.

MR. LYON: Oh, Sophie Calle.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I call her Sally Cally. The photo inspector Clouzot of France disguises herself as a chambermaid at la Notel Motel to document the cultural artifacts of extenuated fidelity and finds her evidence in the tell-tale ashtray, full of Gauloise cigarettes butts, both with and without lipstick traces. It is common knowledge the French before, after, and during sex with an occasional interruptus for a puff or two of cannabis during cunnilingus. And who was that bored haute bourgeoisie belle trapped with her self-loathing disgust and nausea between the being and nothingness of the human condition's no exit. It's called the ashtray. I hit everybody.

MR. LYON: Yeah, you nailed it pretty well. Nice picture of an ashtray too.

MR. MICHALS: By moi. I had to teach myself—it had to be authentic, so I had to teach myself how to smoke.

MR. LYON: Oh, jeez, you had to do that too.

MR. MICHALS: Quelle horreur!

MR. LYON: Well this—I'm totally intrigued by this Merveilles d'Égypte. And you were commissioned to go take these.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. It was wonderful. I went—I was in Paris one morning and I stopped in Café Flor. I love that picture. If you think all the pictures taken by—of the pyramids, you've never seen that one before. But I was at Café Flor—

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Duane builds a pyramid.

MR. MICHALS: Yes, in front of the pyramids. How audacious is that?

MR. LYON: It's amazing. You can actually get them the same size.

MR. MICHALS: What can I say? Yeah, mine's bigger actually.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yours is bigger. Yeah, that's true.

MR. MICHALS: All things.

MR. LYON: Of all things. I love this picture, too.

MR. MICHALS: This self-portrait.

MR. LYON: This stinks. [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, and look at that next picture. Look at how close. You can't even get it a dime in there.

MR. LYON: That's amazing. That's amazing.

MR. MICHALS: I mean, you know.

MR. LYON: Of course, they didn't have dimes then, did they?

MR. MICHALS: No, they didn't.

MR. LYON: See, that's why they could get it in there.

MR. MICHALS: What did they have. [Laughs.] That's the heart of the—and I think that's like very sexual going into there. And then you end up there. And that's in the tomb inside. But I was—I went to Café Flor, and there was Jean-Loup Sieff, who I knew, but you know, I didn't know. Do you know what that is? That's a series of photographs. They have these street photographers. And I bought all of those pictures from him, and then I had him take my picture. These are the locals. I thought they were beautiful.

MR. LYON: They are. That's gorgeous.

MR. MICHALS: That's [inaudible] stair. But I went in there with [inaudible] and he said—

MR. LYON: That's you, right?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, he said, "What a funny coincidence, I wanted to get in touch with you." He was editing a

series of books for Denoel, the French publisher. And the idea was, we will give you a certain amount of money and you could go anywhere you want to go in the world and take pictures. But you had to produce a book that had, I think 60 pages of text. And so, I immediately said I want to go to Egypt. I mean, there was just no question about it. And so, that's how that happened.

MR. LYON: Wow, and what's going on here? This is a—

MR. MICHALS: Oh, I went very early in the morning. This I think is in Karnak to take some photographs. Because normally it's filled with tourists. So I got there before the sun came up. And I was by myself with my camera. And suddenly this guy comes out of nowhere, and he had a gun. And so, I thought, oh, great. He's going to rob me, take my cameras and the whole thing.

So then I said to him. Let me take a picture of you. And so, I did a sequence. And so I said—so I photographed.

MR. LYON: That's a little scary.

MR. MICHALS: I photographed my fear. That's what I was worried about, that I was going to get robbed—

MR. LYON: Oh, that's wonderful.

MR. MICHALS: —so I had him pose as a robber. So I used him as a robber, you know and that was great, you know.

MR. LYON: Wow.

MR. MICHALS: And that was just the reflection in the glass.

MR. LYON: That's great. I mean, they're wonderful travel pictures—I mean, look at this.

MR. MICHALS: I know, prayers.

MR. LYON: And the light coming through, his robe, and—

MR. MICHALS: And I did a whole series of pictures of people—the light there is always amazing, but a whole pictures of series of people in Cairo that have eye contact with me, you know like a shop keeper, a little girl coming out of some—and I love the self-portrait asleep in the tomb.

MR. LYON: Oh, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: That's one of my all-time—they're they are. You see? See she's looking—I love that. Then you see, he's looking at me. There's a guy. And then, he. And then, yeah. So I love that little bit of eye-contact with all those people.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: There he is again.

MR. LYON: This is a great picture. I love that.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. And then these are photos from 1896. Yes I bought a whole series of old, old photographs taken in—you know, they could have been taken today. Everything looks the same.

MR. LYON: It looks like it was silhouetted to—was it a glass plate or what is it just photo prints?

MR. MICHALS: They were prints. No, they were prints.

MR. LYON: This is wonderful.

MR. MICHALS: I like that—I called him the god Anubis. But doesn't he look like an Egyptian god?

MR. LYON: He does. He does.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, and this was a real treat. Coming out of one of the tombs, I was leaving, and he was coming in—or something like that. It's a kid from California. He looked at me to be that kind of—people who work there. And worked on the tombs, an anonymous young guy. But he happened to a surfer. I mean, he was from San Diego. And I like the timelessness of it.

MR. LYON: It's incredible to see him against this background.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, if you knew nothing about him, you know, he could have been somebody—

MR. LYON: Could have been a Roman or a Greek or whatever, yeah. And then you did a ritual, huh?

MR. MICHALS: But I wanted to do a little ritual. So again, that was the same morning. I came there very early. Nobody was there. And so, I took some paper to burn them as a sacrifice or some kind of—and then these guys showed up and they were amused. And then when they saw me burning, they got very upset. And if you'll notice, where that last picture? There's a stick. See the—is that a stick?

MR. LYON: Uh-huh.

MR. MICHALS: And they knocked off the burning thing. But I like the idea of doing a private ritual in a place like that.

MR. LYON: And here you almost look like a mummy, you know that—

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, there's—yeah, it does.

MR. LYON: It's just this black.

MR. MICHALS: That's a step pyramid. That's one of the first pyramids, where they hadn't been figured out.

MR. LYON: Yeah, they didn't it perfect it yet.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, they were still working on it, yeah.

MR. LYON: An early model.

MR. MICHALS: You take a few hundred thousand slaves here and there, and back to the drawing board. More slaves! Yeah.

MR. LYON: Well, let me if I may ask you in English, some of the questions—and it'd be interesting to compare your answers now with your answers now with your answers then. Probably many of them will be the same.

MR. MICHALS: I don't remember.

MR. LYON: So the first. I looked this up by the way. You know, this seems to be a thing, this questionnaire Marcel Proust.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, I know. They do it today in a number of places.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah. You can find references to it online. So I'd like to find out more about it. But, so the question began with, what is for you the ultimate misery?

MR. MICHALS: Ultimate misery.

MR. LYON: Speaking of experiences.

MR. MICHALS: Going bald [laughs]. No. The ultimate misery. I guess some form of a frustration or a disappointment in something that you couldn't perform at or something that you wanted desperately to be good at, but you—like I have no talents at playing the piano. So if I wanted to be piano player, the ultimate misery would be frustration and not being able to perform. What did I say?

MR. LYON: At the time, you said the American army. [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: Oh, well that's—that was—it still is. That was the worst time of my life. And that was very good of me. I prefer that. Yeah. And I was freshly out of—well, relatively freshly out of the army, not really.

MR. LYON: Where would you like to live?

MR. MICHALS: I'd probably say Paris.

MR. LYON: Interesting answer.

MR. MICHALS: What did I say?

MR. LYON: You said New York.

MR. MICHALS: Okay.

MR. LYON: Okay. What is your ideal of earthly happiness?

MR. MICHALS: To love somebody and have it returned.

MR. LYON: Nice. I think you were at the time, mystical ecstasy was your—

MR. MICHALS: Oh, I also like to have enlightenment. In fact, I know somebody who recently who had enlightenment, and I'm very jealous, which would make it even more difficult to have enlightenment, if you're jealous. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: Right, kind of like, going down the wrong road there, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: That's right.

MR. LYON: This is interesting. What fault in other people are you most willing to indulge, you know?

MR. MICHALS: I don't know. I was going to say, I hate when people say things they're not going to do it. I hate when people promise things and they—so that would be when people disappoint, and they're not in their promises.

MR. LYON: But, you're willing to forgive them, then.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah, okay. Okay.

MR. MICHALS: What did I say then?

MR. LYON: At the time, you said ignorance. But you also answered ignorance to a further question. So I wasn't sure if that was, you know, whatever.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Who are your favorite film directors?

MR. MICHALS: Oh, dear. Well, some of them are too easy. But there's an Italian director that I like very much, named Olmi, O-

Christopher Lyon: -M-I. Have you ever heard of him?

MR. LYON: Yes, [inaudible].

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, he did Fiancées, and his most famous movie was the Tree of Wooden Clogs, which I hated. That was his—but all his other movies were small movies, you know. And of course, Hitchcock. You know, and Fellini. But I also like Polanski.

MR. LYON: Oh, yeah.

MR. MICHALS: I thought that Repulsion was one of the most terrifying films I'd ever seen. It's totally brilliant. I give up.

MR. LYON: Yeah, at the time you said Olmi.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, really?

MR. LYON: Yes, and you also said Bertolucci.

MR. MICHALS: Yes, I love Bertolucci. Particularly, I liked, what was the great, the nonconformist—

MR. LYON: The Conformist.

MR. MICHALS: The Conformist. Did you ever see that?

MR. LYON: It was scary. Talk about scary movies.

MR. MICHALS: And I'd photographs Bertolucci. And personally—and I said that to him. And he mentioned that a lot of his visual ideas came from Magritte.

MR. LYON: Really?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Wow.

MR. MICHALS: The way he saw. And I remember there was like a big hall of some sort where you had to go see this fascist director. And Mussolini did that--would be a huge space. And he had his desk, and you'd have to walk all the up to him. It was very intimidating, and there were a lot of spaces and things in there that had that kind of frightening, you know, 1984 quality.

MR. LYON: Yeah, there's a famous photograph of Mussolini in that office that was published in Life magazine, I think.

MR. MICHALS: And it was up on a platform, too.

MR. LYON: Make him more—

MR. MICHALS: Higher. Yeah.

MR. LYON: That's the kind of office Trump is planning for the White House.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, he probably has it already.

MR. LYON: He's probably going to do a little interior renovation [laughs]. We've talked about some of your favorite painters. Would have you have a favorite if you were—

MR. MICHALS: Well, it's hard to pick your favorite [inaudible], because each one of them has brought something to my smorgasbord of delights—visual delights.

MR. LYON: Good answer. Favorite musicians or composers?

MR. MICHALS: Oh, well. Yes, I love Josef Suk. He's the Czech composer. And he did a wonderful piece called Symphonie Fantastique . I love Turandot, the play.

MR. LYON: Puccini?

MR. MICHALS: No.

MR. LYON: The play [inaudible; DM is referring to the play by Carlo Gozzi –CL].

MR. MICHALS: Incidental music by—

MR. LYON: Gee, who was that.

MR. MICHALS: Was it Telemann?

MR. LYON: Or Vivaldi?

MR. MICHALS: No, no, no, no. It was—

MR. LYON: [inaudible]?

MR. MICHALS: No, no. It was by [Carl Maria] von Weber, incidental music for Turandot. And then of course the aforementioned, Ralph Vaughan Williams in *The Lark Ascending*. But anything by Mozart of course, there are whole series of people that were just geniuses, exquisite geniuses, yeah.

MR. LYON: Interesting. The quality you most prefer in a man.

MR. MICHALS: Loyalty.

MR. LYON: Loyalty. Okay.

MR. MICHALS: What did I say then?

MR. LYON: Capacity to love.

MR. MICHALS: Well, that too. That goes with loyalty.

MR. LYON: The quality you most prefer in a woman?

MR. MICHALS: More loyalty.

[They laugh.]

You always have to work twice as hard. Yeah.

MR. LYON: You were asked what sports you played, but I couldn't read the answer.

MR. MICHALS: No, I didn't play any sport really.

MR. LYON: Probably. [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: No, I did the fake—in high school, I played on a homemade softball team, but that was nothing. My grandfather was a huge—the biggest fan of the Pittsburgh Pirates, and his biggest disappointment to him was that I never became a baseball player. He was completely marinated in the Pittsburgh Pirates. [Laughs.] And that's the truth.

MR. LYON: That's so funny. Are you capable of killing someone?

MR. MICHALS: No.

MR. LYON: And what is your favorite occupation?

MR. MICHALS: Photographer.

MR. LYON: Who would you prefer to be? Speaking—

MR. MICHALS: Rather than myself?

MR. LYON: Can be yourself too.

MR. MICHALS: I would say myself.

MR. LYON: That's what you said then.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, okay. Okay. Reasonable.

MR. LYON: Yeah, what would you say is your principal character trait?

MR. MICHALS: I'm a caregiver. And this sounds self-serving, but I'm also very generous. I don't know anybody who's as generous as I am. And not just with money, but with everything. I'm a very supportive person.

MR. LYON: Interesting. And what do you appreciate most in your friends?

MR. MICHALS: Oh, who came up with these questions?

MR. LYON: I don't know. Marcel Proust, actually.

MR. MICHALS: I'd say loyalty.

MR. LYON: There you go. And you've already told me what your outstanding fault or inability would be.

MR. MICHALS: I did? I don't know have any.

MR. LYON: Yes. Not speaking French. [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: Mais oui, d'accord.

[They laugh.]

I'll go with that, yeah.

MR. LYON: The first thing that attracts you to a woman? About a woman I should say?

MR. MICHALS: Physical or anything?

MR. LYON: Anything.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Could be physical.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, a beautiful—this is terrible. A beautiful, plain face. Yeah. A beautiful, plain face.

MR. LYON: Your favorite color?

MR. MICHALS: Blue.

MR. LYON: Your favorite flower? I had to look this one up.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, that's difficult, my favorite flower. I like so many of them. But I wrote a piece about something called the resurrection lily. Have you ever heard of that?

MR. LYON: I have.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, I did a whole—what's her name? I should read you the piece. It's very nice. What's that woman's name? Jamaica Kincaid. She likes near me in the country.

MR. LYON: Really?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Oh, I met her once. She used to be married to Sean, right?

MR. MICHALS: Sean, one of his sons.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: So she doing a book about asking various people to write about their favorite flowers. And I picked the resurrection lily. Now the resurrection lily comes up in June with abundant leaves and then it dies back. And if you don't know it's there, there's nothing there. But then, three months later in August, these shoots come out with no leaves, and these most beautiful iridescent lilies. So the resurrection three months later. They died. And then, they're reborn. So I wrote about the resurrection lily. There's another name for it, but I don't know what.

MR. LYON: At the time you answered, myosotis. And I thought, what the heck is myosotis?

MR. MICHALS: What is that?

MR. LYON: Well apparently that's a botanical name for forget-me-nots.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, really?

MR. LYON: Yeah. So I thought that was interesting.

MR. MICHALS: And I also love lilies of the valley. They're just beautiful and romantic and sinful.

MR. LYON: You must have had quite a garden up in—

MR. MICHALS: We had a major garden, lovely garden. That was our major activity. And that's one of the things Fred and I came together on. We both love gardening. Our mother was a big gardener, and my brother loves gardening. And I love gardening. We have these huge yews that are at least 12 feet high.

MR. LYON: Oh, really? Oh, I love those.

MR. MICHALS: Big conical shapes like in the Bois de Boulogne. And they take a lot of—what do they call that?

MR. LYON: Pruning?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. Very into—and we have to cover them up, because in the winter the deer will eat them. And I'm glad I don't have to worry about it anymore. But there's a lot of people who are in rhythm with nature, people who love gardening. You know, Hitler never would have raised a garden. You have to be a certain kind of person to attend to it, to water it, to nurture it, to take care of something. I think gardeners—I would think would be—I have no survey on this, but would be benevolent people, just like people who love dogs—you know, you would hope would be benevolent.

MR. LYON: You were asked who was your favorite—who are your favorite prose authors. We're talked about some of them. I was really intrigued by your answer then, which was Borges.

MR. MICHALS: Oh, absolutely. Borges is a genius. I mean, that word is thrown around. Cindy Sherman is a genius. No, no, no, no. Borges is a genius. And every time I go back to him, I'm always stunned by him. I mean, stunned at the depth of his—and the other person I like very much is—I read the—I would say the journals of Ionesco, you know the guy who wrote Rhinoceros. Witty, eastern, just a brilliant guy.

MR. LYON: We've talked about your favorite poets already. Who are your heroes in real life?

MR. MICHALS: In real life?

MR. LYON: Or current actuality.

MR. MICHALS: Well, politically, I love Obama.

MR. LYON: Yeah?

MR. MICHALS: Absolutely. I think that—the fact it's such a triumph he became president with all this crap you have to go through, and the abuse, and the adversities. Black people—I've always been sympathetic with black people. And just by nature, they are born, you know, in defeat. And for them to rise above it, for them to—it's easier and easier, but it's still difficult and difficult and never is easy. And he' s just a triumph. And he's smart. And his talks are great. I might quibble with some of his policies, but I just think that hes a really, really important—I can't think of any president recently—I thought Lyndon Johnson was very important. And of course, I'm an old dyed man. Dyed in the wool left wing, steel worker CIO, you know, kid.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. What are your favorite names?

MR. MICHALS: Oh, well my most favorite. If I could rename myself, I would call myself Peter.

MR. LYON: Why?

MR. MICHALS: Well, I figured it out. Years ago my uncle Cyril was dating a woman named Ann Vignovic. And they were going to get married. And I was in high school. And so one night, Cyril said, "I'm going over to Ann's. Do you want to take a ride?" And we want to Ann's. And who comes to the door, but her brother Peter, who was at Carnegie Mellon studying engineering. And I was about 13 or 14. Well, the door opens, and there's this guy, who's wearing jeans—not jeans. Khaki pants, moccasins, sweatshirt, and just stunning. And I thought—he imprinted on me. I thought, this is what you're supposed to look like. This is what a guy's supposed to be. This is the guy. And the whole package just—and then, Ann who was tragic. She died at 26, after she had an operation. She had a blood clot. It was really sad. Well, somebody asked me years later, what is your favorite name? And I immediately said Peter. And I thought, why did I say Peter? I realized it was because of Peter. And then, when I got into the army, I thought well, I'm not going to worry about clothes. I'm just going to get three pairs of khakis, three different t-sheets, that's all I'll wear in the summer. And winter I'll get three pairs of corduroy pants and sweatshirts and that's all I'll wear. That's all you need. And it all went back to that moment of imprint. I had no role-model. And Ann was so wonderful. She got Peter to take me to the Y, to show me how to do things. She wanted him to sort of be a mentor. And when she and Cyril took their first apartment, which was above—an apartment above a garage. We were their first dinner dates after their wedding. And it was an Italian dinner. It was spaghetti and everything. And she had glass of chianti. And she gave me a glass of chianti like I was just really grown up. And so I was incorporated as a mature person. So when she died it was a huge, huge tragedy.

My uncle drank for two years before he could survive. He finally got married, eventually again. But I don't know if he ever got over it. She went to a hospital ostensibly because she had some sort of female problems about having kids—babies. And they did an operation. The operation was a success. It was a Sunday night. He family was visiting and Cyril was there. And her father said, "Ann, sit down. You just had an operation. You've been walking." And so she. There was a wheel chair. She plunked herself into—you know, she went like—she just sat down, and she made a face. And she had a blood clot, I guess an aneurysm. And 10 minutes later, she was dead. It went right to the heart, and she just fell over and she died.

MR. LYON: Jeez.

MR. MICHALS: It was a huge shock, huge shock. And when they called us, it was Sunday night. And they—I heard these people on the phone. I thought they were laughing. And I said, mom, you know, somebody's calling from the hospital. But they're all laughing. And then, she got on the phone, and she said, they're not laughing, they're crying. That Ann had died. It was a huge—one of the biggest—and she was just [clocking sound]. She was the real—Ann was the real thing, you know. Anyway, so that's why.

MR. LYON: So you—but that's interesting. You had this experience of someone very close to you just abruptly dying at that age. It must have—

MR. MICHALS: In high school, I wrote a poem about her that I submitted to the Scholastic writing contest, which didn't go anywhere, but just writing—the gist of the poem was to my uncle and it was about—everybody kept saying to him, you'll get over this, everything will be okay. You're going to [inaudible]. And I was writing that, you know, you're never going to get over this. You're not going to be okay. This death was so huge, you know. I was probably way out of my league and tried to talk about that. But that's interesting. Death again.

MR. LYON: But you were trying to come to terms with it.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, and not just for him but also for me because it was a huge loss. And then when Cyril died, I went to the funeral and I got there. But Ann's sister, I just missed. And I wanted to ask her whatever became of Peter. So he went to Carnegie Mellon to study engineering, and that's the last I ever heard of him. So he's probably pushing 90, if he's still alive, or 80. So that's a [inaudible] I might use sometime.

MR. LYON: That's so interesting. That's a—I can almost picture it. Just someone standing in a doorway and just, you know, almost framed in a way.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, it was sort of like—it was a revelation. I had no idea about anything—or knowing that I was gay, but it was just this sudden—looking at somebody and saying, yes, this is—nobody gave me a clue, but this is the person—this is what you should look like. This is the person you want to be, you know.

MR. LYON: Isn't that funny how you can just—

MR. MICHALS: I still remember. But yeah, and I had forgotten about it all those years. And now, I mean—maybe about 20 years ago, it came back. I remembered all of that. And it became—because somebody said, what is your favorite name. I immediately said Peter, you know. Yeah.

MR. LYON: So the question to which you answered ignorance is what do you despise about all?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: I don't know if that would still be true.

MR. MICHALS: Well no, I despise cruelty and meanness, lack of empathy. I mean, people who are knowingly cruel to another person. It's inexcusable. You know, somebody who's a bully or the Hitlers of the world, people who could be on purpose actually inflict pain on an innocent person. Outrageous. You know.

MR. LYON: What is the natural gift you would most like to have?

MR. MICHALS: That I don't have [laughs]?

MR. LYON: Presumably that you don't have?

MR. MICHALS: Well, I wish I had more of a scientific mind. I may be a dilettante when it comes to reading about physics and—but you know, I did that whole book in Germany on physics—

MR. LYON: Schrodinger.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, on Schrodinger's cat, all the biggies, you know. Heisenberg, mirror of uncertainty, chaos. Yeah, I'm interested in it, but I don't have that particularly kind of mind. I flirt with it, but we've only necked [laughs].

MR. LYON: You answered then grace, which I thought was an interesting answer.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, yeah. I'm not that graceful.

MR. LYON: Do you believe in the survival of the soul?

MR. MICHALS: I'll hedge, yes and no. I believe in the survival of my energy, my particles. Yes, they're going to go—they'll go back into the soup, and they'll be regurgitated—I said that three times already. They will be recycled and shaken up like—shaken up and stirred.

MR. LYON: Right, right, right. Like a—put them in a blender. Yeah. The next to last question is, how would you prefer to die? It doesn't mean by what method but what state of mind would you like to be when you—

MR. MICHALS: Well, I would like to die, and I don't know if it's going to happen now. One thing I really wanted

out of life was to have illumination in the Buddhist sense. To have that moment of enlightenment where you understand the true nature of the universe and your true nature. That's where I'd like to die, then die right after that.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. MICHALS: I would then die in happiness.

MR. LYON: And how would you describe the present state of your spirit?

MR. MICHALS: Well, given—first of all, I'm having a great old age. I mean, I'm very productive. I'm going lots and lots of new work. And even with having to deal with Fred's Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, that's okay. I mean, I can manage. But I have to admit, it's exhausting, it wears me down—doing the photographs and movies saves me from total collapse. So,—[yawns] excuse me—I need more rest. I don't get enough rest.

MR. LYON: Because you're working so hard.

MR. MICHALS: Yeah. It's just my day—I never get enough rest.

MR. LYON: No, I'm kidding.

MR. MICHALS: And it's just stress, emotional—even though, it's under control, it's still stressful. You cannot look at Fred and—the other day, I probably told you, he turned to me, and he said, "Am I awake?" You know, and I thought that was so sad and provocative.

MR. LYON: Well, in your book *ABC*, you gathered many of the quotes, Fred's quotes. Fred said was the way you put it.

MR. MICHALS: Those were the golden age of his quotes. He doesn't say much anymore. Although, the other day, he also turned to me and he said, "Stunning, he said." I loved the "stunning, he said." And in the new movie we're making, I'm going to be using "Am I awake" as one of the lines.

MR. LYON: Oh, and this new movie may have a kind of Vaudeville structure, right?

MR. MICHALS: Yes. And I will be the interlocutor or whatever—the Joel Grey, cabaret kind of guy. I don't know yet, we're still working on it.

MR. LYON: You were friendly with Joel Grey, right?

MR. MICHALS: Yeah, we were friends for a long time. He used to—I didn't know it. But he began to cultivate, calling me up, inviting me to dinner, and get tickets for the theater. And we had a lot in common. We're the same age. And he's from Cleveland, I'm from Pittsburgh, if that means anything. And we were both gay. So we had a lot of things in common. But he wanted to be a photographer, and I wrote the introduction to his first photo book. So we still see each other. We're very comfortable together. He's easy for me to talk to, you know.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah. I have great admiration for him.

MR. MICHALS: He's my only celebrity friend, other than you of course.

MR. LYON: Yeah, right. [Laughs.]

MR. MICHALS: Well, if you want to discount porn stars.

MR. LYON: Oh, well.

MR. MICHALS: That's something else.

MR. LYON: Well, that's all that I had on my agenda, but is there anything you want to add to this conversation?

MR. MICHALS: Well, let me think, for history, for—can I go now?

MR. LYON: Yeah. [Laughs.] You can go at any moment.

MR. MICHALS: I'm trying to think what else. I'm sure. I always have something to say about something. I've never known myself not to have an opinion about something. Well, I guess I'd like to say that-- and I mentioned I think earlier that I like to have though by the time I was 84 I would have figured something out. At 84, I'm more confused than ever. I'm more dazzled than ever. I realize that our little earth is heaven. You know, we're destroying—this is heaven, when people talk about, you know, going to heaven. No, we're in heaven. This is the

most beautiful place you could possibly imagine. And we're the ones who are screwing it up. And I'd like to know something before I die, you know. And I can honestly say, I have no regrets. You know, I've done everything I could possibly do to take care of Fred. I mean, I just—he's always been my main concern. My big fear is that I'll die before him, but I'm trying to make—set up everything. He'll be taken care of, you know.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. MICHALS: I guess—

MR. LYON: Well, thank you so much for your time and—

MR. MICHALS: Wait a minute. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. I don't get billed by the hour. I don't bill you by the hour? Or was it by the word? Now you're telling me this was a freebie? Oh.

MR. LYON: I thought I made that clear.

MR. MICHALS: Where's the erase button?

[They laugh.]

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