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Oral history interview with Bill Jacobson, 2017 March 25 and 26

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Bill Jacobson on 2017 March 25 and 26. The interview took place at Jacobson's home and studio in Brooklyn, NY, and was conducted by Alex Fialho for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project.

Bill Jacobson and Alex Fialho 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

ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho interviewing Bill Jacobson at his home and studio in Brooklyn, New York, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic Oral History Project, on March 25, 2017. So, Bill, thank you for being involved in the project. If we can start at the beginning, where and when were you born? And tell me a little about your childhood.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm [affirmative]. Born August 20, 1955 in Norwich, Connecticut. It's hard to say just a little bit about one's childhood because it's often a very expansive time in one's life. But, I grew up pretty much in a small town. And I think having a lot of woods nearby gave me time to roam and, you know, time to kind of develop internal life without a lot of external stimuli, which often probably people who grew up in cities tend to have more of.

ALEX FIALHO: How about your family? Your mother and your father?

BILL JACOBSON: Mm [affirmative]. My dad was a big Jewish lawyer in a small town. We were well-known in the town. He was also a bit of a tyrant, which I think also gave me impetus to escape into the woods a bit more. So, I had an older brother who turned out to be gay as well, now deceased. And my younger brother is still alive and well, living in Florida. Both parents are deceased.

ALEX FIALHO: How about growing up in Connecticut? Did you come into the city much at all?

BILL JACOBSON: My folks liked New York. We were about two and a half hours away in Norwich, and—so we would come in a couple times a year. So I got exposed to the city at a young age and started coming in by myself in high school. Mostly to take pictures and wander around.

ALEX FIALHO: Were you connected to Connecticut and your community there—was there a sense of community? Or were you alienated? How was growing up there?

BILL JACOBSON: Mm [affirmative]. I don't know. It's hard to describe. Like I said, it was a small town. I ran the school newspaper. It was a big high school, 3,200 kids, and I was features editor. I started off taking pictures actually. You know, really what got me focused was when I went to France on a summer abroad trip and lived with a French family for a month. And I think that was probably 1969, so I was 14. Probably my—after my second year of high school, probably. And came back and said to my dad, who himself was a good amateur photographer—but said to him that I wanted to start taking pictures. And he gave me a good Nikon camera, and we put a darkroom in the basement. And I think that began a process of self-discovery that in some way, shape, or form has continued through today.

ALEX FIALHO: How did you have a sense that you wanted to be a photographer, then?

BILL JACOBSON: You know, on that trip I had a little Instamatic camera and—but I think, something about being in a different culture and about being somewhere outside of New England and outside of what I knew—I think just being exposed to something—language and smells and culture—it was so markedly different, that it sort of woke my eyes up and woke my senses up, pretty much across the board. And I think, probably through my dad, it was in my genes somewhere, this idea of using photography as a way of telling a story. He was pretty buttoned-down, but you know, he was pretty expressive with his photographs. And maybe that somehow entered into my way of thinking as well. So, the act of being in a different country just made me want to explore the world with a camera.

ALEX FIALHO: What city were you in, in France?

BILL JACOBSON: Arcachon. It was in the South on the—on the Atlantic.

ALEX FIALHO: And how did you get involved in that program?

BILL JACOBSON: It was through Mount Hermon School, which was up in—I guess, it was Northfield Mount Hermon at that point. And they had a summer abroad program, so—and I was going to public school in Connecticut. And it just seemed like a, you know, a fun and pretty interesting way to spend a summer. I studied French somewhat in high school, so I think it was a way of getting further into the language and the culture.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's step back a little bit. Do you have any memories in your earlier years—elementary, middle school—that felt sort of formative in any way? Either artistically or perhaps sexuality-related? Or perhaps family-related?

BILL JACOBSON: Hard to say. I mean, probably all of it was formative on some level, for good or for worse. It's a bit of an odd story. I went to a very small public grammar school and we had an art teacher that came in, I think, every two weeks. And, you know, they would give us little assignments. And I could never draw. The most I could really muster were stick figures and I used to get minuses in art. It was either plus or minus, no grades. But I still remember getting minuses in art and how horrible that felt, you know, at that young age.

Other formative experiences? It's hard to say. I think, you know, I probably always was a queer kid. Never—you know, in the '60s it wasn't probably that acknowledged. So, you know, I was never physically coordinated. I was the one, you know, who didn't get chosen for the baseball team until last when the kids were choosing sides, whatever. So, I think I probably was always a bit of a loner, you know, in a lot of ways. I think going back to that idea of the woods and that escape into the woods, which was a big part of, you know, growing up kind of rurally.

ALEX FIALHO: Where were the woods located in relationship to where your house was?

BILL JACOBSON: I mean, the house itself wasn't isolated. It was, you know, in a neighborhood with houses, you know, every, I don't know, 100 feet or so. But, you know, you could go down some back roads and end up there pretty quickly. So.

ALEX FIALHO: And would you go there by yourself? Would you go on hikes or take photographs at some point later on? How did you relate to the woods in your early years?

BILL JACOBSON: Hard to describe. I think initially walking and then probably when I was about 13, I got a little mini-bike. My brother and I both got mini-bikes for our birthdays one year. And so, I think it was—mostly I would go by myself and I think it was a way of, I don't know, there was something, I think a little bit erotic about being there and being alone. There was a certain kind of autoeroticism that was, you know, implied. You know, masturbation on occasion. It was just a place where I could sort of be by myself without structure from anybody. And, I think, that idea of the asymmetry of nature that I really sort of loved and the freedom of nature that I felt where I could just be myself. There was no, you know, heterosexuality around out in nature. And the idea of going there—which I did often—was a very formative one, you know, kind of experience for me early on.

ALEX FIALHO: What did the woods look like in Norwich, Connecticut?

BILL JACOBSON: Probably not that different than woods most anywhere. But there were a lot of old trails and you never really saw anybody out there. It was really just a time to go. I know I loved it. Partly though, to get there I had to ride the mini-bike on the road, which was illegal because I didn't have a driver's license. So, my dad told me I should be walking the mini-bike. But of course it was stupid to walk the mini-bike on a road, so I rode it and on occasion I got pulled over by the cops, and they would have to come pick me up, et cetera. But the woods themselves, I don't know, it just—they were just New England woods I guess. Hard to describe. But quite beautiful.

ALEX FIALHO: And when you came back from France and expressed an interest in photography, did your family support that?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. Yeah, I think my dad, you know, partly because it was a hobby for him. He found a lot of pleasure in being supportive of that. And it—yeah. And then, it dovetailed, you know, with my work on the high school newspaper where I was taking pictures. And then, I think my junior year I became the features editor of the paper and senior year was the editor of the paper. So, it allowed for a certain interest in a publication, and you know, and excitement. And, you know, it was a big paper. I think it was 32 pages or something. It came out every two weeks. So, you know, it could be a little muckraking on occasion if I wanted to, or just to take a picture that I enjoyed and then see it in print I think was a real sort of thrill.

ALEX FIALHO: What kind of photographs did you take for the school paper?

BILL JACOBSON: It was a mix. I mean, partly if there was something newsworthy happening. You know, there were other people who took pictures too, I guess. But, I remember—I think I came in and spent a weekend in

New York one time, and then published a two-page spread, about 10 of these pictures. I still have them somewhere in my archive. And so—I don't know. It was a mix sometimes of fairly poetic, kind of whimsical imagery and other times, you know, a little more documentary-with-a-flash kinds of things. But, I was also doing my own photography in those years, you know, 15 and 16, I guess. And, yeah, taking it pretty seriously. And exploring the darkroom, and understanding the magic that comes from projected light and silver and, you know, that kind of alchemical combination that can produce something special.

ALEX FIALHO: How about France? Can you tell me a little bit about more who you stayed with? What you did there?

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. God, I haven't thought about that for a long time. There must have been about 20 kids who went over as part of this Northfield Mount Hermon program. And we each stayed with a French family. The family I stayed with was very working-class in a very small apartment. And then, we had classes during the day. And at night, I think we just kind of hung out. There was no drinking age in France in those years, so even though we were 16, we could go to bars. I guess it—so, it would have been '71; I was 16 when I went. And yeah, and so we could go hang out at bars at night and go drink rum and cokes, which is what we did. So, maybe go to French movies on occasion, but I think it was about a three-week program in Arcachon.

And then, we all went by bus up and spent a few days in Paris on the way out. It was fun. You know, I mean—I think now, you know, with the Internet and the way the world is so connected I think there's not as much difference between cultures and countries now as there was back then. You know, things were much more—how old are you?

ALEX FIALHO: 27.

BILL JACOBSON: Got it.

ALEX FIALHO: I spent three months in France and had a formative experience too, but that was later on.

BILL JACOBSON: How old?

ALEX FIALHO: 21.

BILL JACOBSON: Got it. But anyways, yeah—no, it was special just experiencing different food and eating rabbit for the first time, and all of it.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool. Do you have any of those photographs you took with the Instamatic in France?

BILL JACOBSON: In a box somewhere, and I haven't looked at them in a very long time. But I do have them, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool. Did you see any exhibitions in museums in your teen years that resonated at all?

BILL JACOBSON: I remember sort of going to the Louvre, but nothing that stayed with me. In the town where I grew up, there was a wonderful museum called the Slater Art Museum [J.F. Slater Memorial Museum]. And it's a plaster cast museum. And they have plaster casts of all the famous sculpture, you know, from Greece and Rome that we know. And it's really special. It's still there. It's—they've modernized it a little bit, but it's still not unlike it was. A bunch of us art kids would go hang out in this museum. It actually was on the ground of the high school. The high school, even though I said it was public, was technically a private school but nobody paid tuition to go. Because the towns never—Norwich and the surrounding towns never built their own high school. So, it's really private, but it's public.

But anyways, on the grounds of the high school, there was this extraordinary museum. And so, a bunch of the outsiders and the kids who were kind of queer, but nobody had really come out in those years, there was a little group of us that used to go hang out with the art teacher. Because the art school and the high school was kind of adjacent to the museum. So really, I mean, I have really fond memories of hanging out in this museum before school and after. And just—I'll show you pictures of it, actually. After I did all the out-of-focus work, I did a book called *A Series of Human Decisions*. I went back and photographed in the museum and there's some pictures in there.

ALEX FIALHO: Who was the audience for the museum, and why was it in Norwich?

BILL JACOBSON: Norwich back in the '30s—'20s and '30s—it was a very, very wealthy town because there were a lot of—there were mills there. And one of the big mill owners was a guy named Slater and he decided to endow the Slater Art Museum because he thought the town should have culture. And many museums had plaster casts in those years. And since the museum—they've mostly been thrown out or destroyed. But—and the audience—I don't think there's ever been much of an audience. You know, a few townspeople go through there on occasion,

but whenever I go back there are maybe no more than one or two people there ever. But it's pretty much of a gem.

ALEX FIALHO: Nice.

BILL JACOBSON: And worth seeing. If you ever get up that way you should go by.

ALEX FIALHO: Hanging out in the museum before and after—any experiences or memories that particularly resonate or come to mind? Just the sort of general sense of it.

BILL JACOBSON: Just the feeling. It was a beautiful old—I don't know the period of the building, but it was designed by the guy who actually had also designed the Worcester Art Museum, which is also a very grand building. And I still remember early on hearing—and it's funny, because, you know—the sculptures of course, the originals often had male genitalia. And when the museum opened, they actually had—the townspeople were so aghast by the genitalia the museum had to close for a period, lop them off, and put plaster fig leaves where the male testicles and penis had previously been. So, I think I got a little titillation out of that at a young age. But.

ALEX FIALHO: How about sexuality in that moment? How did you relate to it?

BILL JACOBSON: It was—high school was a confusing time, you know? The boys in my neighborhood kind of played around a good bit prior to high school—more in junior high school. And then, I think, once high school hit and people sort of started thinking that it was kind of queer to be doing this stuff, everyone got a little more uptight about it. So, as I recall, I don't think—you know, it was mostly repressed throughout the high school years. Much to my dismay.

ALEX FIALHO: How about your mother? We talked a little bit about your father.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: What did she do?

BILL JACOBSON: She was a housewife who did some civic activities. She was an only child. She was—she was a bit of a frustrate in certain ways. She never had a great relationship with my dad. And she prided herself on having a very nice house, and she was a very good cook. But she never knew how to relax. She never knew how to really find pleasure, you know? My dad traveled extensively, but—I don't know. She was kind of an unhappy person pretty much her whole life.

ALEX FIALHO: And how did they end up in Norwich together?

BILL JACOBSON: My mom was born there. And she met my dad who was from Hartford, and when he graduated law school, he thought it would be a good place to open up a law practice. So.

ALEX FIALHO: And did they stay there throughout?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How about getting into Brown?

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: How did that come to be?

BILL JACOBSON: That's a funny story. I was a good student. I wasn't a great student. My dad, as I mentioned, was a lawyer and he was hell-bent that I was going to be a lawyer like he was. And he—

ALEX FIALHO: For all you—his kids? And your brothers?

BILL JACOBSON: No, just me. Just me.

ALEX FIALHO: And why's that?

BILL JACOBSON: He decided I was kind of the smart one of the family—you know, the three boys. And my older and younger brothers, they were never much involved academically.

And so, anyways, he decided he was going to get me into Brown. And got all his business contacts to write letters and et cetera. And his law—the other lawyer in his office was named Allyn Brown and was from that—a descendent of that family. So, my dad worked as hard as he could to get me in there. And I actually—I didn't get in on the first round, but I was on the waiting list. And got in off the waiting list. I think at some point somebody

in admissions told me they had never seen more letters pile up so quickly for somebody who had just gotten on the waiting list as they did for me. So—

ALEX FIALHO: It worked.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, it worked. And it was actually—it was a wonderful place to spend—I was only there three years, not four. But, good memories of it.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you go there intending to study art?

BILL JACOBSON: I went honestly thinking that I wanted to be a lawyer like my dad was, because that's what I was kind of told I should do or be. And then, I forget. My first year I don't think I did classes at RISD [Rhode Island School of Design], but the second year is when I think I started doing photo classes at RISD. And I was taking art history at Brown. And basically Brown in those years let you do whatever you wanted. You could do independent study. You could design your own major. Classes were pass/fail if you choose—if you chose to do them pass/fail. I might have done photography my first year. I actually don't remember.

Brown, oddly, had no photography whatsoever in those years. They since—now have a photography program as part of the art building, part of the art department. But in those years, they had no photography at all. And if you wanted to do photography, you went to RISD. And they had whole classes at RISD for Brown students that were taught by RISD grad students. Because I had started some years before and had a portfolio of some sort to show them, they actually let me—because Brown and RISD had this kind of joint, you know, kind of curriculum or overlap where if you went to one school you do classes at the other. I think when I was a sophomore at Brown I could take sophomore photo classes at RISD.

I'm trying to think. Actually, I bet I did start first semester. Because I can think back now to the people that I studied with. So, pretty early on, I was doing, yeah, photo at RISD.

ALEX FIALHO: Who were some of the people that you were studying with?

BILL JACOBSON: I think my first year there was a guy, an older guy, who might have been chairman of the department in those years. It was Bert Beaver—who nobody had ever really heard of. [Harry] Callahan and [Aaron] Siskind were at RISD at that point, but I think they were only teaching graduate school. So, I would see them around, and their work and their spirit and their specialness were very much part of what was influential for me because I was very aware of what they had been doing and who they were. And just seeing them on the street was so special.

But let me see. I think second year—who was it? There was a guy from Colorado who I can picture but I can't place the name. But sophomore year, second semester, a photographer named Ray Metzker, who had been a student of Callahan and Siskind in Chicago came up from Philadelphia. And he was extraordinary. He's the one who kind of blew it apart for me. He's the one who, I don't know, just had a lot to do with teaching me how to see. And also, I had been taking some art history classes at Brown. And, you know, I never had had art history before. I had never thought about that whole logical progression of what art history means and what it is and what it has been.

And I remember—and the class that was the most extraordinary for me was taught by a sculptor, and by an art historian. And it was Kermit Champa. And who else? Oh, William Jordy, who was an architectural historian. And I still remember him talking about walking through a Frank Lloyd Wright House and how extraordinary that was, and showing pictures. And, you know, Champa talking about Cezanne. I think they alternated once a week. And I forget, it might have been a sculptor named Hugh Townley who taught about sculpture. I think that's who it was. So, basically, it was painting, sculpture, and architecture. And that was a freshman year class for me.

And so, I think, it was incrementally those, you know—being exposed to a class like that and then this next year having this class with Ray Metzker. You know, otherwise I was taking film history. I took a Hitchcock class, which was special. And—

ALEX FIALHO: It sounds like you were enamored from the beginning, though.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. I mean, I was also doing poli-sci 1, but hating it, basically. And so, I think it was there, and you know, started—again, like I was kind of hanging out with the art kids in the museum in high school. I started really focusing on the art building at Brown and at RISD, and realizing where I wanted to be. And it wasn't hanging out with the poli-sci kids or the pre-law kids.

ALEX FIALHO: Were you starting to be in dialogue with other creatives at that point?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, very much so.

ALEX FIALHO: Who? Anyone in particular in college that was a strong relationship that's worth noting?

BILL JACOBSON: You know, a number of people who I'm still—maybe not very close friends with, but, you know, still friends with now, you know, 40 years later.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. Great.

BILL JACOBSON: I mean, the Brown years would have been '73 to '77. So that's—is that 44 years? Is that possible?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

BILL JACOBSON: I think so. Crazy.

ALEX FIALHO: What type of photography were you making in that moment, and what were the courses focused on? Was it a lot of darkroom work? What were you learning basically?

BILL JACOBSON: You know—no, it wasn't really technical stuff. I think the classes I was taking—there may have been technical stuff on offer, but what I really wanted and needed and was craving, I guess, were the crit classes. And, you know, in those years that's really what a lot of photo classes were. Talking about what pictures meant and what pictures could be, and, you know, I remember there was one phrase, you know, that you heard a lot: "What is this picture about?" It's a really simple thing, but it's very—it's a challenging question to bring to a photograph, you know? It's easy to say what it's of. But to say what it's about, sometimes can be something very different. So—

ALEX FIALHO: How so?

BILL JACOBSON: Well, I think "of" and "about"—you know, it's like the difference between asking somebody what their name is and asking them, "Who are you really?" I think it's that difference between, you know, "what's this of?" and "what's it about?" So—or it was funny. I remember, you know, RISD kids had a button or a t-shirt or something that said, "You are what you print." So, I think it's probably some version of that.

ALEX FIALHO: Were you starting at that point to develop what your photography was about?

BILL JACOBSON: Okay, so we can go back to one high school experience that ties the whole thing together. My older brother had a friend who knew my dad was interested in photography. And my dad helped this friend out—I kind of know how, but I'm not really sure how. It was either financially or in terms of college or something. My dad did this guy a favor, who again, was the same age as my older brother. And I guess while I was in high school and both my brother and this friend—who was a Trump supporter I found out recently, which totally pissed me off.

But anyways, found out that this friend knew that my dad liked photography. And he ended up giving my dad the Diane Arbus book that has just come out. So, this would have been around 1971. You know, when I was still in high school. And my dad, of course, you know, couldn't deal with it. He didn't know what it was. He was a little freaked out by it. And I still remember seeing him take this book and put it up on the very top shelf in the den, sort of—you know, I think he didn't want to throw it out, but he didn't know what to do with it. So, he put it up high thinking that it would just sit up there.

And I had seen one Arbus picture before on the back page of *Life* magazine, probably a year or two before. They had published the famous Jewish Giant at home with his parents. And I still remember sitting where I was sitting on the couch, looking at this picture, being totally astounded by it. And I don't know if I remembered her name or how it came about, but I somehow sensed—maybe I had looked at the book before my dad shelved it. But I remember pulling that book down. And, you know, here 40 years later, I still have it in my bookcase.

ALEX FIALHO: Which book in particular?

BILL JACOBSON: The Aperture monograph [*Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*]. You know, with the twins on the cover.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

BILL JACOBSON: That had just come out that year.

ALEX FIALHO: The one.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, exactly. And anyways—so Arbus was a big early influence. You know, partly she presented issues around gender and sexuality, around homosexuality, that, living in a small town, I had never

seen any kind of manifestation of. I still remember the *New York Times* having the word "pervert" on the front cover, you know? My folks would get the Sunday *Times*, and that's how homos were referred to in those years, in print. So, to see this Arbus book, just was a total eye-opening, very, very different perspective on the whole thing. And it coincided with my budding interest in photography and wanting to start taking pictures, and sort of knowing intrinsically that I was queer but didn't know how to express it.

So, I think the whole thing really pulled together as—you know, I think for me the camera was a kind of liberation or showed potential to be liberating in terms of exploring my sexuality. Or giving me some kind of touchstone to a place within, that would allow that sexuality to kind of come out. And hopefully to blossom. So, probably when I first started taking pictures they're actually—I still have them. And I think even on my website if you go all the way down to the bottom you see some from those early college years.

ALEX FIALHO: The American Trip or earlier?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. And—which is the name that came to that work later when I did a show of that work in Berlin about 10 years ago. But, anyways—I got a little lost for a second.

ALEX FIALHO: Were there—you mentioned Arbus as an influence.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Were there other folks that you were looking to at that early stage?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. I mean, again, Callahan and Siskind, Friedlander, Winogrand, you know, that whole '70s Americana. Robert Frank, Walker Evans, you know. Partly, they really looked at those pictures and that whole group of photographers in photo classes, they're referred to constantly. They're really iconographic in those years, you know. Maybe not as much as they are now, but they were really important. It was interesting actually, when I went to the [… -BJ] Francesca Woodman show at the Guggenheim.

ALEX FIALHO: So good.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. It was! And I was reading it and I realized that she actually was at RISD. She might have been a year before me.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

BILL JACOBSON: Or a year after. I don't know. She was right around that time. But, you know, it was interesting because a lot of people—I mean her work, of course, was extraordinary and continues to receive the respect it deserves. But at the time everybody was doing work kind of like that. You know, black-and-white, small, nobody ever printed bigger than 8x10 or 11x14. You know, sort of somewhat dark portraiture, self-referential kind of emotional work. And I was probably printing in the RISD darkroom alongside her. But you just didn't think that much about it because her work sort of felt like a lot of other work that came out of it and out of that time. But—

ALEX FIALHO: It just sort of—as a result of what happened to her, sadly ossified in that way.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: It stays in that moment.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, yeah, partly. And it would be interesting to see like so many people who died over these years way too soon, where the work would have gone if they had been still in the world. But, anyway, so that whole school—but I think it was really primarily Arbus. And I did a lot of Arbus-kind-of-like work, but that also had certain other formal elements I think, you know, that really came out of looking at it [along with –BJ] Friedlander's work in those years.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. Were you taking classes outside of the art department that felt influential?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, yeah. I mean, ultimately, I'm a little embarrassed to admit what it was, but I came up with a very wordy—what do you call it?—major. You know, independent major. "Artistic Manifestations of American Culture" I think is what it was called.

ALEX FIALHO: Nice.

BILL JACOBSON: Sort of. And there was a dean at Brown who was very supportive, and really, you know—you had to get approval from this dean, and whatever I came up with, she said, "Great."

So, I basically went through, you know, four years of college with not a single math or science class. I think there

was one astronomy class or something, but basically, it's all liberal arts. You know, film history, a number of English classes, probably some semiotics classes.

But what I did do was I took my junior year and I went to San Francisco Art Institute. I just—partly, I was coming out in those years. I wanted to get—you know, Norwich is an hour from Providence. I just wanted to get away from the East Coast. The idea of living in San Francisco, that I heard was much more gay, seemed appealing. Yeah, my folks didn't want me leaving Brown, and I was pissed. And I think I applied to Cooper Union. And I said to my dad that basically, if—you know, Cooper Union is free. I don't know if it still is. I'm not sure how they changed it, but—I said to my dad, "If you're not going to pay for me to go to the Art Institute in San Francisco where I got in, I'll just go to Cooper Union."

And they really didn't want me living in New York in 1976, or '75. You know, New York in those years was a pretty tough animal. I liked the challenge. I thought it would have been fun. But anyways, I think between New York and San Francisco for that year, they figured San Francisco was a safer bet.

So, I took my junior year, went out to San Francisco, and I really wanted to stay and graduate from the Art Institute. It was a really formative, wonderful year for me. And, I don't know—my dad, you know, he loved the idea of a Brown degree and put big, big pressure on me to come back. And I gave in and came back. And honestly, after the year I had in San Francisco—where I really found myself in a lot of ways, not only sexually but creatively—coming back to my last year at Brown, I formed a lot of great friendships and, you know, it was a pretty wonderful year as well. So.

ALEX FIALHO: How did you find yourself in San Francisco?

BILL JACOBSON: I started having sex with men. Which I don't think—did I a little bit? I don't think I did my first two years, actually, at Brown. The second year at Brown, I moved off campus second semester sophomore year. I think I was seeing a shrink actually my sophomore year and trying to—you know, a lot of coming out stuff. And I got the shrink to write a—Brown really was big on people living on campus for three or four years to make the money off the dorms, and they were pretty cruddy dorms for the most part. And so, I got some shrink, who was really supportive, to write a letter saying that I needed to live off campus. And so, I ended up moving in my second semester sophomore year with RISD students, and—but I don't think I had sex with guys in that year. And then finally I went to San Francisco where it was a whole lot easier.

ALEX FIALHO: Where did you live in San Francisco?

BILL JACOBSON: I have to think back. I lived in two apartments. You know, partly because I was going to the Art Institute and I wanted to be fairly close. So, I had one apartment for a couple of months that was up on Nob Hill. And then, I think I moved, also in Nob Hill. Apartments were cheap then. You could have a two- or three-bedroom apartment for $300 a month or something. It was really inexpensive.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. The first apartment, though, it's funny. I moved in, and it was a sweet apartment. A kind of nothing apartment, but it was good size. The cable car ran right outside the window, and if you've ever—you probably may remember this. It's romantic and it's lovely to have a cable car and it's convenient. That cable makes a noise.

ALEX FIALHO: It's loud.

BILL JACOBSON: Loud. And we were right at, I think, where two lines met like that. Or maybe there was just one line, but there was one of those cable boxes that kept the cable going—[demonstrates loud noise]—until midnight when it would stop. And you could finally sort of relax. Anyway, that was the first apartment I had for a couple of months. And then, I moved to a much quieter, kind of bigger place with a couple of roommates.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you take photography classes at SFAI as well?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, yeah. That's mostly what I did.

ALEX FIALHO: Who with?

BILL JACOBSON: That undergraduate year, the teacher who I was closest to then would have been Ellen Brooks. Yeah, who I'm still good friends with. And she—yeah, she was great. And Linda Connor. I studied with. Hank Wessel, you know. Henry Wessel is better known, I guess. He was also a big influence at that time. Also, took some photo history.

San Francisco in those years was a very good place for photography. And, yeah, and there was just a lot going on and going to galleries, hanging out at the old SFMoMA, when it was on Van Ness Avenue. And just being in a

bigger city than Providence. You know, it was different of course than New York, but I never had lived in New York. So, I think just living in a bigger city and being exposed to all that was great.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you have any particular memories?

BILL JACOBSON: Oh, it's going back a long time.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you go to the Castro much?

BILL JACOBSON: No. I don't think—even in '75 the Castro felt like another world. I mean, partly—I don't even know how gay the Castro was in '75. It might have been, but more it was Polk Street. Actually, the apartment that I lived in for most of the year I was out there was just a block or two away from Polk Street and sort of the gay bars that were going on there. But I always felt—I don't know. It wasn't so much that I was a hippy or whatever, but the gay scene, as it was, never—I never felt like I quite fit in it, in '75.

You know, it was a certain kind of clone-y look that existed and a certain way of dressing. I mean, you know, I still have pictures of myself from those years with like, you know, a sweatshirt and old baggy white pants that were stained with darkroom chemicals. You know, and funny pink glasses and—you know, probably looked gay but not in a kind of way that I found on Polk Street in those years. And, there's still—I mean, people were out. There was definitely a gay scene.

[Phone ringing.]

BILL JACOBSON: Oh, just—

[Audio break.]

ALEX FIALHO: To get us back into this, after a little dinner break. What was the content of some of your early photographs in your college years? What were they photographs of? To continue that thread from earlier.

BILL JACOBSON: They were pretty varied. It was a mix. It's funny. In some ways, it's not unlike what I've been doing the last years. Some were of people, and some were of architecture, and some were of nature. You know, I think basically my work has always referred or referenced these tropes of photography: portraiture, still life, landscape, and nature. And, you know, I've always been a fairly straightforward photographer. I fuck with those tropes somewhat, to make them my own, but I also I think have a certain allegiance to them. One of the things that's always influenced me has been vernacular photography, which also tend to be very much often falling into those categories.

ALEX FIALHO: Any photos from those days that were particularly an a-ha moment, either particular images or turns and things that you were developing?

BILL JACOBSON: Oh, interesting. Yeah, it's funny because it would have been—I forget if it was—I was in—well, actually, we should talk about a little bit of the lineage. Because here it's going to start to get a little mixed up. So, I went back and I finished my senior year at Brown. And then I took a year and went to Seattle. Didn't know anybody there. Is it okay to go on this track?

ALEX FIALHO: Yes, keep going.

BILL JACOBSON: Okay. I had a friend who lived in Portland, from Brown, and she said, "Oh, come to Portland." And honestly, this would have been fall of 1977. I drove out there with my stuff in my station wagon. And Portland was—

ALEX FIALHO: From the East Coast?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, from the East Coast. From Providence. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Because you liked this friend so much you would go across the country? Or just the idea—

BILL JACOBSON: I think I just wanted some—I wanted to go somewhere where I had never been. And I had really enjoyed my year in San Francisco, and I just didn't know what to do. I didn't feel ready to move to New York. I had this sense of wanting to go to grad school. But I just needed some time before I had—you know—dove back into a school situation.

So, yeah, I liked this friend who was a woman, and she had a boyfriend and she said, "Oh, come to Portland. You can stay with us until you figure out what to do." And I spent about a week in Portland, and it was dark, and it was landlocked, and it was just unappealing. I think I had always lived close to the ocean living on the East Coast and in San Francisco for that year. And so, it just didn't do anything for me. And I remember getting into the car

driving up to Seattle one day, just to see it, and totally fell in love with it.

So, I ended up living in Seattle for a year. But, I think to tell the whole history, though, we missed one really pivotal part. And that is—okay, I was at Brown for two years, went to the Art Institute in San Francisco for a year, decided to go back and finish at Brown, but to get from San Francisco back to the East Coast—you know, I had driven from the East Coast out to San Francisco with a Volvo station wagon. And then, instead of just driving straight back in a few days, I actually spent six weeks driving by myself in the station wagon. Drove up to the Northwest through Seattle. I think I might have gone up to Vancouver, possibly, and then along the northernmost route. And then, I went all the way down into Texas and then proceeded to go east from—through Louisiana. I went to New Orleans, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and then up to New England.

So, I spent six weeks. It was 1976. It was the bicentennial summer. And I spent six weeks basically by myself, met a few people along the way, but basically by myself. Staying in campgrounds, on the sides of the road in Alabama and Mississippi, on these dirt roads, out in middle of frigging nowhere, and took all kinds of photographs with, I assume a 35 mm. Maybe I had a 2 1/4 camera as well.

And so, it was a real time to go deep into what I wanted to be doing and saying in those years. And it was really a wonderful trip. Luckily, nothing bad happened except for getting put in jail in New Orleans for making an illegal left turn. But even that was kind of not a bad experience, ultimately. So, a lot of pleasure in it. And then—so I went back to have that year at Brown. I felt like I was in a pretty strong position and just emotionally, you know, pretty much had come out fully and—

ALEX FIALHO: What were you wanting to be saying and doing in those pictures?

BILL JACOBSON: I don't know. There was something. I would almost have to look at them again to really get into the head space of knowing what I wanted to be doing. They were all black-and-white. I didn't do any color in those years. And they were—again there was a mix of portraits and architecture. Probably my own work has had a certain degree of melancholy in it. Maybe I'm somewhat of a melancholic person, possibly. And so, there is a kind of—they're not morose by any means, but there is a matter-of-factness. This is what this looks like, with this light on this, you know. And if you look at anything, you know.

I was also doing—actually, there's another thing we should probably talk about. You know, in my first year in college, '73, I started a meditation practice. I learned transcendental meditation and meditated twice a day. Pretty much every day. I don't think I missed a day from '73 to '83. And so, you know, the drive across the country in '76, you know, came sort of in the middle of that.

And I think if the mind quiets down and you have an act of recognition, there is just something straightforward and sincere that comes from that. And I had the ability to record those moments that struck me as just present, and probably on some level beautiful, and some level intriguing or different or odd. And so, those pictures probably reflected that mindset to a certain extent. Plus Arbus.

ALEX FIALHO: So, the meditation practice influenced the work in some senses?

BILL JACOBSON: Oh, hugely. Hugely. Yeah. It taught me, along with taking these art history classes and these photo classes and meeting artists and knowing who Harry Callahan was. You know, it all coalesced to—you know, it started me seeing.

ALEX FIALHO: When you were looking at—we'll get there in a minute, actually.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: Did you have a final project in college?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. Essentially my senior thesis for Brown was the portfolio of pictures I did. Then I wrote about them. I have no idea where the text is, but it was those pictures I did driving cross country the summer before, and really pulling those into a kind of group or portfolio. Talking about Americana and talking about—I think the object is reflective of a mindset, you know. It didn't have the depth, of course, of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, but I think it was that idea of America and how it could be represented through a series of photographs that interested me.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. So, you go back to Seattle.

BILL JACOBSON: Back to—so, after—

ALEX FIALHO: Or you go to Seattle.

BILL JACOBSON: So, yeah, so anyways. Yeah, I had the summer drive across country, had that last year at

Brown, graduated, and then went to Seattle for a year, which I visited briefly on the cross-country thing.

ALEX FIALHO: From Portland?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, from Portland. And got there, didn't—you know, I just remember driving up there one day and saying, "I want to live here." I still remember going to the Pike Place Market, and it was again on the sea, and the light was beautiful.

I looked around and found a house that was for rent for $400. And it was either that day, or I went back another day and rented this house, and ended up getting a job with a commercial photographer a couple days a week. And the *Seattle Gay News* was a pretty big deal in Seattle in those years. It came out every week or two. I think they even got government funding in those years, and they hired me to be, I think, their photographer, and I was doing design and layout for them. And all that newspaper stuff I had done in high school came back to help me.

And so, I spent the year basically doing that. And it actually was pretty fun because being the photographer of a gay newspaper, I was going to gay rodeos and you know drag shows and discos and, you know, the Mr. Gay Seattle contest. And, I don't know, I think it demystified the gay world for me in a way that was really, really helpful. Just to see all these different tropes and "isms" of the gay world. And to be there as the observer, as the photographer, people always treated you very nicely. And I think it just got me over my fear of what this gay world could possibly be.

I went to my first gay bathhouse that year. I found a bar that had a lot of artists that went to it, and felt comfortable and fun, called Tugs.

ALEX FIALHO: It probably showed you a lot of different types of gay culture, as opposed to something like we were talking about Polk Street, for instance.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, exactly, yeah. I mean, also I think—oh, yeah, yeah. And then, from Seattle is when I applied to graduate school. I think I applied to Yale, didn't get in, and a couple of other places. But I applied to go back to San Francisco Art Institute, got in there, and made the decision to go there.

ALEX FIALHO: And were you excited to leave Seattle, or did you grow attachment to it, or was it just sort of stint?

BILL JACOBSON: Not really. Not really. I formed one very good friendship with a guy named Charles LeDray who has gone on to have a really big career.

ALEX FIALHO: I love his work.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. He was in high school when we met and I was a few years older. But—so, he was an important part of that year. And then—no, but, I was allowed to go back to San Francisco. I think it was good to have a break and again to have—I think when you're young the more experiences you pile on and the more places you lived and the more things you do that are different, it just all adds and builds up and helps to form a good foundation. At least, that was my experience.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. Why SFAI?

BILL JACOBSON: I thought they had a good photo program. As I mentioned before, the whole history of San Francisco is very connected to the history of photography. And a lot of good people came out of there. And I very much enjoyed the program and really thought it would be good to go back there. The year I started, Larry Sultan got hired to be part of the graduate faculty, and Larry was a very important teacher. He is also very close to Ellen, Ellen Brooks, who I mentioned before. But he probably was my primary teacher during the graduate school two years.

ALEX FIALHO: How was San Francisco closely tied to photographic history? In what ways for you, or just generally?

BILL JACOBSON: Just a lot of good photographers who always come out of there. You know, the whole [Edward] Weston school obviously. I'm trying to think of who else. I mean, it has that history, but now when I actually start to think about it—you know, Jack Welpott, Judy Dater. I was in grad school with Jim Goldberg, who has gone on to have a very big career. [… -BJ].

You asked me if there was one thing that happened in school, and I can't remember if it's when I was there for the year in '75—I think it was—but it might have been the beginning of grad school. And I was basically stopping people on the street and asking them to take their picture. But there was always a lot of space around them, they were a little bit Arbus-y. And there was a guy there who was a visual anthropologist named John Collier. And John was quite old, somewhat deaf, but he was really special. He just offered insight that nobody else was

really able to do. And I remember him looking at these portraits I was doing on the street and him, basically, yelling at me, "Get closer! Get Closer!"

Partly he was deaf, so I think he was screaming it for himself. But I remember actually going out that day with my 2 1/4 camera, not unlike the one Arbus used, and putting the camera in the faces of a few people. And all of a sudden, I was making the Arbus pictures that I had always wanted to make. And it was really him telling me, pushing me to kind of physically get closer to the subject that taught me basically that where you put yourself and where you put the camera is half the battle. You know, getting within the vicinity is one thing, but then actually where you take that stance is something completely different. And I think probably any art student is going to have experiences of somebody saying something where it affects what they do. But that's one that really comes to mind, you know.

Also, you know who Larry Sultan was, right?

ALEX FIALHO: No.

BILL JACOBSON: You should look for the work, only because he was very influential for a) a lot of students, and b) a lot of artists. Died sadly very young about six years ago now. But I remember him saying that if—you know, his advice to artists is, "If you're ever stuck and you don't know what you want to do, make something not for the art world, but make something as a gift to somebody else." And that's also something that's helped me at different points. Just to think about it in a really personal way and to, you know, get out of the art world kind of construct and just, you know, make something that's a poem or a gift or photograph. It's—you know, for somebody you love. It's good advice.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. Was the graduate level developing your work in particular ways? Or more intensive?

BILL JACOBSON: It was helpful. The year I had been at the Art Institute for my junior year was good to be immersed in an art school environment and then to come back and really be on a graduate level in a two-year program. It was really helpful. I mean, grad school there didn't give you that much. I think mostly we had the critiques once a week. I don't remember a whole lot of other classwork. There might have been but not that I—but I really remember there were very intense, you know, kind of studio critique things that would go on. But just to have the time and the space to just make work and not much else.

Did I have a day job then? Not that I can remember. You know, school was very cheap. It was cheap to live in San Francisco. And it's funny, though, at the Art Institute because, you know, San Francisco came out of that whole Haight Street hippie thing. So, at the Art Institute, there was a very funny thing that happened where basically every week somebody who you knew at the school or somebody, you know, who was a friend of a friend who had always had long, kind of hippie hair, basically, cut all the hair off, got an earring and then all of a sudden came out. And it was just a weekly kind of thing to see this process. And I think it was a real signal of that time.

It was also a start of the whole punk rock time, which was a very big community in San Francisco. You saw a lot of things shift in those years. So, I was there, started grad school. I came in mid-year I think. So, I started in January of '79, and then graduated two years later, January of '81, and then stayed in San Francisco for about another year and a half after.

But—you asked me about how my work changed and grew. And I think I came in still as a disciple of Arbus and Friedlander. And my work in the two years that I was there—I still have it—it got much more poetic. And I think I started to develop my own style, and I started doing work that didn't feel so much of an allegiance to, you know, those important godfathers of photography.

I started doing these very small pictures that each felt like a little poem. And I think it felt much more like work that was really my own and work that, you know—you could see where it's gone on since. I think embedded in those pictures from those years.

ALEX FIALHO: How was your family relating to both the photography direction that your life had taken and the gay direction that your life had taken?

BILL JACOBSON: You know, I came out to my mom in those years, and I didn't come out to my dad until I moved to New York in '82. So, the gay thing, they weren't really dealing with. You know, my mother till her death told me that she wished I hadn't told her I was gay. So—[laughs]—at least, at that time. I mean she had finally came around, and she met my boyfriends, and she ultimately was mostly fine. You know, I think it was hard for them having my older brother being gay and also myself. So at some point I can tell you the funny story about how my brother was outed by his lover's drunk mother. We can go there if we want to, but—or not. But.

ALEX FIALHO: To your family?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, yeah. It's a funny story. But anyways—so, the gay thing didn't really come up until later except for me coming out to my mom, who then pretty much denied it. And in terms of the art stuff they saw I was doing things, and I was happy. And, ultimately, much to my surprise they were pretty supportive.

ALEX FIALHO: What directions did your brothers' lives and careers take?

BILL JACOBSON: This and that. My younger brother sold cars. He was a truck driver for a while. Then he became a salesman of kind of industrial goods as the younger brother. And then the older one, the gay one, he worked at Bloomingdale's for a while, and then he kind of had a downward spiral with drugs for a number of years, and got sober in '89. And then, discovered dogs and basically devoted himself to taking care of dogs for the rest of his life.

ALEX FIALHO: So, you were the "art son."

BILL JACOBSON: Very much so, yeah, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: What were you doing after you graduated from SFAI in San Francisco, either artistically or work-wise?

BILL JACOBSON: I had to figure out how to make a living. And, so, I started taking pictures for a gallery, Stephen Wirtz Gallery [Wirtz Art]. And they had advertised at the Art Institute they needed a photographer, and I had done it for some friends and a couple teachers. So, I went down and applied, and they started giving me a lot of work. It was freelance. But I was good at it, but not that good, but they gave me keys. So, basically, I'd go in. And in those days, of course, you didn't have digital. You didn't know how you did. You'd have to bring the film to the lab, get it back the next day, and if the picture didn't come out, I could go back in and reshoot the stuff.

So, it was really learning by doing and so—yeah, that's mostly what I did for the next year and a half. I did some of my own work, I suppose, after I graduated, but, yeah. And then, I moved to New York October of '82.

ALEX FIALHO: Why did you make that move?

BILL JACOBSON: I never lived in New York, but a lot of my friends from Brown, and also from San Francisco, had moved to the city. And it just felt like the right time. I mean, the art world in San Francisco—as wonderful as it was, and there was some good art spaces and good things to see—but ultimately, it was too provincial. You know, in ways—compared to New York. And I would come to New York once a year or twice a year to visit, and just had the best time.

New York, I'm sure you know the history and the pictures. It was fucking raw. And it was cheap, and it was wild, and it just—as much as being in France when I was 14 or 15—pushed my senses, New York was a complete fucking sensory overload of burned-out buildings and graffiti and punk bands, and it was—you know, $300 a month rent. And it was a perfect city for artists because you just—there was never a comfort level. It's like everything you—every sense you had was continually on fire. And what better way to create.

ALEX FIALHO: What was the first time you heard about what would become HIV/AIDS?

BILL JACOBSON: Well, it goes back to San Francisco, and I still have this brochure here. I should find it for you at some point. You know, there was a group called the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

ALEX FIALHO: I love them.

BILL JACOBSON: And the sisters—they were amongst the—maybe the health department talked about it some in San Francisco. But I still have this brochure, and they actually did an early safe sex party that I went to. The Sisters hosted it at some space or club. I can still remember being there and the guy I had sex with—it's funny—but it—they were really—and this brochure talks about it, that, "There's something going on, but we don't know what it is." You know, and it—they really promoted this idea of not exchanging bodily fluids. So, that would have been before I moved. So, I do remember that.

ALEX FIALHO: I'm trying to pull this up because—it's purple, right?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, yeah! It's kind of like this and it folds out like this, yeah. I have it somewhere in box—in a box.

ALEX FIALHO: I curated it into an exhibition in San Francisco.

BILL JACOBSON: Wow. Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: At a space called the Center for Sex and Culture.

BILL JACOBSON: Fabulous.

ALEX FIALHO: But I think it's from '82.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: It's perhaps the earliest—

BILL JACOBSON: That's right.

ALEX FIALHO: —safe sex disseminated information.

BILL JACOBSON: Because I moved in October '82, which was a few months before that, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, and they handed it out at sex parties.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And people think about Richard Berkowitz and Dr. Joseph Sonnabend, I believe—

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —in New York with *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic* in '83 as a milestone landmark, which it definitely is, but—of safe sex information disseminated by the gay community.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: But, the Sisters in San Francisco—

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —were a little earlier.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And it folds out.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, exactly.

ALEX FIALHO: And it even has—I think in particular it talks about—it has quite sensitive, thorough information—

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —for that moment.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, no, completely. Completely. And—yeah, no, it—they really had the foresight to start—

ALEX FIALHO: "Play Fair."

BILL JACOBSON: What?

ALEX FIALHO: "Play Fair."

BILL JACOBSON: "Play Fair," exactly. Yeah, that was it, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And it has the Sisters, and they all have the little cotton swabs and they're—

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —in a little chorus line with their cotton swabs.

BILL JACOBSON: That's right, that's right, yeah, exactly. Exactly, yeah, I remember that party well. I started to develop my first boyfriend right around that time in San Francisco before I moved to New York.

And my other exposure to HIV/AIDS in those years was both of us getting fucked by this one guy, who then we found out died about six months later. So, I moved to New York first and Jeffrey joined me here, you know, in New York about three months later. I moved in October and he moved in February, so I guess five months later and there was no HIV testing in those years. We both had gotten fucked unprotected by this guy and I had no idea if we also were infected or not. I forget when testing first started. It was probably not until '86 or '87, so it

was really a four-year window of waiting for the shit to start flying—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

BILL JACOBSON: —and being terrified.

ALEX FIALHO: In your years in—in your time in San Francisco when it was on your radar—

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —how was it affecting life there, if at all yet?

BILL JACOBSON: You know, it was such a background—I mean, it was backgrounded and foregrounded. You started hearing about GRID and you started hearing these things. I mean, I don't know. It's going back a long ways, but it—like any epidemic, it creeps up slowly. And it was the kind of thing where people thought it was from poppers. I mean, you—there was so much conception and misconception simultaneously because nobody knew. Nobody knew what the fuck it was. I mean, now in retrospect, it seems so clear, but at that time, who knew? And who knew how—you know—I remember going to Europe in—after I moved to New York in '83. And you could fuck around in Europe because it wasn't a problem there. But in the States, you had to be careful. You know, and the whole Haitian connection. You know, all of it was just misconception and misunderstanding because nobody knew the scope of what it was.

Again, it was this Russian guy who kind of peripherally came into our circle of friends. I don't even know how we met him, but [he] screwed both Jeffrey Lunger, my partner at the time, and myself. You know, but—how—I think—again, I moved in October of '82 to New York, and it was right at—that was kind of the transition time, I think, when AIDS started to assert itself much more.

And it's funny because I kind of left one community behind in San Francisco, and moving to New York, formed a whole new circle of friends and knew a number of people here. And I kind—I mean, it's not as if I was not affected by it in New York. I was for sure, but I think San Francisco was much more devastated just because of the density of the gay population. And I surely had a few friends and acquaintances who died.

But I think because I had moved to New York, I had sort of left my life in San Francisco behind. It was really a transition for me and I think—you know, moving and having Jeffrey come, and forming a new life here. So I remember in the mid-'90s, early-'90s, running into a friend from San Francisco who said he went to 100 memorials, you know. And for whatever reason, I didn't have that kind of intense loss. I lost one very, very close friend in New York who died early on of AIDS. Probably, I would have to think back, about '94. He was actually the lover of the person who's on the black-and-white out-of-focus book who died. But of course I was aware of it. I was terrified about my own health, my partner's health.

ALEX FIALHO: Who was that, if you don't mind me asking?

BILL JACOBSON: Jeffrey Lunger, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Who passed away, on the cover of the book?

BILL JACOBSON: Okay, oh, that was Jeffrey Siegal. Yes, so, he was lovers with a guy named Sean Dwyer who's on the cover of the book. So, yes, and Jeffrey actually, who had—we were boyfriends for 10 years—died just a few years ago, but not AIDS-related. It was cancer-related. But—so all of us were affected by it. You couldn't be gay. You couldn't be straight in those years without feeling this incredible sense of loss. It was—you know, to use the word "holocaust" is perhaps too strong, but it's also not too strong.

It had that feeling of a holocaust that was going on, where everywhere you looked, there was an obituary, or there was somebody else who had gotten sick, or you heard of somebody, or you saw people walking around who looked like they were near death. And, you know, it was—there almost aren't words to describe how painful those years were. Be grateful you didn't live through it.

ALEX FIALHO: Moving to New York and settling here, how did you relate to the way that New York was responding to the AIDS crisis in the early years? Or was it background and foreground, as you said?

BILL JACOBSON: It was both. It was really both. I mean, the real crime was the way the government was not responding. You know, freaking Mayor Koch, who basically didn't address it. Reagan who didn't address it. The State government. You know, it just wasn't being addressed in the way that it needed to be. So it was this weird dichotomy of feeling and seeing people you knew or people who knew people that you knew, just dropping like flies and there was also this huge level of denial around it that was so insane and so criminal, ultimately. That—so it was, like, it's kind of how I feel in these months now that Trump has been elected. You're either in denial or you're nauseous. You know, because you couldn't escape the insane reality of what was going on around you.

ALEX FIALHO: How about your day-by-day life moving to New York and transitioning to living in the city? Was that an artistic choice? Was it a community choice?

BILL JACOBSON: You know, I just—I felt—again, I wanted to be in New York and be an artist in New York. And that living in San Francisco, you just didn't have the same exposure to art, to art spaces, to people making and, you know—plus the kind of crazy insanity of what New York was in those years was a real draw for artists. You know, I moved here, October '82. Like I said, Jeffrey Lunger joined me here in February of '83. And it was just really—oh, this is funny, though. After meditating for 10 years, I basically stopped meditating the day I moved to New York in 1982. I just said, you know, "Everybody's in zippered clothing and mohawks and, you know, it's not a time to be meditating."

So I gave up meditating and I went to a lot of punk clubs in San Francisco. I knew more people in bands there. And I think when I was here, I started more hanging out in the art world. You know, actually the first night I moved to New York—this is kind of an interesting story, especially seeing your Keith Haring tattoo. I went to The Kitchen, which used to be on Broome Street. And I don't even know who told me to go or how I knew to go, but I remember going by myself. I was actually staying with a friend on Broome Street. So it was easy to walk right down. And it was Bill Jones and Arnie Zane dancing at The Kitchen. And the last half of the show, it was Bill Jones by himself on the stage and Keith Haring was doing those beautiful ink drawings of Bill while he was dancing.

ALEX FIALHO: That was your first night in New York?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. It was great, and then I remember—I don't even know who told me to go or how I ended up there, but I went to The Bar. You know The Bar on the corner of Second Avenue and Fourth Street? You know what that was? Ah, it was the quintessential East Village gay bar. I mean, everybody went.

ALEX FIALHO: The Bar.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, it was just called The Bar. You know the Boiler Room, right?

ALEX FIALHO: Now.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, it's the bar that's right on the corner. Like, the Boiler Room front's on Fourth Street, and the entrance to The Bar was on Second Avenue. It's been there—I started going there in the late, you know, '77 when I would come to visit and it might—I don't know how many years before. But, you know, everybody would be in there and every—nobody went until midnight. People were there until 4:00 in the morning. But [Robert] Mapplethorpe would be in there. [Peter] Hujar would be in there. Gary Indiana would be in there.

There was a playwright. Fuck, somebody else name the playwright, kind of a burly guy with reddish hair, who was a well known gay playwright, who was the bouncer there. You know, people were selling weed in there. People were giving blow jobs in there. It was—you know, New York was—I mean, probably other people can tell the story about the West Side of New York better than I can, but—you know, the Eagle in those years. You went into the Eagle. Half the bar, people were drinking. It was a horseshoe bar. The other half was all sex. It would be like walking into here and have, you know, the kitchen be drinking and the living area be sex. I mean, it was just—you know, things were just so much more open. There was no, I don't know, shame about it and there was no—or, it's funny actually. I remember working for Dia. What year would it have been? Probably the late-'90s. And that whole block of 22nd Street, which is, you know, all the galleries and Dia, you know, Dia now. You know, I could look out the window of Dia up on the fourth floor at night and there was all this sex going on on the street. You know, New York was just much more out there back then. It's so much more tame now, or probably it's all shifted online, which is its own kind of space, but things were just much more public in those years. You know, all the outdoor cruising, which is how you met people or one way of meeting people, I guess. And yeah, it was just very different.

ALEX FIALHO: What were you doing for work at that point?

BILL JACOBSON: So, because I had started shooting for that gallery in San Francisco, when I moved to New York—actually I spent a few months working for some graphics house, doing copy camera stuff. But I hated it. The hours were bad. I think it was 3:00 to midnight or something, or 3:00 to 11:00, and I didn't like the place. And I finally got out of there, and I started knocking on doors on 57th Street. And, basically, got hired by a very good gallery that doesn't exist anymore called Blum Helman. And so I did all their photography from—

ALEX FIALHO: Is that the same as Blum and Poe or—

BILL JACOBSON: B-L-U-M and then capital H-E-L-M-A-N, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: But is it the same gallerist?

BILL JACOBSON: Oh, no, no.

ALEX FIALHO: No?

BILL JACOBSON: No, totally different. Yeah, and actually the Blum part is somebody who you may know of, Irving Blum. You know that name? He showed Warhol. He had Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles early on.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, wow.

BILL JACOBSON: And so, you know, showed Warhol and a lot of important people. And he partnered with Joe Helman. And they had a very good space. You know, they were showing [Richard] Tuttle and [Ellsworth] Kelly.

ALEX FIALHO: Ferus Gallery was LA?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. And so they hired me the day I walked in. They said, "We need somebody tonight. Can you do it?" And I said, "Yes." And so, I started shooting Ellsworth Kelly for them when they were doing a Kelly show. So that would have been '82. A year or two later, I started working for Marian Goodman and did everything for Marian Goodman for about four or five years. '86, I got hired by Pace Gallery and did everything for Pace from '86 to '91.

In '91, Pace decided they wanted to have a staff photographer. I didn't want to do it and that's when Matthew Marks opened. Got hired, and basically did everything for Matthew for a number of years, probably about 10 years. And then also worked for the Whitney off and on doing photography. So, I didn't do my own—I actually took a break from—when I moved to New York. You know, the '80s, as I recall—other people may differ, but the '80s was not a very good time for photography in the fine art world. You know, it was all about [Julian] Schnabel and [David] Salle and [Francisco] Clemente and big painting. And there was the Pictures Generation, surely, but in term—which had a different kind of—I don't know. It's hard to describe it and it would take longer to go into it, but in terms of a more traditional photographic background, which is more where I came from as opposed to a more conceptual background, there wasn't much of a place in the '80s for that kind of photographic language. And I think after school and really working hard on my own work for some years, I was pretty fascinated putting my own work on the shelf for those years and really just doing that commercial work.

I got an amazing education, you know, photographing Marian Goodman's extraordinary Kiefer show that she did in the mid-'80s, and going to Ellsworth Kelly's studio, meeting Jack Shear. You know, all of it was—in some ways—I won't say a better education than what I got in six years of schooling, but an equivalent education in very important ways.

You know, my first job with Pace was sitting in a room with every Picasso sketchbook they could get their hands on. And I sat in this room for about four months with a copy camera, you know, shooting every page, flipping the pages of these sketchbooks. Or going to Louise Nevelson's studio or spending a lot of time in Julian Schnabel's studio, or going to Lucas Samaras's apartment when he used to live in that little apartment on the Upper West Side and photographing work in there. So they sent me—I spent time with Richard Serra at his studio here in Greenpoint.

So from '82 to '89, I basically—I often say I didn't do any of my own work. I did a little bit here and there. I traveled some and would bring a big camera and photograph, but I don't know. My real work in those years was doing this commercial work. And for pleasure, I would go to flea markets pretty much every weekend or if I was traveling. And I assembled this huge collection of vernacular photography of all sorts. If I liked it, I bought it. You know, I never spent much on anything, but I ended up with several thousand vernacular pictures that I still have here pretty much.

It was really—those pictures that I collected at flea markets that brought me to—back to my own work. You know, as we talked about, people were dying constantly in those years, and here I was looking at these found snapshots that I was buying. And, basically, everybody in these snapshots most likely were dead, you know, or were so markedly different than how they would have been from that moment that the picture was taken 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, 50 years, maybe 100 years before.

And it taught me so much about that very curious, very important relationship between time and photography. I think often of the famous Roland Barthes quote about how every photograph is of a dead moment, you know, and that moment doesn't exist anymore. And so, I think the collecting—this, you know—also I was bereaved in those years to know of some friends in San Francisco who were sick and to hear about people who were dying, to hear about people who were well-known, whose work you admired, who were dying. You know, it just—it was—you couldn't go a day without feeling the pain and feeling this incredible sadness of that time, you know.

It was probably around I assume '86 or so. I don't remember exactly '87, you know, of finally realizing that they could do some sort of HIV testing. Going with my partner and realizing that we were both HIV-negative. And

feeling, of course, a huge relief around that. But it didn't mitigate the pain of this extraordinary death that was going on around us, not only in New York, but nationally and internationally.

So, I think it was seeing this kind of holocaust, which is also very much a time-based thing. People live and people die. And then I'm collecting all these old photographs, which were also about dead moments. So I think the whole thing coalesced, and I still remember, you know, after seven years of doing a lot of this commercial work, finally saying—you know, I couldn't afford to give up the commercial work, but just saying, in '89, "I'm going to go back to doing my own work now." Just remember, it was—I think it was—actually, you know what, it was New Year's Day in 1989. That was it and I—yeah, it was this very dramatic moment of saying, "Whatever it takes, I have to get back. I've taken seven years of doing, you know, these other explorations that have been valuable and—but it's time now." And also, I think I started seeing work—photographic work out there and I just said, "You know what? I can make work that's as good as that." I just really felt finally I had something that I wanted to say.

What had happened was I had a couple of these big 2 1/4 cameras, and by accident, in just mucking around with it, maybe while—I think on a trip to Mexico, I had produced some out-of-focus pictures by mistake with it. And found myself thinking about them more and more. And also for all the commercial work I did, that was mostly 8x10 view camera work. You know, when you set up the view camera, it's often out-of-focus before it becomes in-focus. And you're—you know, you're sitting there, under the dark cloth and you're looking, you know, at the painting or the sculpture that you're going to photograph. And it's very out-of-focus and then you crank the thing until it gets in.

And a lot of those old photographs that I was buying at the flea markets were also—had elements of diffusion, of out-of-focus, of some kind of fucked-up-ness, or backgrounds that were out-of-focus, or—you know, just the tones in those—in the rendering of those old photographs would have something obscured by some part of the process, whether it was camera or darkroom. And so, I started seeing how beautiful the world looked through my view camera. Out-of-focus, before it became in-focus. And thinking about that relationship with time and photography and death.

And so, I made a commitment to myself in January of '89 that I was going to begin doing pictures that would be out-of-focus. I had a neighbor across the street, older guy, straight guy, who I think was on welfare. And he—I don't know, we sort of became friends and he would see me going in and out with my photographic equipment all the time when I would do the commercial work. And I remember he knocked on my door one day and he said that he had this 2 1/4 camera. And he said, "Oh, my buddy, he owed me $40 bucks; he didn't have it, so he gave me this camera." He said, "Give me $40 bucks and I'll give you the camera."

And so, I don't know. It was—it wasn't a Rollei. It was a Yashica Mat, which looked like an old Rollei camera. And I just said, "This is the camera I want to start taking pictures with." And it's—you look down at that ground glass. You know, you don't look through it. You look down into it. You hold it sort of by your stomach and the ground glass was kind of diffused and a little bit funky, a little bit dirty. And just the act of looking into it—it was really just a magic box. And—[cries]—Anyways, it just brought the whole thing together for me. Sorry, I can be a bit of a crybaby.

ALEX FIALHO: Is that revelation, what's emotionally impacting you?

BILL JACOBSON: No, I don't know. It was just—I still remember that transition moment. You know, when—it's funny because I want to say when everything became really clear, but it was actually about the obscuring, you know, the just—I said, "This is what I want to be doing." And it just was a very good camera for rendering things out-of-focus, just the optics of it, and that ground glass was magic. You know, that's kind of what I got, you know, emotional about, was just the act of looking through there and just seeing what I wanted to be seeing. You know, just—it just brought the whole thing together for me. So, yeah. And so that's really when I started with the Interim Landscape work. It would have been '89. I got a car, I think in '86. We also got a dog. I mean, Jeffrey and I got—so we moved to, you know, from a little apartment that we moved into in '82. Four years later, in '86, we moved to the firehouse, to that big loft in the East Village, 11th Street and Avenue B, and I got a car that year.

I think after four years in New York, I just needed to get out of the city, partly. So we start—we had—we got a Rottweiler. We had the car. We had the boyfriend. And we just started, you know, pretty much most weekends, or a lot of weekends, just going places. And then three years later, when we added the camera to it—you know, a lot of that Interim Landscape work is about horizon line and about, you know, just seeing open space. And—yeah. So, a lot of that work was about traveling and leaving the city and thinking about landscape photography.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's step back a minute to the photos that you said happened sort of after, at a recent show in Berlin, you called them American Trip.

BILL JACOBSON: Right.

ALEX FIALHO: The pictures that were a little bit earlier, even in the Interim Landscape, from my sense of the chronology.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, sure.

ALEX FIALHO: What's the time range on that body of work? They're on your website. I really love them.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, thank you. Those would be from undergraduate and graduate school.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. I think towards the end of graduate—I think after grad school is when I started working in color and none of those pictures—there's no color pictures on the site. So, I think that work that's on there is an amalgam of stuff from, you know, probably '75, '76—when I started, you know, doing the undergraduate classes at RISD—through '82. Yeah, grad school.

ALEX FIALHO: And what was your—it has a range of subject matter.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, partly because it's so many years.

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, and—

ALEX FIALHO: What was the American trip that you were capturing?

BILL JACOBSON: You know, American Trip was actually not my title, but I did a show at a gallery called Exile, in Berlin, which would have been eight years—it would have been around 2009. And so that was the name that Christian Siekmeier, the dealer, came up with for the show, which I thought was a good name actually. And so—but essentially—the American trip, I don't know. It was—probably refers up to my own personal journey more than it does anything else.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. Any of those images stand out to you, that're particularly of note?

BILL JACOBSON: You know, I remember all of them really well, but they all feel fairly equal so many years later. Yeah. What's interesting though—I'll just say it because it's sort of fun to say. For many of the—not all of the pictures I've ever taken, but for many of the pictures that I've taken, I can often still remember the light and the air and the physical and the emotional sensation of taking that picture.

ALEX FIALHO: Right.

BILL JACOBSON: So, I think because a lot of those sensations are still strong, they all feel kind of equivalent on some level.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. How about folks' reactions maybe either in Berlin or when you were doing that work early on? What was the response, then or now?

BILL JACOBSON: I don't know. Hard to say. I mean, once I got more into, say, the Interim Portrait work I think it's easier to quantify that response that it was.

ALEX FIALHO: Okay.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, I mean, the Berlin show—I put the show up, and then I came back here. The show was in 2009 when the economy was bad over there as well as here. And I don't know, the show kind of sat there and came home, but I was happy to do it. It kind of forced me to pull that work together.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

BILL JACOBSON: So.

ALEX FIALHO: And then, how about—you sort of touched on the importance of this moment at the shift in cameras. What cameras were you using earlier on? We started with the camera your father got you.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How did you move from camera—from that camera to the later?

BILL JACOBSON: Over the years, I used Nikons. I had a Leica. I had a Hasselblad. In '80, you know, when—I

started—moved to New York and I started doing the commercial work is when I got a 4x5 camera then an 8x10 camera. But it was something about that old Yashica-Mat that—it just kind of became my tool for, you know, quite a number of years. Maybe not that long, maybe about three years. And then I moved to the 4x5 to do a lot of the Interim Portrait work.

ALEX FIALHO: Right. Let's talk about the Interim Landscapes. So you were—you started to dive into them as related to travel, this new scenery that you were aging with. How did that project continue to develop? I think I read in maybe Vince Aletti's [*The] Village Voice* article which I think is great, that prior you were doing sort of smaller scale, or maybe that's this project that they were small scale, and there were some grainier, blurry images around.

BILL JACOBSON: They were done accidentally. Yeah, I remember going to Mexico with Jeffrey. I think we went twice, once in '83 and another time in '86, I think. But—and bringing a different kind of 2 1/4 camera and, you know, doing—like I said, doing some pictures by mistake that were out-of-focus. And then—I forget.

I remember, you know, this is part of it in a way, but that my—you know, I have always had very bad eyes. I had cataract surgery a couple years ago which—you know, all of a sudden now I have perfect vision, pretty much. But, from 7th grade until age 59, I either had to wear contact lenses or very thick glasses. And so, the idea of coming out of the shower or waking up in the morning, essentially, you would see the world completely out-of-focus. And so I think that's what it was about that Yashica-Mat camera that, essentially, just the beautiful way it rendered out-of-focus. It just felt like the perfect kind of dream equivalent to how I would see without contacts or glasses on.

And also, it shifted time. You know, the Interim Landscapes that I started doing were my first real intentional out-of-focus pictures. A lot of people thought I was blowing up found snapshots, because they had a kind of American vernacular kind of feel to them. You know, partly because they were done in these sort of rural areas and they're pastoral, they were black-and-white, so the colors didn't feel contemporary. The prints were big, so people thought I was maybe copying old snapshots and making them bigger, but, actually it was just things I was, of course, taking myself.

ALEX FIALHO: Where were you photographing those?

BILL JACOBSON: I did one trip, actually, with Charles LeDray when we went down to Lancaster, Pennsylvania. So, in some of the Interim Landscape pictures in that series you see these young guys with these hats, which has a very old/young kind of feel to it, and kind of 19th century feel. But it's—you know, they were Amish kids. '89 or '90 I had a residency at Edward Albee's barn out in Montauk. I developed a project there a good bit, and some of the beach pictures that you see in that series were done out there along with some others. I started going Upstate, Delaware Water Gap, really wherever the car would take me within a few hour radius of New York. I think, too, I was just feeling kind of hemmed in in the city after seven years here. So, it felt really good to just get in the car and get out and have a reason to do it.

ALEX FIALHO: Did the location matter, in terms of—

BILL JACOBSON: No.

ALEX FIALHO: —the final result?

BILL JACOBSON: No, you never know what you're going to find. You know, you can find it in a parking lot in New Jersey, or you can find it at the beach in Montauk, it's just—once you, once you start looking through the camera, it's about you and the camera and you can find magic anywhere.

ALEX FIALHO: Were you looking for particular types of scenes to capture with that project in particular?

BILL JACOBSON: No. I think I felt pretty open about it.

ALEX FIALHO: When would you have the a-ha moment that you would need to take a photo of that specific—

BILL JACOBSON: When would—

ALEX FIALHO: —perspective or did it not really matter too much?

BILL JACOBSON: You just never know. I've never—you know, until I got the damn iPhone, I've never been one to carry a camera with me around New York, but sometimes you see those guys with their Leicas walking around the city. But, for a day or a weekend or a few days, as I was on these road trips, I always had the camera with me and you just never knew when it would happen. But when you're carrying that camera, and you're looking, you are like a hunter. You're, you're kind of out there and you're searching and trying to find it.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. How many photographs would you take of these landscapes?

BILL JACOBSON: You mean to get one that I liked?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

BILL JACOBSON: Not a lot. Not—sometimes more, sometimes less. You know, when you're doing it, you're kind of dancing. None of it was tripod. At least those Interim Landscape pictures was handheld with that, you know, that Yashica-Mat. And you're kind of dancing around, you're seeing what's happening. If it's people moving, you're kind of moving with them or—you know, you're seeing what happens. I photographed this one Amish woman on a bicycle going by a cemetery. I had one chance, that's one frame. Maybe there were two, but, you know, it's kind of slow, you take the picture, then you have to do this big crank to get the film moved and the shutter cocked. So, I think every situation just really varies.

ALEX FIALHO: How did it relate to you—to the vernacular photographs that you had collected up until that point? Or continuing on but—

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, they were very influenced by it. You know, they really—I wasn't trying to imitate them, but again, that whole notion of time, and photography, and this idea of knowing—those old pictures are wonderful because they gave you, of course, a lot of information, but they also gave you—or they took away a lot of information, or they left your mind free to wander. They gave you some, but you had to fill in a lot of blanks. And, I think I was taking a similar tact with these pictures I was doing that referenced them, where by making them out-of-focus, there's a lot of information there, but it really forces the viewer to make up information, you know, to really figure out what the story is.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. I even think my impulse to try to get at some of the questions that I've been asking, like, "Where?"

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Or, "How did it matter? The a-ha moment?"—is almost the impulse that a viewer has in looking at a photograph.

BILL JACOBSON: Interesting.

ALEX FIALHO: And your response, which is, not as definitive or directional as one might imagine, points to the fact that that's not really what those photographs are really about.

BILL JACOBSON: Right.

ALEX FIALHO: They're more about the soft focus, the lack of information that's really there but, then, what that evokes without having it on the surface.

BILL JACOBSON: Sure.

ALEX FIALHO: Feels like what is emerging from—it's sort of in the dialogue that we're having here.

BILL JACOBSON: And when I teach, I use the words often "overt" and "covert." And I think, you know, photographs, maybe any art object, gives us a certain amount of information, but then there's a huge amount of information that we have to bring to it, based on who we are or what we had for breakfast or our own desire or what we love or what we hate.

ALEX FIALHO: How did the Interim Landscapes develop into the Interim Portraits? You spoke about the Amish woman. They were a little interspersed from the beginning—

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —is my understanding.

BILL JACOBSON: No, actually, they were pretty separate.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh.

BILL JACOBSON: I mean, '89, '90, I was doing the Interim Landscapes. Also you asked where I did them—I did a couple trips to Europe.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

BILL JACOBSON: And I brought that camera with me and some of it—some of the work for that series are from Italy and also from Greece. But some of the Interim Landscapes include people and others don't. And it if they include people, the people are often seen at a distance, but I think it was looking at those faces. You know, if a picture—you know, often I would print them at 20x20, but, you know, a face within them—because if people were a little bit distant from the camera and were within the overall landscapes. So, somebody's face on a 20x20 frame would maybe be an inch-and-a-half by an inch-and-a-half, but also very diffuse and out-of-focus.

And I started again going back to that equation between people who were dying of AIDS and this kind of odd symbiotic relationship to my understandings about photography in those years. And something in looking at those faces said what—you know, maybe it goes back to what John Collier, you know, screamed at me some years before about, "Get closer." And so, I, basically, started inviting some friends to the studio, and I remember hanging up some cloth backdrops and black ones, some light ones, and I started taking pictures. Actually, I don't think I got that close, but I got kind of from the knees up, I think, in a number of people.

And I looked at them, and I still have them somewhere. And I was kind of intrigued by them and then I realized I want to get closer still. And I did some, and, you know, probably waist up, and then I got closer still. And, basically, it brought me towards what became the Interim Portrait project.

ALEX FIALHO: Which camera were you using for this, by now?

BILL JACOBSON: So, then I made the switch to the 4x5. Yeah, I made the switch to the 4x5. And it's funny because the 4x5 was the camera that I was using for that commercial work, but because I was still doing a lot of it, you know, '91, I remember getting a second one because I wanted to have one that was only for commercial work, and one that for my own work. I didn't want to mix them up, so—

ALEX FIALHO: Even though it's more or less the same camera?

BILL JACOBSON: It was an identical camera. But I had two cameras, two lenses, and then one got stolen from the gallery. I was really upset about it. So then I went back to just having one, but it was fine, because that's around when I started pulling back from doing a lot of the commercial work, too.

ALEX FIALHO: Were you showing the Interim Landscapes?

BILL JACOBSON: A little bit. I showed them—Pat Owens—

ALEX FIALHO: Huh [affirmative].

BILL JACOBSON: —had, he was partners in a gallery with Amy, Amy, Amy—I could find it on the C.V. It was really her gallery, but Pat was involved. But he showed them there in a couple of group shows. And, I'm trying to think. There's a dealer named Richard Anderson. Did you know Richard?

ALEX FIALHO: Of course.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: He showed Hugh Steers—

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, of course. Yeah, yeah, sure.

ALEX FIALHO: —Visual AIDS, did a big book of that work.

BILL JACOBSON: That's right. And I showed with Richard a couple of times, but I don't remember—I don't think he showed the Interim Landscapes. I think Richard showed the Interim Portraits. So, I barely showed the Interim Landscapes, honestly. So, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: There's a way in which the development into the Interim project is a somewhat conceptual shift.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: It's not conceptual in the Pictures Generation—

BILL JACOBSON: Right.

ALEX FIALHO: —type of conceptual which you had earlier said was not the line of traditional photography that you were working in but I do think it's interesting to note that there is a sort of—it's about something, in a conceptual kind of vein, to start taking out-of-focus photographs.

BILL JACOBSON: Sure. Although, in a way it's opposite. As much as the Pictures Generation relied on advertising and relied on mass media—

ALEX FIALHO: Completely.

BILL JACOBSON: —I think what I was doing was complete opposition to it.

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly, but it's still not in line with the traditional photograph—

BILL JACOBSON: That's true, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —in a sense. So, there's a lot swirling around here. And I'm interested in that relationship of your photographs to traditional photography and conceptual photography, and, maybe, a conceptual photography that was, at that moment, rising in stature or interest. And, also, as your career is rising in stature and interests, it's a different vein, or a different avenue of it, is something I'm seeing. Let's dive into the Interim Portraits.

BILL JACOBSON: Okay.

ALEX FIALHO: They feel like such a big part of the story here, and I just saw prints of a few of them that you showed me, and I'd never seen them—I saw one in *Art AIDS America*—

BILL JACOBSON: Mm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —the recent show, but that's the only one I had seen in person and I'd seen the reproductions in books but I'm really taken by the ravishing quality of the print—and I'm just curious to hear more about the development of that project.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: You kept getting closer and closer to your subjects was the start, it sounded like.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, I mean, I felt—you know, the AIDS crisis, obviously, had no intention of abating in '92. And it just seemed like it was even, you know, even more intense. It just seemed like it was never going to stop. And I just—it wasn't that I felt an obligation to do that work, but—and, honestly, I never intended to do a body of work that was about AIDS. You know, that work, even at that time, as I started showing it, would get written about erroneously. The people saying I was documenting people with AIDS, which totally pissed me off. I had never said that, nor should I have ever been quoted saying that. It was a very, very personal project that was my own kind of poetic response to what I was feeling at that time, you know? That I was seeing a generation of people just dying, you know, not even around me, but around us. Around just being in the world and sensing this kind of devastation and—but, again, I think there is much a treatise about a very basic underpinning of photography, as they were any kind of suggestion of what was happening in terms of the health crisis of those years.

It was really both. It was—I think all my work that I've done since—everything is about a trace of people being in the world. You know, there's these recent pictures I've been doing of the Breuer building where the Whitney once was and now the Met is. You know, they're about traces of the 50 years of exhibitions that the Whitney had there. They're about a building in transition. They're about something that exists in one state and then exists in another. And I think that those elements and that quality has been in every picture that I've done, whether it's an in-focus picture, or an out-of-focus picture.

And so, I think the Interim Portraits, as much as they—I think people needed something in the art world in the early-'90s to be a poetic reflection of what so many people were feeling very deeply, emotionally, in those years. But my intention was never to be that photographer or to make work that filled that need. Basically, for me, those pictures were just a response to what I had been feeling for the 10 years prior since the AIDS crisis began. And the white background of those pictures related to going to see my friend Jeff Siegal in the hospital as he was dying and that whiteness of the hospital room.

And the out-of-focus was a relationship to those out-of-focus vernacular pictures that I was buying where it showed traces of people who had lived in the world, and then, obviously, were no longer there for any variety of reasons. But I think this idea about photography and time and loss—I don't know. It just became—that's what those pictures were about, more than I think they were specifically about the AIDS crisis. They happened to be probably inspired in reaction to my feelings of what was happening at that time, but I think the issues are actually, you know, other than the AIDS crisis, ultimately, but were also a reflection of those years.

ALEX FIALHO: Where were you taking those photographs? And how?

BILL JACOBSON: They're all taken in my studio. They—none were done anywhere else. Yeah, they were all taken

in my studio and they—I needed a lot of light. You know, they were done, like I say, with a 4x5 camera on a tripod, and I had a bank of fluorescent fixtures—you know, a fluorescent fixture that was up in the ceiling that was there when I moved in. So those would be on, and I had two or three lights with umbrellas. And I invited—I don't know, those pictures were done in '92, '93, really just over two years.

And the Interim Figures—there's some white Interim Figures and the Interim Portraits, also. I don't know how many people I photographed. Maybe 50 or so? It would be interesting to go back and look, actually—I have all the negatives—maybe a bit more. People who were classically very beautiful or hunky or thought they were gorgeous often didn't interest me so much for the project. I needed a sense of inner vulnerability and a softness in someone to really have it work well. People who I thought—I don't know—maybe if I didn't like them that much, all of a sudden, they transformed, and I loved the pictures. Other people, I loved dearly, the pictures were no good.

You never know. I mean, basically, you can go into making a photograph with great intentions and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. And you just never know until you get in the darkroom and see what the prints look like.

ALEX FIALHO: Who were some of the people that you photographed for the project?

BILL JACOBSON: Again, it was a whole variety of people. There's a dancer who still performs in New York named Stanley Love, and I met him at the Crowbar one night, and, you know, he came back, spent the night, and he ended up, you know—

ALEX FIALHO: [Sneezes.]

BILL JACOBSON: —bless you—posing for me several times over the next few years. Occasionally, meet somebody at a party or at a bar. Some were very close friends. It just—people came into the project somehow of their own volition, you know? I didn't try to force it, but it just—there was a little bit of magic to how people would sort of flow in to having their picture taken. It just seemed like the people who were there in front of the camera with their shirts off were the people who needed to be.

So, yeah, I think in all the Interim Portraits, everybody—you know, if you see more of the body, had underwear on. I didn't want them to be about nakedness or nudeness or genitalia. You know, there were some of the Interim Figures which showed more of the whole bodies lying down on a piece of white seamless paper. And then, of course, most of them were just sort of head and shoulders or down to the waist, but, yeah, they're really—as much as they were about people who were somewhat unclothed there's no nudity or really eroticism to those pictures. In some ways, I think, there's a kind of anti-eroticism to them, possibly, because the body is so dematerialized.

ALEX FIALHO: How many shots do you take of each, and what's the portrait-sitting process, itself?

BILL JACOBSON: Probably—I would have to look back—but probably about 12 sheets of each, of 4x5 film. And, often, I direct—I would direct the people some, but, you know, I'm there, don't forget, with a 4x5 view camera with a big, black cloth over. And often I will put the person in front of the camera, I'll adjust the lights some, and then I say to that person, "Move. I just want to see you move, do whatever you want to do." And then, when the proportions, when the balance, when the gesture feels right, and there's no real way to quantify what "right" means, but when it feels right, instinctually, I say, "Hold that." And then, it's a matter of having them hold it for a good bit, a minute or two probably, because I have to then do a light meter reading, I have to close the f-stop, cock the shutter, put in the film plate, cover the camera with the cloth because there's a lot of light and I don't want a light leak, and then make a one-or-two-second exposure.

Maybe they were a little shorter, I forget exactly what the exposure was. But partly because the lens would be wide open, there's no need to stop down for depth of field. Maybe the exposure was a 60th. I really don't remember how long those exposures were, but that person, you know, would then have to hold that position for a good bit and then we would start again. And I would open the camera, take out the film plate, go underneath the dark cloth, and, "Let's try something else. Move a bit more," or—you know? And I say to students, you know, if the hand is tipped here, or the hand is tipped a few inches in the other direction, it's totally going to change the feel of that picture—or the head cocked like this, or the head cocked like that. It's a very, very, very, different picture.

You wouldn't think it. You know, street photography somebody's moving, whatever they're doing is maybe fine, maybe it's not. But when I'm in the studio and you're close up and all you have is basically mostly a field of white and the face is outlined by a little bit of gray because it's so bleached out, any little movement or cock in the position of the hand or the head will create a very, very different, not only visual effect, but emotional effect.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the printing process because I feel like that's important to a final image, too?

BILL JACOBSON: That was very much part of those. Both the Interim Landscapes and the Interim Portraits were done on chromogenic, which was traditional color paper. And I did that—I had a darkroom where I could print 20x24 black-and-white at home, but I found by printing in color, it was partly easier because you had a machine to process the paper and the darkroom was small that I had at home. But, mostly, I could get a tonal range.

ALEX FIALHO: You're printing on color paper?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, yeah, so—

ALEX FIALHO: But not in color?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, it was printed—well, they were black-and-white negatives. So, basically it was color print, but from a black-and-white negative, if you use the right filtration, you essentially get a black-and-white print on chromogenic color paper. And I found that I could get a more beautiful tonal range with a—with less black tones in it. If I printed them in black and white, the blacks tended to be very contrast-y, even if I tried to mitigate it. And, especially with the Interim Portraits, I didn't want any dark tones. I couldn't photograph anybody with very black hair, because it would just come up too black. So, basically, everybody in the Interim Portraits had to have—people were shaving their heads in those years, or blonde hair or light hair. So that, actually—so, basically, I was printing in color because of the tonal range.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. In the prints themselves, there's such a—"fuzziness" doesn't give it the right gravitas because it's a real—it has both emotional and visual impact, the print and the gradation in it, in a way that I'm immensely impressed by in person. When you—yeah, let's talk about the show. How did the show at the Grey Art Gallery come to be? Which is a sort of—

BILL JACOBSON: Sure.

ALEX FIALHO: —a big moment.

BILL JACOBSON: That show happened, I think, in October of '94. So, I had been working on the, you know, bleached-out white Interim pictures for about two years. And I had befriended Donna De Salvo shooting a show that she curated out at the Parrish Museum, Southampton, and she was friends with Tom Sokolowski who was the curator at the Grey Art Gallery. So, Tom saw the work and wanted to give me the Project Room. That room doesn't exist at the Grey anymore, but it was upstairs on the main floor. So—it was a small room, but a nice size for about eight or 10 photographs.

And, originally, he wanted to pair me with Rene Santos. He was having a show for Rene in the bigger gallery. And then, I don't know what shifted, if it was his choice, or if it was scheduling, but it turned out he was also scheduling a big George Platt Lynes show in the main space. And so it seemed like a better pairing with the Platt Lynes. So, you know, we had talked about it and talked about content, and I remember the gallery had very yellow floors, very like a wood parquet floor.

ALEX FIALHO: Is it in the same spot as now?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, yeah, it was the same spot, but very different—configured very, very, differently. And it had these very warm sort of tungsten bulbs up in the ceiling kind of track lighting, but warm tungsten bulbs. And, basically, I realized that when you put a very white picture with a yellow floor and yellow lighting, it turns it completely yellow. And so, Tom was very gracious and I went out and I bought a bunch of—maybe they bought them, I forget—but, essentially, grow lights, which are very blue, and would screw into the same fixtures. So, we ended up changing all the lights in the gallery. So, we had this very—and it felt very white, very, very, clean, almost like the florescent light which I, you know, had made the pictures with—and had that show.

And I think, actually, there were none of the Interim Portraits in that show. It was all the white Interim Figures. It was all the white Interim Figures, lying down, or there was a walking figure, I remember. So, I think, maybe there was one standing walking figure and all the others were lying down. So.

ALEX FIALHO: Interim—can you make the distinction between the Interim Figures and the Interim Portraits?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, the Interim Portraits, basically, were all from the waist up, and the Interim Figures tended to show more of the body. Like, it was either sort of, you know, like I say this walking figure or these lying-down figures. You know, I think—yeah, basically, the Figures showed more.

ALEX FIALHO: And which project had couples? Or both?

BILL JACOBSON: Well, okay, so you have the Interim Portraits—

ALEX FIALHO: Which came first.

BILL JACOBSON: —which came first.

ALEX FIALHO: After the Landscapes.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And then I started on the Interim Figures which were the standing and lying down figure, you know, figures. And then—but then the Interim Couples came after that in '94. And those were not only about two people coming together, but there was a tonal shift where the pictures started to go darker. So, if you spent some time and you looked through that Twin Palms book, which covers the work from '89 up to '98, it's almost like a grayscale, where they go—the Interim Landscapes were more of a full range, but then it goes from the Interim Portraits that are very white and the figures that are very white, to the Couples which are kind—you know, that medium, very slate, almost like an 18 percent photographer's gray card, and then the pictures get darker in the Songs and then much darker in the Thoughts, Thought Series.

So—but the Interim Couples—you know, my relationship with Jeffrey began in '82 and ended in '92 in the midst of—well, interestingly, in the midst of both doing the Interim Portrait work, we broke up. At the same time, I was going through—you know, it was hard, you know, we had loved each other and lived together for 10 years, and we just had grown apart over those years, though. We had gone in different directions and decided to part ways. So, I was also—spent about six months shooting a lot of Robert Ryman paintings for his upcoming retrospective which was going to be both at the Tate Modern and at Museum of Modern Art. So, you know, here I was, you know, going through a lot of very personal angst around the breakup, and I'm having to spend my days in a room at MoMA.

I remember the Matisse show was in the—you know, had occupied the galleries, and we had to walk through the Matisse show to get to this abandoned room, or empty room at MoMA, to be doing this big Ryman shoot, and just how, I don't know, emotionally torn I was having to be doing this job that I loved, but also it was just hard. It took me out of my emotions. You know, then, at night I would be going home and photographing and making prints for these Interim Portraits, which were also about a degree of loss.

So then, anyways, two years later in '94, you know, we had fully broken up and parted ways, but I decided I wanted to do a body of work that was about couples. You know, partly thinking back on my own relationship, thinking back on the breakup—a number of the Interim Couples, there's an embrace going on. Not in all the pictures that I showed, but in a lot of the ones I took, there's this element of an embrace, which is both—you know, it's like the word "Shalom" in Hebrew. It's "Hello" and it's "Goodbye." And so, that embrace embodied, you know, that gesture and all the meanings that it can suggest.

And I think the darkening of the palette—I just, you know, I had done the white palette for a few years, and I was just ready to move the work in a different direction. And I think as the AIDS crisis was continuing unabated, I think the darkness felt metaphoric for, you know, this sense of darkness that was deepening amongst so many of us, you know, in those years.

It was funny, though. I remember initially wanting to—I didn't really know gay couples. You know, there weren't that many of them in those years. And so I had this idea: What if I get two people together who are friends or who don't know each other and try to simulate the idea of a couple? And I did it a couple of times, and it just didn't work. You know, there wasn't the body language there. And then, finally, through connections, or through talking to people I ended up getting not a lot but three or four couples to come over. And you found the intimacy in the body language that I was looking for, when you were photographing people who were living together and sleeping together, and sharing life together.

ALEX FIALHO: What was the response to the show at the Grey Art Gallery?

BILL JACOBSON: I have to think back. It got reviewed not a lot but some. You know, basically, I think every gay person in New York who's interested in photography came to see the Platt Lynes, and the project gallery was a little bit hidden, but if they found their way back there, they got to see my show, too, which was nice. But I don't know. The response, you know, my friends told me they liked it. I liked it. And—I don't know. People still remember that work, so I guess it was a good thing.

ALEX FIALHO: It was your first solo in New York.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, it was. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. How about the title, Interim? How did that develop? It's apt, of course.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You know, I think, as I go—said before—that relationship between time and photography—you know, every moment is a kind of interim moment. It's a temporary moment. It's a moment—you know, an interim officeholder is somebody who's in office for a brief period of time. And that notion of time seemed to play itself out in that title, so it seemed like an apt kind of word for what I was trying to

suggest through these pictures.

ALEX FIALHO: Were there other photographers doing sort of diffused or defocused type of work?

BILL JACOBSON: Only by accident. And—

ALEX FIALHO: And showing it?

BILL JACOBSON: Not really. A year or two later, you started getting a lot of people doing it. And actually I remember the *Times* on a Sunday, probably in the Arts section, had an article about how popular out-of-focus had become. I didn't get mentioned in it, but I think they cited some examples in advertising, and they cited some examples in the art world. I didn't remember who exactly got cited, but I think the idea of the world being an unknown place, especially in the midst of the AIDS crisis, was the gist of the article.

David Armstrong went on, of course, to do a lot of out-of-focus work. I'm trying to think of who else. It seemed like there were several other people who got a fair amount of attention. There's a guy named Bill Armstrong who did it for a number of years. I won't say I did it first by any means, but in terms of actually showing out-of-focus work with intentionality—I don't know—I seem to think I might have been maybe the first, but it's really hard to say.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the question of time in relationship to the photos? You sort of talked about the way that the Landscapes felt almost like they were almost out of time, or they may be referencing a time in the past. Was there—I guess, generally, how did they relate to the time, but then also the sense of time in the photographs themselves?

BILL JACOBSON: I think when you see an in-focus picture it feels like 1/60th of a second, but for out-of-focus, it feels like time has been stopped, and it feels palpable and direct. It may not be, but it sort of feels that way. And I think by having this very diffuse or defocused picture, I think it implies a little bit of time before the picture was taken, and a little bit of time after the picture was taken.

So—I mean, I remember this very intense experience of going to see a show at the Metropolitan Museum [… -BJ] called the *Waking Dream* [: *Photography's First Century*], a beautiful show. And I think the time it covered was roughly 1850 to 1950, something like that. And the very early photographs had very long exposures, and then as the history of photography progressed, the exposures, of course, got shorter and shorter, and by the end of the show, people were using the Leica and shooting at a 125th of a second.

And I wouldn't say it would be the experience for anybody else, and I don't even say it was completely my experience, but I still remember having this experience with going through the show and realizing that the longer the exposures were, the longer it engendered my looking. And the shorter the exposures were, the snapshot, I could then deal with it in a quicker way. You know, so the quicker the exposure, the quicker my involvement with it. And I think for me to do these longish exposures, where, you know, even though they're not blurred—"blur" implies a kind of motion, which comes from the figure or the action moving faster than the exposure. Is that right? Anyways, I think by not fixing it through a sharp image and what I was doing, I think this idea about a dissolving of time was the kind of apt metaphor that came through.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's take a little pause.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Cool.

[Audio break.]

ALEX FIALHO: Were there artists at that point—yes, I'll answer my own question—there are artists at that point in the art world that were passing away from AIDS-related complications—people like Felix Gonzalez-Torres who was in '96, so a little bit later—but Mapplethorpe, Wojnarowicz, Keith Haring—late-'80s, early-'90s was the time when a lot of these artists and a lot of the artists in our world were no longer with us.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: Was that—were there particular artists who you felt a loss from? Was it the impact of the whole community? How was AIDS impacting—and the loss from AIDS in particular—impacting the art world, and how were you feeling about it?

BILL JACOBSON: I mean, it was huge, and it was emotionally devastating. You know, all the people who you just cited were people whose work I had huge respect for. As I mentioned, I saw Keith Haring drawing Bill Jones the night I arrived in New York, and then Keith was dead. And I met Felix very briefly at a party at John Lindell's house and went to the opening night of his retrospective at the Guggenheim when he shared the museum with Ross Bleckner, and I was totally blown away by the work. Both their work at that point, his and Ross's both, and

then Felix was dead.

And, Hujar I met at The Bar one night at 4th Street and 2nd Avenue, and then, you know, Hujar was dead, and [David] Wojnarowicz was dead, and he was dead, and she was dead, and you know, it just went on and fucking on and fucking on in those years. So, you know, it was—there—none of the people you cited were people that I had a personal friendship with, but it was all artists who I respected, and then the work didn't exist anymore.

And I forget what year, the Day Without Art first came into being, but I remember the idea was like, galleries and museums would close that day. At least that was the point. And I guess, without thinking, I was in SoHo for something, and I said, "I wonder what's at Metro Pictures," and I went and tried the door, and the lights were off, and the door was locked. It wasn't a Sunday, it wasn't a Monday. I think it was a Friday. But it was very symbolic for this idea that as people die, the cultural production stops—literally, the lights go off. And—

ALEX FIALHO: It was a Visual AIDS project, Day Without Art, founded in 1989.

BILL JACOBSON: It was in '89 when it started, okay. Yeah, then yeah, that's when it would have been then.

ALEX FIALHO: On December 1st.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. Yeah, it was that first Day Without Art. And so, you know, it was very—I don't know—the sadness was very deep. Partly about knowing that an artist—you know, even it's now when an elder artist dies or an artist of any age that—you know, no matter what the cause of death, there's just a sense that this creative output that's been stimulating, that's been inspiring, that's been eye-opening for whatever reason, just won't be there anymore. There will be no more new work from this person. And so, yeah, it was devastating, you know, to feel not only the loss of life but the loss of art.

ALEX FIALHO: How was the AIDS crisis affecting directly the communities you were a part of?

BILL JACOBSON: That—I mean—it's a question that could be addressed in many ways, I suppose. But, you know, my communities were the—pretty much the downtown queer arts community, you know, my friends in San Francisco, and—you know. Like I said, for whatever reason, I only lost one very, very close friend. You know, I knew of many people who died. You know, I was friendly, of course, with Hugh Steers. Not close friends, but we were friendly because we both showed at Richard Anderson Gallery, and—

ALEX FIALHO: Have you seen the Visual AIDS book that we made?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, I went to the book launch up at the public library.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

BILL JACOBSON: And so, you know, I guess I felt lucky not to have lost more people, because I know, as I mentioned before, you know, a friend in San Francisco told me he went to 100 memorials, you know. And—you know, in a 10-year period.

So, I mean, I was affected probably not as deeply as some, and—but it was still—you know, seeing this incredible loss that was going on not only in terms of my own community but on a global level. You know, it did feel not unlike a holocaust that was happening. It was something out of our control ultimately. And you know, oddly through it, I continued to test HIV-negative, you know. Why that was, I have no—it was much to my surprise, and I have no idea, you know. I think some people perhaps called it into question that I was making work that seemed to be somewhat symbolic of the AIDS crisis, you know, from the perspective of somebody who was HIV-negative. But you know, I couldn't let that influence the work that I felt I had to make, you know, in those years.

ALEX FIALHO: [Sneezes.] Excuse me.

BILL JACOBSON: Bless you.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the political culture of the time? ACT UP, activism, Gran Fury? What was your response to that? And was it influencing your work? Or what was your working dialogue with it?

BILL JACOBSON: I went to a number of demonstrations in those years. I went to a number of the marches in Washington in those years. Honestly, for kind of one odd reason, I never went to ACT UP meetings, mostly because they were on Monday night, and it was all those years that I was working for the galleries, and that was

the day that the galleries were closed, and I would often be in there all day and actually a lot into the evening, so I was pretty much never free on a Monday night. So, never, as a consequence, ended up going to the meetings. And I had many friends who were involved with, different activist groups, so I would end up going to different demonstrations, but I felt that my work was really in the studio and that my work—you know, I felt I was, on some level, affecting consciousness amongst my community and doing what I felt I needed to be doing.

ALEX FIALHO: Were there any particular demonstrations that stand out?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, going to—I think it was the first big AIDS march in Washington. You know, when the quilt was laid out on the Mall. I remember going—it must have been in '92, because I remember it's when Clinton first ran for President, and Jesse Jackson, you know, addressed the march. I think that might have been the second one that I went to in DC. And I went to a couple in New York, but actually, honestly, not many.

ALEX FIALHO: How did you view the role of art—either your art or art more generally—at this late-'80s, early-'90s moment?

BILL JACOBSON: I don't think I did. I think I was basically doing what I—I don't know—doing what I felt I needed to do. And I think I didn't consider it a role so much as—it wasn't a calling. I don't know. I was making pictures. And I was responding—I wasn't setting out to do anything to or for anybody else except myself. And on some level, they were influenced by the times, but I think, on some level, I've made the same picture since I was 16 that I still make today. And I think, you know, those pictures from the Interim Portraits and Interim Figures and Interim Couples, they definitely dovetailed with that time, but I think they—they weren't attempting to chronicle that time or to be anything more than what they were. Which was, for me, a kind of, you know, mirror on myself as much as it was on anything else.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. Do you recall seeing any shows at that time that were really important to you?

BILL JACOBSON: Well, Felix's show at the Guggenheim. You know, plus his shows at Andrea Rosen in those years. I remember going into the FUN Gallery, which was on 10th Street, and seeing the drawings—or they might have been prints. I forget—but they were basically from Keith's work with Bill T. Jones. And that was, you know, a few years after I had—maybe not that long. I forget what the timeline was, but you know, they were definitely from that night that I had seen him at the Kitchen. Or work that was around that, you know, that night.

Other shows? I remember seeing, you know, Peter Hujar's work at Gracie Mansion in the mid- '90s. It was a beautiful show. She told me recently, you know, that nobody bought that—the only person who bought a print from that show was the artist who had the little project gallery, who basically bought a print because he wanted to support Peter and he wanted to support Gracie. And he didn't really care about the picture and gave it to some friend of his, but—

ALEX FIALHO: The rest is history. [Laughs.]

BILL JACOBSON: What? Yeah, exactly, and—but, also, don't forget, I was shooting for Marian Goodman, and I was shooting for Pace. So I was seeing a huge amount of work, you know, in those years. You know, again, I was shooting for the Whitney and going over to Ellsworth Kelly's Studio. So, I felt like I was seeing a huge amount of art in those years. You know, plus going to all the downtown galleries, I was living on Avenue B and 11th Street, so you know—Massimo Audiello was showing the Starn Twins, and you know, Pat Hearn was right up the street, and—I don't know—it's a long time, and memory can be a faulty thing. But, I may not remember so many in particular. I was young and I was curious, and I was pretty much seeing everything.

ALEX FIALHO: What was it like to live on the Lower East Side in the '80s?

BILL JACOBSON: It was the East Village, not the Lower East Side.

ALEX FIALHO: That's what I meant.

BILL JACOBSON: [Laughs.] Sorry. Yeah. What was it like? Pretty crazy, you know. When I lived on 7th Street between '82 and '86—

ALEX FIALHO: 7th and—

BILL JACOBSON: Between C and D. You know, it was—

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

BILL JACOBSON: —I think mostly heroine being sold then. And then when I moved to 11 between B and C in '86, you know, we were surrounded by crack dealers and crack houses. It was pretty raw. I was fortunate to find a loft in an old firehouse in '86 that I stayed in for 20 years until I got priced out. But, I saw the neighborhood

change and go from being riddled with empty buildings and crackheads to getting fairly upscale in comparison.

But it was a great time for art. It was a great time for artists. You could live inexpensively, and everything—there was a sensual kind of challenge, daily, in the smells of the people burning cars and burning wood on the street to stay warm, and the squeegee guys coming up to your car asking you for money, and—to seeing burned out buildings everywhere. It just—all of it made you look and smell and feel and—combined with the intensity of knowing that you could be dead in a year.

ALEX FIALHO: What curators and artists were you in contact with, most closely at that time?

BILL JACOBSON: I'm trying to think.

ALEX FIALHO: Tom, of course. [Laughs.]

BILL JACOBSON: Tom at Grey Gallery, sure. But—

ALEX FIALHO: Julie Saul, I assume, but we'll get there.

BILL JACOBSON: I started with—yeah that's—that could be a starting point kind of for tomorrow even. I would have to think back. I think the person whose work really inspired me in those years, photographically, was Barbara Ess, spelled E-S-S. And, you know, Barbara, early on, started using pinhole, which isn't quite out-of-focus, but it's akin to a kind of shift in focus. She was also printing black-and-white monochromes in the darkroom—you know in the color darkroom. I don't know. She was a big influence on me in those years, and I'm very grateful for her work and what she taught me both in terms of the sensitivity that she brought to the pictures she was making and some of the technical things.

I was very aware of Nan Goldin at the time, and some of the early versions she did of*Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. Plus, I was shooting Anselm Kiefers for Marian Goodman, so it was really both. But you asked me really about curators. Not so much. I mean, curators didn't really come on to the work until some years later. And then, an artist, as friends—I'm trying to think of who my artist friends were, you know, back then. Hard to say. I mean, I knew writers and all kinds of creative people, but in terms of actually visual artists—you know, I forget when I became friendly with Richmond Burton, and—but I didn't really know a lot of painters, except for the ones I was really working for.

ALEX FIALHO: How about your emotional well-being at that time? It's a general question, but—

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Probably—perhaps—fraught—

BILL JACOBSON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —but I'm just curious. The intensity and charged nature of that moment.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I would have to think back, so we're talking—

ALEX FIALHO: '80s, early-'90s.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How was it affecting you?

BILL JACOBSON: It was devastating, you know. I mean, I think everybody walked around as if there's a war going on, shell-shocked and just in this complete, emotional meltdown state. I think it was actually, at least amongst my community and living in New York and there's just a crazy sense of devastation and not any glimmer of hope, honestly, still in those years. I mean, when did AZT come into being?

ALEX FIALHO: I don't know exactly, but it wasn't—[laughs]—very helpful.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, but, you know, at least—

ALEX FIALHO: Late-'80s, early-'90s.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. But anyway, I remember I was in therapy for ten years from '89 to '99, and I think just—you know, partly to deal with the breakup, you know, with Jeffrey in '92, and being a single guy in the midst of the AIDS crisis. And, so—I don't know. I wasn't comatose, and I wasn't, you know, doing drugs. I was doing my work and pretty busy. And I think the business was probably—you know, helped get me through it. You know, I

was doing a lot of the commercial work, and doing my own work at night and on the weekends. So between the two, it pretty much probably got me through those difficult years, if nothing else.

ALEX FIALHO: What was it like to be a single guy in the midst of the AIDS crisis?

BILL JACOBSON: A whole lot of fun. No, no. [Laughs]. I'm kidding. Yeah, you just—I would have to think back to really what it was. I mean, we're going back now still 25 years.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

BILL JACOBSON: You know, not easy. You know, not easy after being with Jeffrey for 10 years. You know, to all of a sudden go from a safety of a relationship, into the un-safety-ness of the world was emotionally a really big challenge. You know, learning how to date.

Before I met Jeff, nobody—you know, people in the late-'70s, early-'80s, there wasn't much sense of dating. It was basically everybody went to bars and fucked around, or to the baths. I mean, I had very little sense of knowing anybody who ever dated. So, all of a sudden to—I guess when Jeffrey and I split up in '92, how old would I have been? About late 30s. I guess about 38. And all of a sudden having to feel like I wanted to date. You know, fucking around didn't seem to be a real viable option at the height of the AIDS crisis. So, it was emotionally tough. It was really, you know—all of it coalesced to form a very kind of challenging, emotionally stew.

ALEX FIALHO: I had my next question, and then I lost it. Is there anything that comes up as—after all that we've sort of covered today—that feels important to include in this chapter?

BILL JACOBSON: I think we're good. No, it feels pretty comprehensive.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Day one.

BILL JACOBSON: Cool.

[END OF SD 1, TRACK 1.]

BILL JACOBSON: I want to lie down. Let's see what happens.

ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho interviewing Bill Jacobson at the artist's home and studio in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, New York on March 26, 2017.

So, Bill, off record, just talking a little bit about the almost a-ha moment that brought you into some emotions yesterday, and I thought we could just start there, in that it felt like a turning point for you, in your photography.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: So, can you talk a little bit about that moment itself again, and also why returning to it yesterday was impactful?

BILL JACOBSON: Well, the year was 1989, and it came at a time when I had ceased really to do my own work for seven years. I had spent a lot of that seven years, from '82 when I arrived in New York until 1989, mostly doing commercial work that I have eluded to. You know, photographing for other artists and photographing for Pace Gallery and Blum Helman and Metro Pictures and the Whitney. And I used that seven-year period, a) to learn how to make a living and support myself after grad school, but also, I was looking at everything. I was looking at—I was going to museums, I was looking at galleries, I was looking at—you know, living in the East Village and going to a lot of the East Village galleries that were popular then.

And I think I was just kind of collecting information, and thinking about where I wanted my work to go when I started back up again. And as I mentioned yesterday, I had a neighbor who gave me this old, sort of beat up, Yashica-Mat camera that was kind of like a Rollei camera but not nearly as good. And all of a sudden, last night when I was thinking back to that moment of him selling me that camera for 40 bucks and looking through it. And I realized that the way the world looked through that slightly beat up ground glass of that odd 2 1/4 camera, looked and felt like the old photographs I had been collecting from flea markets.

And, you know, I think artists are often out there prospecting for gold, no matter what we do. I thinks it's a matter—you know at least for me, maybe I shouldn't speak for others—but it's a matter of looking and

processing and thinking. And I knew I was ready to get back to work after that seven-year hiatus. And all of a sudden, to look through that camera the whole thing coalesced and I said, "This is what I need to be doing." Especially when I took the very nice little lever at the bottom of it that shifts the focus and put it somewhat out of focus, it really clicked me into what I had been thinking about, but not really able to put my eyes and hands to specifically.

I don't know if that's clear but that's—it just brought it all together for me is really what I want to say. And I think—remembering that last night it was a real turning point, and, all of a sudden, I remembered and it brought me back to how emotional that was, to feel that I finally found the tool and the vision to go forward after a long seven-year hiatus.

ALEX FIALHO: And then as your career continued to grow, in large part as a result of that revelation and the prints that you started to make through that process—you started showing in Julie Saul Gallery which has been a long-term gallery relationship that you have had.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: Can you talk to me a little bit about that first show with her, and how that developed and how your relationship started developing?

BILL JACOBSON: I guess prior to—I think we touched on it last night—but just prior to my showing with Julie was the show at the Grey Art Gallery. And I think part of what happened was I was very friendly at the time with an artist named Richmond Burton, who actually did the piece that's hanging right here. But Richmond was friends with Julie, and I think it was one of those New York moments where they were both at diner at the Odeon—I'm not sure if they were together or just ran into each other, and Richmond told Julie that she had to go see my show at the Grey Art Gallery. And Julie saw the show and loved it and invited me to join the gallery, you know, based on that work and on that show that was hanging at the Grey.

And then—so that would have been—I forget, the show at the Grey, I think was October of '93, and my first show with Julie was I think the following spring. I would have to look back but I think it was probably spring of 1994. It was, because I remember it coincided with the 25th anniversary of Stonewall, so '69 to '94 would be 25 years.

ALEX FIALHO: What did you show with Julie that first show?

BILL JACOBSON: It was a mix, as I remember. While the show at the Grey Art Gallery were all the very white, bleached-out Interim Portrait and Interim Figure work, the show I did with Julie was a mix. They were very small prints for the most part. There might have been a few 20x24's but it was a mix of the darker, very monochrome gray Interim Couples, and some of the Songs of Sentient Beings, but printed in a smaller size. It wasn't until a year or two later that I started printing them much larger.

ALEX FIALHO: And how did that show go?

BILL JACOBSON: I think it went well. It got good attention. You know, some work sold, as I recall. It was a nice sort of follow-up after the show at the Grey Art Gallery, which also got a fair amount of write-ups and attention. Even though the AIDS epidemic was at that point, you know, 13 or 14 years out, there was still no cure in sight, there was no PrEP, or, you know, kind of prophylactics that exist now. And people were still dying at a pretty rapid clip, and the emotional intensity around the epidemic was still at a very high pitch, and rightfully so. It was a very—still a dire time.

And so, I think, you know, as much as these pictures again for me are not any kind of reportage or document around the epidemic—and I forget if I said it last night, remind me, but—you know, on occasion people would write about this work as being portraits of people with AIDS, and I just need to emphasize that that is very, very far from the truth. And when you look at the history of my work, I think it has much more to do with the fact that landscape, people, buildings, places, architecture, you know, all of it is temporal. All of it is here for a brief period of time in the greater scheme of things. And really, ultimately, as much as the work was influenced by what was going on around me and having friends who were sick and who were dying, it really was much—the work was about something actually, ultimately, very different.

ALEX FIALHO: You said, off-record, tentativeness was a theme that comes through a lot in temporality.

BILL JACOBSON: Yes, I would say, surely, I would use those words. And so, I could not help but respond to the AIDS crisis that was happening but I also think that the themes of the work, you know, are also—extend beyond that.

So, anyway, so the two shows. The show I did with Julie in '94 was that show, and then we did a follow-up show. I forget when. I think it was 1996, the Songs of Sentient Beings, and those are primarily black-and-white, all black-

and-white prints. And for those, they have a very different look. The tonality is also quite dark, but I printed them with a homemade lens that I made from my enlarger. And they have that kind of odd, un-rectangular, undulating edge that really ducks in where the edge of the body hits the frame and goes out where there is no body intersecting with the frame. I had always wanted to do pictures that were technically un-rectangular, where the edge of the frame actually had more to do with that sort of odd, straight, and not-straight line of the body, and I was able to achieve it through this odd homemade lens that I came up with one day in the middle of a blizzard where I couldn't go outside.

ALEX FIALHO: Can you tell me a little bit about that nonrectangular angle, or interest?

BILL JACOBSON: It's hard to describe it without actually looking at the pictures maybe, but the only thing I can say is that the out-of-focus pictures that I had been doing for, you know, five or six years at that point never had a straight line within it. You know, partly, they were mostly around straight—around plain backgrounds, and by putting them out of focus it would take a straight line and make it ultimately an un-straight line, or a soft line, or an undulating line. It would take any right angle of architecture that might have existed in those out-of-focus pictures and render it un-rectangular. And so, I was always aware that the out-of-focus bodies and the shape of those bodies were at odds with the rectangle, say, in the white Interim Portraits.

And so, all of a sudden with the Songs pictures, the edge of my picture frame, or the edge of the image basically, went from being not straight and rectangular to being this kind of undulating, un-straight line—interested me quite a bit.

ALEX FIALHO: We were looking at it this morning, too.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: How about the title for Songs of Sentient Beings? The Whitman reference?

BILL JACOBSON: Good question. I had gone to lectures at the Zen Center in San Francisco when I lived out there in 1979, 1980. And they talked often in those lectures about—they referred to "sentient beings." And so I added the word "songs of," and that became the title.

ALEX FIALHO: I see.

BILL JACOBSON: And as I remembered—and I must have looked it up at the time—but "sentient beings" refers to creatures who are filled with great knowledge and feeling.

ALEX FIALHO: That's so poetic and touching.

BILL JACOBSON: Yes, perhaps too poetic a bit. But it's really how I felt at that time. Because I think it was such a dire time and there was so much loss that was happening, but people—there was still such a cognizance and awareness of what was going around for everybody that, you know, even as I saw people's bodies kind of dematerializing, there was such a kind of intense emotional residence that was happening, that—almost in spite of the body. And so, I think the reference to sentient beings kind of was implicit in that. But that was implicit in the title.

ALEX FIALHO: Did not meditating affect your life or art in any ways? Because yesterday, you were saying that the decade in which you meditated almost every day that practice had an influence on your practice.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm [affirmative]. It's a good question. It's a hard thing to quantify.

ALEX FIALHO: Of course.

BILL JACOBSON: Probably. It's a really hard thing to quantify, you know. I think for those 10 years I was in school, or out of school but living on the West Coast, or in school, or in Providence, I just had more time. And, all of a sudden, like a lot of New Yorkers, I got incredibly busy when I moved here, and was running around doing that commercial work, or seeing friends, or going out to clubs late, or doing whatever. I think the 10 years I spent meditating stayed with me. And it's hard to say how I would have been or how I would have felt if I had continued the practice, but I think surely there was a residue that affects me even till this day.

ALEX FIALHO: How about your commercial work? Let's talk a little bit about that.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: You've talked about it sort of as teaching you how to look, but can you dive into it a little bit more? What was similar about photographing other folks' work for galleries, and then what may have been very different about it for your own practice? That's a big question.

BILL JACOBSON: It's hard to say, but I think, partly because I was working for Pace from '86 to '91, which really dovetailed and overlapped with that kind of desire to go back to my own work. At the time, what I loved about working for them was spending the time with Robert Ryman's paintings. I shot many, many Agnes Martin works and also did the Whitney Agnes Martin retrospective for the Whitney around 1990. And I photographed many, many Rymans for the Ryman Retrospective.

ALEX FIALHO: At MoMA?

BILL JACOBSON: At MoMA and also at the Tate back then. And I photographed many of the Ad Reinhardt black paintings for Pace. I had spent a lot of time with Ellsworth Kelly's work at Blum Helman and Richard Tuttle, also. And I think it was through that exposure and through that act of spending not only hours, but days and weeks with each of these artist's works, it exposed me to the kind of Minimalist aesthetic. And I was also shooting of course for Jim Dine and a lot of Joseph Cornell's and—but, it was really these artists who loosely can be described as Minimalist, which is where I felt the most allegiance. And in the process of working enough and shooting thousands of art works for different artists and different galleries and museums over those years, it was really those few—you know, like Kelly and Agnes Martin and Brice Marden, especially Brice's early work, that made me feel that my own work should really start in a Minimalist kind of—or utilize a Minimalist kind of language in photography.

ALEX FIALHO: Yes, there's definitely a muted quality to them both, I would say.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: It's interesting, because I know a lot of art handlers who are artists, but I don't often think of the staff photographers at galleries as artists. But I think they are. More so than I would think.

BILL JACOBSON: I think it depends. I think it really depends. I mean, it's a funny kind of analogy. This is going to be a little bit off the record but you know the old days a lot of dentists were also very good amateur photographers, because often to process the x-rays you actually had to have a photographic darkroom in your dental lab. So, you know, sometimes if the equipment is there people just, I think, feel free to use it. So, probably a lot of people who shoot art you know also do their own work but maybe some don't, I think it just really depends.

So, I think for me I was always an artist, and then kind of segued into shooting art, and then kind of backtracked. And, as I mentioned before, I still, 25 years or 30 years later, still do it. But mostly I worked for Brice for 25 years and for Robert Ryman for 25 years and also for Dia for that same number of years. So, they've really been my mainstays, and they've become friends over the years. And I've also developed a huge amount of respect, a) for Dia's program, and also for, for Brice's and for Bob Ryman's work.

ALEX FIALHO: Are there are any tricks of the trade for that particular angle of work, that when you're shooting a Robert Ryman white painting, when you're shooting a Dia—

BILL JACOBSON: Mm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —light film instillation, that either you've grown to develop as your practice in that type of work or that you think is related to the way that you take photographs that works well with that kind of work? Or did it just come organically?

BILL JACOBSON: I don't know. I think the reason I have—I don't know—kind of go back and forth between my own practice and this commercial work is that, for whatever reason, I have a sensitivity to subtlety and to—I don't know, just—yeah, that I'm able to do it and record it. I mean, it's funny, I have said this in other interviews, but I kind of like saying it, that I have never been a big technician. You know, some photographers are very, very technical and I know some who just can talk rings around me in terms of the technical underpinnings of photography. But I've always been what I call a small technician, where I just have a few tricks up my sleeve that I'm able to work well for me, or have worked well for me.

So, yeah, I feel that I'm able to get what I want through kind of intrinsic understanding of the medium of photography and a kind of innate sensibility that allows me to kind of see the subtleties in Minimal work.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. Moving back to your own artistic practice.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: Can you talk about the development to—you spoke a little bit to it yesterday, about the sort of more dark prints, blacker prints. For you, it almost became metaphorical to the continued intensity around the AIDS crisis, but also just—I'm curious to hear more about how that Interim series, as it develops into Songs of

Sentient Beings, as that photographic—or portrait—practice becomes just darker, what it—what you were looking to achieve with the development there? They're amazing. Seeing them in person yesterday, I was really, really struck by the dark portraits in particular.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm [affirmative]. Thank you. It was never really a conscious decision to have this light-to-dark, you know, timeline in the work. It was really—a lot of what I do, probably not unlike a lot of artists, was really instinctual. And light ones felt right for that time, you know, the gray Interim Couples and the very grayish Interim Figures just felt like the right next step. Also, I don't know if I noted it before, but going from the white pictures to the gray ones, also was the shift from color paper to black-and-white paper. And then, all the rest of the black-and-white work for the next few years was on a very matte beautiful Ilford paper—

ALEX FIALHO: Black-and-white paper.

BILL JACOBSON: —that, fortunately, is still being made.

ALEX FIALHO: It's a black-and-white paper.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, yeah. And, I don't know. It wasn't, the dark pictures felt any bleaker, but I think I was partly trying to entertain myself. And, you know, it wasn't a goal at that time, but I think any artist wants to make something that they have perhaps not seen before. And so, after doing the white pictures for about two and a half years, it just felt like the right next step to bring the tonal range darker. And then, for the Songs of Sentient Beings to go darker still, and then the Thought Series, which included both those very dark water pictures and close-ups of faces and bodies, to go even darker still.

I was pretty influenced in those years by Adam Fuss's very, very dark portraits that he was doing. His were, of course, so dark that you really couldn't make out the figure in it, which I always found a little bit frustrating but also fascinating. Whereas for myself I wanted to bring them towards the edge of visibility, but to also say that—yeah, I wanted—it's a bit like—as the work progressed, I also got closer to those bodies, and I think it was a time for me of—I don't know, I think as the '90s progressed, my fear around AIDS somehow lessened on a personal level. And I think the closeness to the bodies that happens in the Thought Series pictures, which are '97, '98, was about my own sort of getting close to people again after some years of being single and some years of being terrified. So—and the tonal range in those Thought Series pictures, even though they're dark, there's not a bleakness. I think there's actually an increased sensuality in the work that came at that time.

ALEX FIALHO: How did you develop photographing water?

BILL JACOBSON: In 1994, I think—I would have to look back—I had a residency at—actually it was '93—I had a residency at a place called Blue Mountain Center up in the Adirondacks, and it was a wonderful place. It was small and it was a second—I went to Edward Albee's barn out in Montauk in '89, which was the first residency I did. And then, Blue Mountain was the second in '93 and the—right there is this wonderful lake called Blue Mountain Lake, and—very deep, very dark water. And I spent a lot of the five weeks I was there with my 4x5 camera on the dock that juts out into the lake, shooting down into the surface of the water. And a lot of artists have done water, obviously, but there was something about the constancy of the movement of that surface that felt like a perfect parallel to the process of living and dying of the human body.

It—the lake was always in motion. I forget exactly what the percentage is, but you always hear about how the human body is 80 percent water or some such thing. But the same way the surface of the lake was constantly moving and in flux, it just felt like the perfect metaphor and perfect parallel for our own bodies, which are also constantly in flux. And so, anyways, so that was '93. So I ended up coming back and printing some of those pictures, more with a very kind of open medium gray tonal range, but I was never satisfied with them. And then, I actually took those water negatives and put them away for a few years. And towards '96 and '97, when I was started doing the Thought Series and putting those in that very dark tonal range, I went back and pulled out the negatives of the water and reprinted them with an equivalent kind of dark tonal range.

I probably was looking at Stieglitz's Equivalents in those years, where he was photographing both Georgia O'Keefe close up and the pictures of clouds. And they're called Equivalents because he acknowledged an equivalence between the clouds and the body, and I think I used that as a kind of template for my Thought Series where I was equating the water and the body. And then, when the book came out in 1998, with Twin Palms—and that book, basically, is identified by the years the pictures were from. So the title of that book is *1989-1997*. I ended up interspersing some of the water pictures, which are very dark, with the Thought Series close-ups which are also very dark.

ALEX FIALHO: That's a great book.

BILL JACOBSON: Thank you. Thanks.

ALEX FIALHO: Who were the folks that you were photographing up close? And how was that process of intimacy and closeness?

BILL JACOBSON: You know, it was a mix. Basically, for all the figurative work from the Interim Portraits, through the Couples, through Songs, through the Thought Series, all of it was just whoever happen to float into the project. I didn't try very hard to recruit people. It just seemed like whoever happened to be the right people were the ones who ended up in my studio, either through word of mouth, or, like I said last night, I mean, somebody at a party, I don't know.

Sometimes I would approach friends that were close but, often, as I recall, I liked working with people I was not that close to, because I didn't have preconceived ideas about what they should look like or what the shoot would be. So, I don't know, they were just people, you know, that came through. Mostly it was men. Probably all gay men. And there were two women who I photographed. One was Kate Shepherd, who is a well-known painter, and the other is A.L. Steiner, posed at one point for the Thought Series. Aside from that, I think pretty much it was all men.

And again, for most of the people—honestly, I didn't ask what their HIV status was, nor did I think it was germane to the project. So, that really was never an issue. And, oddly, of the three people that I photographed, who at this moment I know no longer to be alive, one did die of AIDS, and then—

ALEX FIALHO: Who was that?

BILL JACOBSON: Jeff Siegal. Yeah. And then, Keith Schaeffer, who is in the Interim Portraits, sadly died of cancer a number of years ago. And another friend, Fernando Bengoechea, who is in one of the white Interim Portraits, sadly, was swept away in the tsunami in Sri Lanka some years ago.

[... -AF]

ALEX FIALHO: In sitting here, I'm looking at this Robert Mapplethorpe book on your coffee table, and that is one photographer who you mentioned photographing the images of for the Whitney. Can you just tell me a little bit about how that project came to be, and then also maybe what your take on what some of those images was at that time?

BILL JACOBSON: Well, they're two pretty different things. I was doing a fair amount of commercial work for the Whitney in those years. And it was prior to the advent of digital scanning. And so when they were having that big show for Mapplethorpe—I forget what the year was, but it's just prior to his death—so, anyways, the Whitney hired me to set up a 4x5 camera and lights.

ALEX FIALHO: I think it was '88 or '89.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, it would have been, I guess. And to make a number of essentially copy prints for a book that they were doing in conjunction with the exhibition. So, I don't know, it really—I saw the Mapplethorpe shows that were in Los Angeles last year, and I have never thought he was such a good photographer, ultimately. I thought the work was transgressive and that it forced people to see things that perhaps they had never seen before. I think it was perhaps one of the strengths of Arbus's work. But I think Arbus was a much more radical photographer, ultimately.

But between Hujar and Mapplethorpe, I'm much more a fan of the Hujar work. I think there's much more subtlety, and I think, technically, Hujar really developed his own language whereas the aesthetics in the formal concerns that Mapplethorpe implied—employed actually had a lot more to do with traditional photographic aesthetics, going back to Cecil Beaton and what not. And so—but it was fun actually handling the Mapplethorpe prints and being up close to them and, you know, doing the picture—the copy print of Arnold Schwarzenegger, or doing a copy print of those cock and testicles that get fried and that kind of S&M machine, and just seeing all this work up close was a lot of fun.

ALEX FIALHO: What language did Hujar develop that you were drawn to?

BILL JACOBSON: I just thought what Hujar did with the photographic medium—whether it was the lighting he employed throughout his entire practice, as well as what he was able to accomplish in the darkroom—was something that was his own, which I don't think Mapplethorpe accomplished in any way. Plus, the sensitivity of Peter's eye and how he saw the world, I think, was also very specific to himself. You know, again with Mapplethorpe I think it was the subject matter, but I think for Hujar it was not only the subject matter, but all the steps that went from concept to a finished print was something that nobody else did in quite the same way.

ALEX FIALHO: Were there any other, I guess, particular photographers but also artists that were lost that—whose work you miss? I mean, Mark Morrisroe, Jimmy DeSana? In the photography medium but broadly conceived, too.

I'm curious.

BILL JACOBSON: You know, it's interesting to me—I don't know if we touched on it last night but, you know, I think the artists that were probably most important to me weren't gay artists, but it was perhaps that generation of photographers that I studied and looked at and spent time with, you know, in probably my formative of college years. And, you know, Harry Callahan, who we talked about last night, was very important to me in terms of the utmost sensitivity and how many different ways he chose to make pictures in the course of his long career.

I also talked last night about Ray Metzker, who was my teacher at RISD first semester, and I also did a workshop with him at Visual Studies Workshop. Who was also a really important influence? Arbus, who—like I mentioned last night, I first discovered in high school—very, very important in my thinking about photography and wanting to continue in the medium. Ralph Eugene Meatyard, who died very young, tragically—also incredibly important. So—and it's interesting, because Callahan, Arbus, Meatyard, all worked in a square format which is more coincidental, perhaps, but I think the idea, you know—also, oddly, Francesca Woodman, who was also at RISD at the same time I was, worked very much in the square.

And that square format is neither portrait or landscape. It really exists in its own odd photograph language. And, you know, for many years I also worked in the square, which is really neither here nor there, but it's just—I don't know, it's—we don't really have a lot of options in photography. We have black-and-white, and we have color. We have the rectangle and we have the square. You know, there are a lot of options in terms of size, I suppose, which, when I was going to school, we didn't. It was either 8x10 or 11x14 for the most part. But it's interesting to think about these parameters that the photographic medium provides, and then to, you know—how often practitioners of the medium kind of work within that, and then on occasion—you know, like Gursky did when he first came on the scene, in terms of scale—really work against it.

ALEX FIALHO: We've weaved in and out of inspiration but maybe just focusing on that in particular, since we're talking about creative references—is there a place you would look when you're looking for inspiration?

BILL JACOBSON: I often take a year between projects, you know. If I—I've done a lot of different bodies of work that I've done—worked on—from anywhere from two years to five years, and then at the end of the period of making the work often is one or more exhibitions that happen. And then I find that I'm taking a year where I'm not making pictures. I think that kind of process doesn't work for a lot of people who need to be in the studio or making work daily. But I know for me those years off have been pretty pivotal in terms of giving my mind just some space to grow. I often take that time and use it for travel, either for professional reasons, or personal reasons. I use it to go out and look at a lot of art. I think that not-making allows the work in my head just to go to a different place, which is perhaps why often different bodies of work look different than the work that precedes them, which for me is how I want my work to be. That each body of work feels specific and pointed and—in ways, an amalgam of the work that has preceded it, but also different enough that it, you know, perhaps feels like work from a different person.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's talk about a shift in your body of work to more in-focus practice. How did that come to be? Was it after the Thought Series?

BILL JACOBSON: We should backtrack, though, and do one thing first, and talk really about the color out-of-focus work what I don't think we've really touched on yet.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, great. [… -AF]

[Audio break.]

BILL JACOBSON: So, you know, pretty much the Thought Series work was completed in '98, and I knew that, you know, I was ready for a change. The work was ready for change and—

ALEX FIALHO: What was the title for the Thought Series—why that title?

BILL JACOBSON: Originally, the title for those black-and-white close-ups of faces, bodies, and water was going to be "Thoughts for Friends Who Are Sick and Who Have Died." And, actually, I had a number pieces in the early part of that work with that long, very wordy title, and then I just thought it was way too heavy-handed and I just backtracked to the Thought Series.

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of the Thoughts for Friends Who Had Died?

BILL JACOBSON: What were—what were the images?

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of the—what were those about?

BILL JACOBSON: Oh, well like I said—they were these close-ups of bodies, faces, and water and—

ALEX FIALHO: Traces, I guess.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. And it was just—I don't know, I suppose as I was making that work, I just, you know, was thinking about friends who were sick and who had died. So I wanted to bring that terminology and—I think a lot of my work has always been autobiographical on a very personal level, so sometimes it's more clear, perhaps, in the picture. Sometimes it's more clear in the titles that accompany the pictures.

And so, a lot of my work—as much as they're of other people, which means spending time with people to actually make the pictures—as I mentioned, when we were looking at the prints, there are countless hours that were spent in the black-and-white darkroom, you know, all through the '90s. You know, often I would do the commercial work for galleries during the days, and then get home at 5:00 or 6:00, have some dinner, and then be in the darkroom making these 20x24 black-and-white prints from 6:00 until midnight. And then, really, not able to sleep well because I'm just nervous how the prints are going to come out, because you never really know until you see them dry the next day. Every one of those black-and-white prints, you know, that was made for an exhibition or for sale—I really, at the time, decided that that was a small victory because they were very, very tough to print. The darkroom was tiny for the size and scale for what I was doing, and the whole thing was pretty makeshift. It just worked. It was a preexisting darkroom that was there when I moved in, so I didn't really have the means or the desire to expand it, but it—you know.

Those prints were very challenging, you know. I made them all by myself. There was no room or place for an assistant. And when I say each one that worked was a small victory, I really mean it. And each one was very physically taxing and emotionally challenging, just to make a black-and-white print with the tonal range that I wanted, to have it be consistent throughout the edition, and to get it to work was never easy and never really fun. But I also saw it as a challenge that I—in some visceral level, quite enjoyed.

ALEX FIALHO: So, I cut us off before we moved into the color [out-of-focus –BJ].

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: So, stay on that lane.

BILL JACOBSON: So in the summer of 1999, I made a—ended up going on a trip to India for six weeks. I had a very good college friend who was living in India with her husband, and the three of us were also good friends with a gay couple who live, still, in San Francisco. So Peter and Michael and myself traveled to Jodhpur to meet these friends, and I ended up spending six weeks in India, where I took some photographs Yashica-Mat, some black-and-white portraits out of focus. But, the time in India was a bit of an intense catharsis, that was as relevant to wanting to change the work as that moment of getting that old Yashica-Mat camera was, you know, about 10 years before. It really was a 10 year period, '89 to '99. Anyways, in '99, the trip to India—have you been by chance?

ALEX FIALHO: No.

BILL JACOBSON: I don't know what it's like now. I haven't been there, you know, since which is now coming on about 17 years, but it—the color, and the street scenes, the smells, the—all of it was a total sensual kind of overload, and I totally loved it. It was—I don't know, I went terrified that something was going to happen, I was going to get sick, Lord knows. But, once I got there and spent time—I spent about four and half weeks traveling with this group of friends and then they—the people who lived in India had to go back to go to work in Jodhpur and my friends from California had to go back to teach, and I spent a week and a half at the end traveling by myself. And, I don't know, I loved every minute of it.

It—but I came back to New York and saw the work around me in a very different way. As much as these street scenes in India of all these people and extraordinary colors, sort of going on these journeys down these streets, and how sensual it was—I came back and I started seeing people moving down the streets of New York in this very, very different way. And I found myself standing on street corners in New York, watching this extraordinary parade that happens pretty much everywhere. Whether it's a crowded block on Fifth Avenue or, you know, a quiet block in the East Village, this idea of watching people move through the city was actually not unlike that experience of watching the surface of the lake. Again, it's this constant feeling of something that's in motion, that's constantly changing.

So, I basically, then started to bring the 4x5 camera out on to the streets of New York. You know, I was no longer working with models. The idea was to not chronicle people moving through the city in any way, but to somehow portray this beautiful, poetic journey that happens constantly around us. I remember the first thing that really tied me into this idea was walking—it was very soon after I came back from India, and walking through that very long tunnel that connects the 123 lines with the ABC—or the A and C lines in Times Square—and that crazy long

tunnel that sometimes can fill with hundreds and hundreds of people, and just watching that incredible journey. I thought: What happens if I start photographing in this tunnel? But I knew that I could never—you know, the exposures would need be too long and I probably couldn't get permission or whatever, so then I had this realization about setting up on the streets of New York.

I was still committed to working out-of-focus in those years. It really marked the shift—and I think also influenced by India—from black-and-white to color. And the work, you know—it's hard to say what that work is really about. There's no—the first few years shooting, from 1990 to 1991—I won't say the work is untitled because I don't use the word "untitled." But those pictures, technically, are only titled by my negative number. So, you know, one—it's just kind of, you know, hashtag or number sign followed by a four digit number, and those are the titles. Because I really couldn't think of words that went with those pictures. I wanted them to be parallel to the experience of standing on a street corner which is a kind of open-ended, ephemeral, poetic viewing of watching people move.

The same way that the Interim work were about people coming and going in our lives—I felt that there was a not dissimilar feeling of watching these people who flow by us on a daily basis in New York. Or really not even in New York—it can be in any city, it can be in any place, it can be in the country—but the idea that people come and go. And, you know, you pass somebody on a street corner and—we're all visual people on some level, and we take in, you know, all of it. Honestly, we can't see somebody who's a stranger walk by us and not, on some level, internalize what that person looked like and our reaction to them.

Maybe people go through the world numb, but I tend to think that we don't. I think, actually, we—we take it all in, and our brains are trained to then reject the information, to deny the information. And I think what I've always tried to do is acknowledge the fact that we're taking this in all the time and it's wonderful journey, you know, to be on.

ALEX FIALHO: Is that same titling system how you named the Interim Portraits when they have the—

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, all the work, if there's a—is based on my title for the series, followed by the negative number.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: I was curious about that.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And so, then because I have no words to go with these street scenes—there's just no words, it's only the negative number. And then, around 2001 and 2002, they switched from—all the ones from 1998 through 2001 had been horizontal, and then I switched to a vertical format, and still continued with the urban scenes, but also started going to the countryside and photographing some scenes without people, and also doing some figures in the studio. And those I called New Year's Day.

And the title, New Year's Day, came about just because it's always for many people, and I'll say for myself, the quietest and the most introspective day of the year. You know, I've never been a big New Year's Eve partier. And then New Year's Day can often be a time just to take a walk through the city, and to really take stock of what the year prior had been and what the year ahead may be, and to—I don't know, just to be with friends and be quiet. And so, I wanted to sort of acknowledge that idea of awareness and stillness, which comes from, you know, my associations with that first day of the year.

ALEX FIALHO: What did introducing color to those photographs do for you?

BILL JACOBSON: I think they—well, they were surely a shift away from the black-and-white. I think they summoned this extraordinary experience around color that I had in that six-week trip to India. And that trip to India really inspired me to start thinking about color, and I probably came back dreaming about color, in a way that I never had before. So, both in my kind of—maybe in my sleep dreams but in my kind of waking dreams, you know, the color thing was very much part and parcel of where my head was going. And, yeah, it was just about—you know, the same way that the black-and-white work constantly reflected a shift in palette. I think I was ready for, you know, kind of a more radical shift in the palette as well, as the work went into color.

ALEX FIALHO: I'd love to see some of those early Interim Landscapes up against some of the color out-of-focus later work.

BILL JACOBSON: Also, I just want to point out—I think I mentioned it last night, but I'll say it again—that every body of work in the black-and-white group, and also then again in the color group, had a different way of diffusion or refocusing, you know. Some people might say "blurring," although "blur" tends to refer to motion.

But, you know, the way I diffused the color work was also very different, and it involved the—a kind of homemade filter that I made for my 4x5 view camera. And that tended to soften the color palette, because it was defusing the color. You know, the colors became much more—I hate to use the word "pastel" because of all the bad associations with pastel—but it really made them much less vivid than they might have been in real life.

Also, I just want to point out about the process, for all that color out-of-focus street work, really involved thinking and finding architecture. People come and go. I have no control over them, so essentially, I would spend many, many days—mostly in the summer, just because it was more conducive—and also the light—the summer light tends to be much more hazy, with very open shadows that I liked. But a lot of that color street work was about finding the architecture. You know, there's a picture hanging right there. Do you recognize that building facade? It's the front of Tiffany's.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, wow.

BILL JACOBSON: And so, it was really about walking the streets of New York, setting up the 4x5 view camera, finding the architecture, and then it felt like the right place to shoot. It's really hard to say, but it's really the light and the architecture. And then, sitting there a bit like a hunter waiting for people to walk through the scene. And I would usually stay in one place for about an hour, and make anywhere from 10 to 20 4x5 film exposures. And—but you never really know what you get until you get home, you get the film developed, and then go in the darkroom and start making prints.

ALEX FIALHO: I'm curious about what you said about each different body of work and different diffusion process. And you've touched on each through the course of this conversation.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: But maybe could you do a little Bill Jacobson cliff notes. What was the differences, or process for diffusion, between Interim Landscapes to the Portraits to the Thoughts. Like, was it a different camera? Is it a different printing? What was each body of work, through that specific lens of diffusion?

BILL JACOBSON: I usually don't tell the technical secrets.

ALEX FIALHO: No problem.

BILL JACOBSON: I kind of think maybe I should for this because it will sort of sit in a kind of historical way beyond my lifetime, and maybe it wouldn't be bad to have it down on record, so I think I should do it, actually.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's do it.

BILL JACOBSON: Okay. So essentially, the Interim Landscape work were done with that 2 1/4 Yashica-Mat camera, and those were done simply by putting the camera out-of-focus.

ALEX FIALHO: What about the earlier ones that had a little bit out-of-focus that inspired the Landscapes? The ones that—

BILL JACOBSON: Which ones?

ALEX FIALHO: —that you took in the mid-'80s, not even so much as your own work, in a way. But you said that you almost stumbled upon it—the process through these few.

BILL JACOBSON: Oh, those were—

ALEX FIALHO: That was just a mistake or an accident?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah those—yeah. Yeah, it was through using a 2 1/4 range-finder camera, where you couldn't—you actually had to set the focus manually, but you couldn't see through the view finder if you were in-focus or not. It was an odd sort of camera made by Singer sewing machines, oddly, and so it was really easy to get a mistake and an out-of-focus picture, and so—yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: That was a mistake for you.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, exactly. So, the Interim Landscapes were done out-of-focus. The white Interim Portraits were done with the 4x5 view camera. And those were done, also, by shifting the camera out-of-focus. The Songs of Sentient Beings, those negatives could be in- or out-of-focus, it made no difference. What I did for those was to take a black piece of cardboard, stick a big pen through it, and that became my lens for the enlarger. So, I took out the glass lens completely for the 4x5 enlarger and just took a piece of cardboard, poked a very funky rough hole through it, and put it up in there. That is actually what caused that odd, diffused, undulating edge

around those pictures.

ALEX FIALHO: That releasing.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, I wish you could have seen—I wish I could have seen the look on my face when I tried that one day. I still remember, sitting at my kitchen table. There was a blizzard outside on East 11th Street in New York and I was home in the loft on East 11th Street. And I just said, "What happens if I make a lens like that?" I had never thought about it before, but I was just sitting there bored and said, "Let's see what happens." And went into the darkroom and made a small print from one of the Interim Portrait negatives.

It just had a—it really looked like a drawing, so—you know, I think for a lot of that work, actually—you know, I could never draw, as I mentioned last night. But the closer that work got to looking like drawings, the more excited I got about it. And I found that by making that homemade lens, they set in between photography and drawing, especially with that matte surface, black-and-white paper, you know, which felt as much like a drawing paper as it did like a photographic paper.

And then, for the Thought Series work, I went back to a glass lens for the enlarger. And those, again, were just primarily by putting the 4x5 camera, you know, out of focus. Although finding the right place for the out-of-focus was a big part of it. If you go too much with it, the image falls apart, and if it's not out enough then—actually, I could also put it out of focus a little bit in the enlarger, which I did do on occasion if it was not done enough in the camera.

And then, for the color out-of-focus work, I actually just took a Glad freezer bag, cut it up and took two of the pieces of freezer bag, and together taped them on the back of the lens of the 4x5 view camera. So, actually, when I was looking through the 4x5 view camera for all that work, you know, it looked as diffused as the prints do, because it's exactly what the camera was seeing. Because I had the plastic, you know, taped on the back of the lens. It just made it gauzy and funky and kind of wonderful.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool. How about banding? You talked a little bit about the paper you're printing on, but that is part of the project, too.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, yeah. So, the color pictures of the street scenes and also the New Year's Day work, those were all printed from—on a 4x5 analog process, and printed on to chromogenic paper in a darkroom—so.

None of that out-of-focus work could really be printed digitally. I started to get digital printing around that time, I suppose, but even when we were doing the books of the out-of-focus work, digital wants to take anything that's not focused and make it sharper. And you end up just with huge banding problems, and there were—I was in a number of anthologies in the '90s with both the black-and-white and the color work. And basically, everybody would get the most beautiful reproductions, but because the out-of-focus was so difficult to scan and reproduce—because of the banding problems, they would have to add a lot of noise and cut the contrast. And, you know, I would go through these very good beautifully printed anthologies for different shows I was in, and everybody else had the most gorgeous reproductions, except for mine, which would just be flat and gray and funky and kind of shitty, much to my chagrin. But I realized that what I was doing was never a good match for these new digital processes.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you photograph your own work when it is installed?

BILL JACOBSON: I do, yeah. I just figure I can probably do it as well as anybody. So.

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly. Great, that was really an interesting dive into all of that. Thank you for that.

BILL JACOBSON: Good.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the development of in-focus photographs? Are you showing with Julie mostly these bodies of work?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Thoughts—and was there any particular show of them or response to them that you feel like you want to chat about?

BILL JACOBSON: Yes, we can go over the exhibition history. Let's see. As I recall, you know, the show of the Interim Couples and the early Songs was in '94. And '96, I did a show, the Songs of Sentient Beings, and this was when she was at 560 Broadway. And '98 or '99, I had a show of the Thought Series with her. And then she moved to Chelsea, I think, in 2000. And in 2001, I had a show of the not-titled color landscapes in her space where she had moved to 535 West 22nd. Then I did a show—the New Year's Day work, a couple years later, also in that space.

And then—okay, so now we'll switch. After doing the out-of-focus color work from '99 to 2003, I had a big shift in my life. I had been in this one loft in the East Village for 20 years. I was a renter there, and moved in in 19—it kind of talks about real estate history, as much as it is our creative history, but—I moved in there in around 1985, paying about $1,500 a month rent, which seemed like a lot for a loft in a neighborhood that was falling down and had a lot of abandoned buildings, a lot of crack heads.

And 20 years later the East Village was a completely different neighborhood. The abandoned buildings had been fixed up, and it was becoming more of an upscale neighborhood. I was paying, at that point, $2,500 a month rent, and the guy said I could sign another long lease with him, but he wants to double the rent to $5,000 a month, which, financially, was completely outside of, you know, any possibility for me. So, I made the decision to move to Brooklyn and was able to buy the loft where we're sitting here now, fairly reasonably. It was that odd time where they were giving mortgages to anybody who asked, and I asked. And without needing tax forms, they gave me a mortgage, so that was great. And—but, I had to move out of a loft where I had been living for 20 years. And, you know, it was a big process. The loft was quite large. I had been a huge—

ALEX FIALHO: Bigger than this, or smaller?

BILL JACOBSON: It was—square footage, it was about the same. But I had a whole mezzanine because the ceilings were much higher, and I just had—it was longer and it just felt bigger, and I had a lot of stuff. I had really gone to flea markets for years and just—I had art, my own art that I had been making. I had a lot of work by friends, furniture, things I loved, and things that were maybe, at that point, unloved.

And so, it literally took me three months, to decide what I wanted to keep and what I wanted to get rid of. And as much as the trip to India and the decision to go out-of-focus in '89 had been kind of cathartic moments, this three-month packing binge was also this incredible catharsis of literally having to hold, fondle, handle, consider every object that I owned up until that point. And like I say, the place was big and I had a lot of stuff. It was really this very intense reconsideration of object and also space. And at the end of three months, I went from having this very big studio, a very large living area, plus of course kitchen, bathroom, et cetera, and everything that I was willing and able to get rid of had gone out on the street or gone to friends or gone to thrift stores.

And then, in the middle of the room was a massive pile of furniture and boxes. And there was something very intense about it, because as much as my work from 1989 up until that point, which was 15 years in total, you know, had pretty much all been out-of-focus—but I think—I won't say all photographers are voyeurs, but I can pretty much say all photographers are voyeurs, and, I don't know, I'm always looking. I'm always looking at everything, whether it's the way somebody moves on the street, or a shop window, or, you know, perhaps one could say myself in a mirror.

The idea of going to a thrift store, or going to a flea market—to see this huge amalgam of objects is very much a kind of odd amalgam of human history, and I find it fascinating. And so then to sit there and see my own amalgam of objects really brought me into thinking about the physicality of the constructed world. You know, there was nothing constructed in all the out-of-focus work. Everything felt like it was dematerializing. And, all of a sudden, I was faced with this mountain of kind of my own collected materiality.

You know, plus, surrounding this mountain of objects there were essentially four blank walls. And it really hit home that it was time to shift the work to the built world and the constructed world. I think as much as I had seen this place as my home for 20 years, which, you know, for a young to middle-age person is a very long time. I had spent half the time there with my boyfriend, Jeffrey, and then the other half living there by myself. The place had a lot of memories, and I really started thinking about how as full and as rich a home and a studio this had been for all those years, now it was kind of nothing. Now all—you know, it was being literally—the building wasn't being torn down, but my life within it had been—was in the process of being taken apart and shipped out.

And I started thinking that as much as people come and go, which, was a lesson surely from losing friends and losing relatives, you know, to—whether it was to the AIDS crisis or to the process, the very human process of living and dying—the physical world, the material worlds also have lives of their own. That none of it is permanent, and—but there is also something very—when I look at an object, or I look at a building, or I look at something that's been made by somebody, that they also reflect the very human process of living and that none of—you know, none of it is—nothing that's built is without human hands and human heart behind it, or a human brain. That all of it is a manifestation of people being in this world.

So, the same way that the figurative work I had done in years prior reflected people coming and going, once I turned my camera onto the sharp in-focus physical world that became the next body of work, they also similarly reflected people coming and going. You know, that these that these objects do not exist without people. And, like I said, I love going to flea markets because they are a kind of human encyclopedia on some very poetic level, so—and it was a tough transition for me, because essentially, I had to learn how to make in-focus pictures.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

BILL JACOBSON: I had been doing in-focus work, of course, commercially, for all those years, but for myself I had not made an in-focus picture in 15 years. And I made a lot of really bad, really shitty pictures for a number of years. I gave myself no parameters, honestly. I knew I wanted to think about the real world, and I started bringing my 8x10 camera over to Tompkins Square Park and I photographed skateboarders, maybe because I thought they were cute, partly—but I don't know. I just did a lot of things.

I photographed nature, and I photographed people, and I photographed buildings, and—there was about a year or two where I just did whatever I wanted—if it felt—I said, "Oh, let's do this. Let's see what this looks like photographed." Because I really wasn't sure what it was that I wanted to do and I started, you know, shooting and printing and editing and this time all the pictures were in-focus. And everything was in color. And I started seeing what I was attracted to. I realized it was this idea of the built and constructed world. It was either architectural exteriors or interiors, and usually details rather than an entire building, or it was kind of odd or quirky manmade objects. Or a store front, which is a kind of—its own still life of maybe, you know, signage, object, you know, it's a mix of still life and architecture, basically.

And so, I ended up developing a project which came out as a book called *A Series of Human Decisions*. And that title, it was really important to me at that time because I think it was a kind of manifesto that we live in a world which is exactly that: a series of human decisions. It's—somebody makes a decision to make something. Somebody else makes a decision to buy it. Somebody makes a decision to place it somewhere. Somebody comes along with a camera and makes a decision to record it, and then to make a print at a certain size. Or makes a decision to publish a book of a collection of those pictures. So, I'm only one step in that process that's—you know.

I look around and I'm fascinated by the idea that somebody chose to make that lamp, or somebody chose to make that t-shirt that you're wearing. You know, all of it—we take it all for granted, the same way we take all the lives around us on some level for granted, until we lose it. And then, we don't anymore.

In the same way, you could have a sweater that you love, and then all of a sudden, who knows where that sweater goes? And you go, "Oh, shit," you know, "how much I loved it," or "It was a gift from so and so." Or, you know, the World Trade Center gets demolished. I mean, we think that the physical world exists forever, but none of it does, you know? And I think it goes back to the lessons I learned from collecting those vintage photographs at flea markets all in the '80s, that, most of those people weren't alive anymore. If I didn't buy those pictures or somebody else didn't buy them they could end up, you know—or it implies how many million or trillions of snapshots have ended up in garbage dumps.

All of it is a kind of river of transition, and—so by my photographing these architectural details and these objects, it's no different than photographing people. All of it is in transition at all times.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

BILL JACOBSON: So—

ALEX FIALHO: And you talked a little bit about geometry as important to that—or sort of a human rationale or intentionality—as important to that series in particular, but also your interest in these decisions. That was off-record when we were looking at the prints.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: Do you want to touch on that a bit?

BILL JACOBSON: Sure. You know, a lot of times when I start a body of work, I go into it not knowing where it's going to go. And it's only after working for a period of time, whether it's some months or some years, that I start to learn from that body of work. Or we talked yesterday about the difference between "what is a picture of?" versus "what is it about?"

And so, when I started this Series of Human Decisions, I knew that they were going to be of things, or places, or architecture in the real world, but what I started—as I got deeper into what this work was about, I started noticing that pretty much in all these pictures, there were these lines of delineation. These either vertical or horizontal edges that pretty much divide space and create the outlines of objects. It's not something I had ever really thought about before. You know, again I went into it with one self-given mandate, which was to photograph the real world. But basically, once I started to edit and whittle down and become more focused on what I wanted the work to be, I realized it was really about this idea of the edge, which, again, is a very human-created way of thinking about the world. I mean it's true, in nature you have the edge, but what interested me most were edges that were manmade.

The cover of the book depicts a psychiatrist couch. And actually maybe first I should talk about some of the

places that I chose to shoot for that five-year period that I made the Series of Human Decisions. So, when I had—through a friend who is a shrink here in New York, he put me on his listserv for shrinks, and I wrote up a letter that went out, and I ended up shooting about 20 different psychiatrists' offices, just because I thought, "If I'm really thinking about human decisions, often shrinks offices are the place where decisions are being made."

I also thought—ended up shooting artists' studios. Mostly—and I went to London to do that. Partly because I wanted to shoot not established artist studios, but student studios. And a lot of student studios in New York are very small, and a little crammed, whereas I got access to the Royal College and the Royal Academy in London, where the studios are just much bigger. And I wanted also to go to a place where I didn't know people, and—

ALEX FIALHO: Why student studios?

BILL JACOBSON: Because I wanted to include artwork, but I didn't want it to be artwork by well-known people. And it just—you know, through friends in London I was able to get access.

So—I also lived in Berlin for six weeks in that time, partly to work on the book that Hatje Cantz was doing on the out-of-focus color work, and so I ended up—but I didn't want to live in Stuttgart, so I ended up renting an apartment in Berlin and going back and forth, and made a number of the pictures on the streets in Berlin for that project. And—what else went into it? It was really just—I went to Barcelona. Partly to visit friends, and ended up photographing a number of places there, including the famous Gaudi Sagrada Familia. There's a number of pictures from that in that book. A friend who is an architect bought a beautiful art deco house up in Westchester, where I photographed the day after he bought it, and it still had a lot of the original architecture and furniture in it.

So, it's really a very odd amalgam. You know, there's no rhyme or reason ultimately to the choices that are going to be obvious to many people, but—and I just gave myself really free reign. But what I ended up learning from that project, again, was this idea of the straight edge, which is really something not found in nature, and is primarily a very human construct and manifestation of, I think, a human desire to bring order to the world around us.

ALEX FIALHO: Artists' studios—

BILL JACOBSON: Psychiatrists' offices.

ALEX FIALHO: Anywhere else?

BILL JACOBSON: Streets in Berlin, thrift stores. And there's an odd photograph of a stuffed rodent from the—what do you call it? The anthropological museum, Natural History Museum in Barcelona. You know, the Gaudi. There's just a lot of odd places in there.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

BILL JACOBSON: Actually, it's important, too, I photographed the Yale School of Architecture. The famous Paul Rudolph building up in New Haven prior to the renovation of that building.

ALEX FIALHO: Is this when you photographed the Slater Museum as well?

BILL JACOBSON: Oh, and also the Slater Museum. Yeah, from high school.

ALEX FIALHO: How was that full circle moment?

BILL JACOBSON: It felt like a wonderful full circle moment.

ALEX FIALHO: Anything in particular? Had you been back to Norwich in a while?

BILL JACOBSON: I had, because my folks were still living there at that point—

ALEX FIALHO: I see.

BILL JACOBSON: —so, you know—and I go back regularly, and would often go back to the Slater just to walk around and through, be reminded of how extraordinary it was.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's talk a little bit about the next series, which is the desert landscapes?

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, the deserts were done actually in the middle of the Series of Human Decisions. Human Decisions were 2005 to 2009—and I have one question actually, I'm curious about it: Do your questions end up in the oral interview, too?

ALEX FIALHO: Yes.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, it's funny—I don't care—I'm happy with that, but I was just curious [how –BJ] it worked. I was wondering about that.

So, anyways, the Human Decisions were 2005 to '09. And in the middle of it, I just decided to take a break. In a way, the Human Decisions could have been a 10-year project, or a 20-year project, or whatever, but I gave myself five years to do it.

And I think, as much as they were about the built and structured world, I think I just needed some space and some freedom. And I think nature—a kind of anti-urban-ness has always been a part of who I am. And so I just partly made the decision to see if I could duplicate the straight edge that I was finding in so many aspects of the commercial world, whether it was the edge of a piece of paper, or the edge of a picture frame, or the edge of a wall, or the edge of a building. I wanted to see if I could find that straight line in nature.

I didn't know if I could do it, but all of a sudden I was swimming one day, and I started thinking, "Well, what if I go to a variety of desert locations?" And again, I didn't know if I could find, even in the desert, a fairly straight line. So, you know, thanks to the Internet I could do a little research, and basically came up with three locations where I could find desert locations in America, which didn't have trees or mountains or kind of weird, craggy ups and downs.

So, in 2007 and 2008, I made three trips. Each one was about 10 days, and one was to the Painted Desert Petrified Forest area in Arizona. The next one was to the Great Salt Lake, and the third one was to White Sands in New Mexico.

In each case, I would fly out there. Everything was done with a 4x5 view camera. And, so, I would fly out with my 4x5, tripod, and a shitload of film, film holders, dark cloth. I was pretty much by myself, had no assistant. And I would essentially get an SUV and try to get as off-road as I could, and—White Sands you really can't. But I would just go out early in the morning, often stay till late at night, and just try to find these desert locations that had a very, very even, either straight line or slightly undulating line of horizon. And they were—none of them were done as horizontal, which is considered to be the traditional landscape format. All were done as vertical.

And my goal in it, actually, was not about recording the desert, but it was really trying to do pictures that were two equal rectangles. And I think the same way I was seeing the built world as a kind of series of rectangular spaces, I was really, then, trying to duplicate that in nature as well.

ALEX FIALHO: They're almost painterly too, in a kind of interesting way.

BILL JACOBSON: They are, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: They evoke Ellsworth Kelly, for instance.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And, you know, there's almost no detail, there are no clouds in the skies —

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

BILL JACOBSON: —at all. There's no detail or very, very little detail in these kind of sandy bases. The horizon lines always hit exactly in the middle. So essentially, they're creating two very separate, but equal, spaces.

ALEX FIALHO: And you're printing them from a color negative?

BILL JACOBSON: Those were all printed from color negatives. Some were printed in black and white, and others are printed in color, but very much de-saturated with a lot of the color taken out.

ALEX FIALHO: And you're looking—they're analog. In that moment, do you have a sense of what you're capturing? Or do you have to almost go back and print it and realize you got what you were looking for?

BILL JACOBSON: It was really a process of going through the negatives, yeah. You're really shooting with blind faith. But it was exciting. Partly the experience of being out there—where I was really by myself was out in the Great Salt Lake. I found this weird road that just had to go through a fence, and out in the middle of nowhere. And I was really by myself out there. It was a little bit scary, but also quite exhilarating.

And then, it was more on the tourist path that White Sands and the Painted Deserts, it's a little bit harder to get off road there. But, just the experience of being by myself out in these places with this camera—waiting for the light, and watching the light change, and looking at the rhythms of these very beautiful, very stoic locations was quite special.

ALEX FIALHO: Can you talk a little bit about how that series relates both to the Series of Human Decisions, and also some of the earlier out-of-focus work?

BILL JACOBSON: I think they pretty clearly have amalgams—they pretty clearly have elements of both. They have the sense of dematerializing that the out-of-focus Portraits had, because there is almost nothing in them. You basically have these contrasting, areas of tone in the top half and the bottom half. But the idea of reducing a picture down to almost nothing, I think, is a common sensibility between the earlier out-of-focus work, and these. And even though these are very sharp—because there's almost nothing to focus on, they have a similar feeling to the out-of-focus pictures. Because there's really almost nothing sharp to focus your eye on except for the edge of the sky and the edge of the desert below it.

And then, what they share with the Series of Human Decisions that I was working on, was that very straight edge that is the demarcation between land and sky. And it sort of mimics the edge of the picture frame, or the edge of the piece of paper, or the edge in architecture that I was finding in Human Decisions.

[… -BJ]

ALEX FIALHO: Let's take a pause.

BILL JACOBSON: Okay.

[Audio break.]

ALEX FIALHO: So, now we're in the moment of the aughts and the 2000s, and are working our way up through your career in the in-focus color photographs. So the next body of work is the Place (Series). Can we talk about both the publication and the development of that project as an extension of previous projects?

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What I have learned over the years in making one body of work after another is that each one I do either overtly or covertly references the work that has preceded it. Sometimes in ways that are more obvious, and sometimes in ways that are less clear.

But so much of A Series of Human Decisions embodied, like I said, this sort of straight line of delineation between the edge of something. And I started thinking about how rectangles, while it wasn't my intention, appeared over and over again as I was recording these manmade objects and architectural details. And like I mentioned a few minutes ago, this idea of rectangle also kept reappearing in the desert work, which was titled Some Planes. And planes is spelled P-L-A-N-E-S.

So, I was gravitating in the work, obviously, towards this idea of rectangle. And so, keeping in mind that I had already spent many years photographing works of art for galleries and museums, which is often about shooting a rectangle hanging on a wall. And I decided to set up just a white tabletop, a kind of fake wall behind it, and to take a black board, about 11x14 inches, and lean it, and just to see how that would exist as a still life. So, that is *Place (Series) #1*. And then—it seemed to work, it gave me a lot of ideas for going forward, and I proceeded to spend the next five years, which would have been basically from 2009 to 2014, you know, working on this body of work called the Place (Series).

I had two residencies at MacDowell Colony, one in the summer of 2009, and then I went back again a year later in the summer of 2010. And they had a lot to do with the progress, and the—my ability to go more deeply into this body of work. In 2012, I received a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation grant, which allowed me to rent a studio in Long Island City and build some bigger sets, and work on a very different kind of scale for a period of about eight months.

So, partly—it wasn't work that I really had room to do in this loft, unfortunately, because it involved kind of a bigger set up, but being at MacDowell Colony allowed me to do some of the work outside, which involved setting up boards in the landscape. I also had a nice commission from the Tacoma Art Museum, I think in 2009 or '10, where I was invited to Tacoma for a week and they gave me an assistant, and I did a number of the Place (Series) pictures there as well.

ALEX FIALHO: Who was that through? Was that Rock Hushka?

BILL JACOBSON: It was Rock who arranged for it, yeah. They were having this show upcoming called *Made in Tacoma*, or *Mighty Tacoma*, I think, or something like that. And it was work that was made in Tacoma, and he invited me to come out and be part of that, and I thought: How nice to be able to continue this body of work that I was doing in different locations anyways, and to do it out there. And to use Puget Sound partly as a backdrop.

I had this idea about wanting to use an old red velvet theater curtain as a backdrop to a white rectangular leaning board, and they found that. And, really, they were very accommodating in facilitating of a number of

ideas I had to keep the project going in those years. So basically, that body of work—yeah, it was a five-year project as well, from 2009 to 2014. And—

ALEX FIALHO: What are those photos about?

BILL JACOBSON: You picked up my terminology here. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: I'm consciously doing it.

[They laugh.]

BILL JACOBSON: Oh, what are they about?

ALEX FIALHO: To get at the underlying questions of the image, it sounds like, is how you think about that question.

BILL JACOBSON: You know, I came out of the earlier Series of Human Decisions really thinking about this idea that we live in this world where everything is an image. You know, maybe it comes out of being influenced somewhat by all that Pictures Generation ideology, but, ultimately, if you start to look, you know, we live in a world of images and we would live in a world of people.

In a way people are images, too. I mean, if you're a visual person and you're looking, there's an infinite number of things to look at. And one of the things I love about being a photographer and being in this world is that everything I look at—you know, whether it's the gum that's stuck to the sidewalk, or a beautiful guy's face on the subway—all of it is equally satisfying to me. There's just pleasure in looking. And so I think that was part of—it's been part of everything I've done, ultimately.

And so, as I started thinking about this idea of a black rectangle leaning against a white background, it sort of implied—it was a sort of stand-in for every object, it was a stand-in for every photograph, it was a stand-in for all of it, you know. It was saying that this black rectangle is as much of an image as a Picasso painting, or, I don't know, a subway car. I mean, it can be anything. And so, I ended up spending the next five years either shooting black boards, white boards, or taking pictures of architectural details, making them roughly about 11x14 inches, mounting them and then leaning them either—in a studio situation—again, on a tabletop leaning against a plain backdrop.

And I could have kept going with it. I could have continued to do project for another five years, because it felt limitless. But finally, you know, five years felt like a good parameter where I worked out what I needed to work out through it. But, ultimately, what that body of work was about for me was, basically saying that the number of images are infinite, that everywhere we look, you know, we are seeing an image. And especially with this ubiquitous-ness of the iPhone camera, we are seeing everything and putting a rectangle around it. And that it's kind of the bottom line for making images these days, for so many people. And—I don't know if I'm describing it well, but it's—yeah, I don't know what else to say. I'm a little bit stuck with it.

It's funny because I think I have left that body of work now. For so long I was in it, and now I have kind of gone on to these new ones, the last year or so. But I'm kind of moved on from them a bit in my head, I think. It's interesting—I used to talk about them more eloquently. But I think that's it. Does that make sense?

ALEX FIALHO: Yes.

BILL JACOBSON: Or do you feel you need more?

ALEX FIALHO: Did you show them?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, I showed them in a number of galleries outside of New York, and then about a year ago, at the ADAA fair, Julie Saul exhibited them in a two-person booth with Richard Artschwager's blps.

ALEX FIALHO: Photos of the blps?

BILL JACOBSON: It was a mix of—he had done some photographs of blps that were artworks. There was one he had done—it was kind of one group. I forget what it was called. But it was an edition—and it was six sculptures that were one edition that I think Brooke Alexander published years ago in a fairly large edition. So those sculptures were kind of arrayed around the booth. And then, he had done a beautiful series of black-and-white photographs in a park in Holland. And they were arranged in a grid—there were 25 of them—and he painted a little blp on each one of these photographs in black ink. So, they were sort of in the booth, also as a grid.

So I think Julie had the idea that my rectangles, whether in the studio or in the landscape, were interventions in an existing space, and formed a nice dialogue with Artschwager's blps, which were also a kind of intervention.

ALEX FIALHO: How did you get to putting rectangular boards in nature and taking photos of them? To distill this idea to its basic elements without your eloquence around it?

BILL JACOBSON: I love looking at architecture and a number of the Human Decisions pictures were pictures of buildings. But I started to think about—let me say—I'll backtrack a little bit. I think a number of the Place (Series), whether it's the studio ones or the outdoor ones, were a kind of distillation—distilling it down to an essence. You know, the black leaning board, whether it's in the landscape or in the studio, is a kind of a representative of every picture that's ever been made.

And on some level, the white board leaning in the landscape for me suggests this notion of architecture, being built in a landscape. Every house starts with the erection of a foundation and then on top of it, a wall. So, essentially, architecture is a series of rectangles that go up, often within a space that had been nature at one point. So, I see those pictures as a suggestion that architecture is a series of rectangles in nature. So, by me taking a white or black board, and plunking it down, I think it suggests that process of building and construction in its very early stages.

And also, that idea of geometry, which is a manmade construct, in conjunction with nature, which initially existed on its own, and then became part of the manmade construct.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you attribute an interest in nature in some of your photographs to those early days in the Norwich woods? Or how does the natural as it exists in your photography relate to those early childhood experiences that we talked about yesterday?

BILL JACOBSON: Good question. I think that idea of the asymmetry of nature juxtaposed against the symmetry of the constructed world has always come and gone in my pictures. You know, that idea of a straight line versus an undulating non-straight line, and how different those two are, has always figured pretty prominently in my work—if not as a foreground issue, then as a background issue—was my way of thinking about art and architecture. You know, both in what I do and what I see done by other people.

It's mentioned by one of the writers in the figure, ground catalogue, but I still remember Steve Reich coming to my photo seminar in graduate school at the Art Institute in San Francisco. And hearing him talk—really what he stressed was his interest in non-electronic percussive sounds versus Philip Glass's interest in electronically generated sound. And I remember him saying that if you take an electronically generated single note and you put it through an oscilloscope it's going to form a perfectly straight line. But if you try—if you get the most accomplished violinist, for example, and you ask them to play the most even single note on a violin and you channel that sound through an oscilloscope there's going to be an incredible amount of wave and texture to that. And, again, it's that very simple idea of what forms a straight line versus what forms an asymmetrical, or a kind of non-synthetic, natural, undulating line. And the juxtaposition between the two is something, for better or worse, I think about frequently.

I think that time growing up in the woods as a kid very much has stayed with me—the more I live in New York, the further I get away from nature, in terms of my own intrinsic being, and I felt it kind of dribble away over the years, where a kind of closeness to nature becomes more and more distant. And I both hate it and I have also come to accept it as part of the reality of being an urban dweller. But I also recognize how different, constantly, the two kinds of landscapes are, whether it's a kind of interior connection with them or a visual kind of observation of them.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. And speaking of landscape, let's talk a little bit about your current series, and your current show that's up right now, actually, at Julie Saul Gallery, which I think just opened last week—

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —which is great and felt appropriate that we were having this conversation the week afterwards.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: How does landscape relate to those photographs? And how does portraiture relate to those photographs? What are those photographs?

BILL JACOBSON: Well, the body of work is called figure, ground. And, essentially—there's a secondary body of work in the show called Lines in My Eyes. And figure, ground pictures, I developed pretty recently. I started them last summer, in June, and worked on them pretty diligently through—well, the shooting went through early January, and then the printing took place January, February. And all those pictures—

ALEX FIALHO: Were you working towards this March show slot?

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah, yeah. And all those pictures are comprised of figures essentially looking away from the camera. For the most part, you see very, very slight turn of the body and the face, but the figures are turned away from the camera and all facing a natural landscape in the distance. They are all shot with the 8x10 view camera, and they are all shot with the lens open to the widest open aperture. So—with the telephoto lens, you get very, very little depth of field, where the only thing that's sharp and in focus is the figure that's in the foreground. And then the landscape recedes and becomes more diffuse the further away from the figure it sits. Everybody's pretty much chopped off below the knees, and that was done very intentionally, because if I included feet, then there would always have been something in front of the feet which would have been in focus, or at the feet which would have been in focus.

And very intentionally—I didn't even plan it that way, but I just—as soon as I started shooting, I knew I wanted the figure to be sharp and the background to be out. And the only way I could achieve that was by cutting the figures off kind of mid-calf. So, it's a little bit awkward, but I also like the awkwardness of it. Some of the pictures are in color and some are in black and white, and that was essentially an aesthetic decision based on what looked better in color and what looked better in black and white. The prints are quite large—about 40x50 inches.

And then, the Lines in My Eyes pictures—there were some earlier Lines in My Eyes from 2010 through 2015 that are architectural details, and then these continue that body of work and are very tight close-ups shot with a digital camera of sections of human bodies, both of men and women.

And what brought me to the figure, ground pictures was thinking about that beautiful line of the body which is mostly straight, but also not straight. And after five years of shooting rectangles, I was on the subway one morning and this woman who looked like a model had a very, very thin arm and her arm was basically holding on to the vertical support in the subway—the railing, I guess, the vertical railing. And her arm was right in front of mine, and I just started looking at that straight arm and just thinking, This is both the horizon line that I was shooting for a long time, and I was thinking about the similarity between the Steve Reich and the Philip Glass kind of construct between straight and undulating, and how similar the straight line—or this undulating line of her arm was to the rectangles that I had been shooting, but also how beautiful and how different it was.

And this was probably now about a year and a half ago. And I tried doing some pictures of friends' arms with the 8x10 view camera outside, and sort of liked them. I ended up doing a number of landscapes that focused on horizon line in a way that I never had done before. I liked them, but I felt it wasn't really quite getting to what I wanted the work to be. And then, last summer I started going upstate to visit friends and started bringing my 8x10 view camera up and started photographing different friends in their backyard. And I realized if they were facing the camera they would be portraits, and if they were facing away from the camera, that hopefully the line of the body would be the primary component of that photograph, especially with the backgrounds being so out of focus that there's no detail.

So, essentially, for the Place (Series), they were these rectangles that were leaning—so it's really a very simplified subject and a kind of barely present background. And I wanted to do the same things here. It's a very, very similar construct where it's a kind of something in the foreground and a something that recedes. It goes back, in a way, to the Interim Portraits, which were also something centered in the foreground, and the white background that recedes.

You know, very few of my pictures have much activity in them. Pretty much all of them are these very, very quiet observations of something that's there and then, basically, whatever I shoot won't be there shortly thereafter. People move, the trees rustle in the breeze and this idea that something—it comes back to the Roland Barthes quote that I mentioned last night: "Every picture is essentially of a dead moment." Because once it's photographed it just—it all changes.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the fact that their backs are turned to the photograph?

BILL JACOBSON: Again, I think for me that was about not making them portraits. I think these pictures allude to landscape photography because they—landscape is a big part of them—but because the landscapes are out of focus, I think they challenge notions about landscape photography. On some level, one could think of these as portrait pictures because they are of people, but because people's faces are not present, they are also, again, challenging that trope of portrait photography. [… -BJ]. They are also not that far from still life photography. But I also think that they are obviously not still life pictures. I think pretty much everything I do has always referred to some genre, some common genre of photography, but then tries to challenge it by doing some kind of "anti" stance against it.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. What are you working on now?

BILL JACOBSON: Not much. The show last week just opened. So—

ALEX FIALHO: Your Whitney book.

BILL JACOBSON: Yeah. That's true. That work—okay, so those pictures are a bit old, but the book is something that's in process at the moment. And it's—

ALEX FIALHO: What's it called?

BILL JACOBSON: It's called 945 Madison Avenue, which is the address of the building that was designed by Marcel Breuer for, you know, the Whitney Museum in 1965. And it—as everybody knows, it was recently vacated by the Whitney, about now two and a half years ago, and last year became the Met Breuer.

So, when I heard the Whitney was moving out, I got in touch with Donna De Salvo, who is a curator there I have known a long time. And she was able to get me permission to go in and photograph the building when it was completely—after it had been completely emptied out by the Whitney, and before the Met took possession of it and started doing a massive renovation on it. And I was able to spend three days in there. I think two days were at the very end of 2014 and then the third day was early January 2015. And, basically, it was like going back into a house you had grown up in that had been completely vacated, and you sort of know the whole thing but you can also really understand the architecture. And you feel the history of 50 years of shows. There were wonderful experiences I had at the Whitney, going through that building for so many years, really beginning in the late-'70s when I started coming into New York.

So that's probably about 40 years of going to that building, and then to have the experience of it as an empty building—it was really special. Because you really understand the bones of the architecture, seeing it completely emptied out. So, at the moment, there are two pictures from that group hanging in the back room at Julie Saul, and I'm doing a self-published book of it, called—yeah, 945 Madison Avenue.

ALEX FIALHO: What are you looking for—what were you looking for in capturing different angles on that building?

BILL JACOBSON: I think—because—I think I mentioned it before, in this interview—that pretty much all my work involves this idea of gathering traces of human existence, or traces that are manifestations of human existence. And I thought: What better way to do that, than to look at, and think about, a completely emptied-out museum building, at that moment of transition between its ownership by one museum and its tenancy by another museum? That this idea of transition, which has been part of all my work, and this idea that everything is open to change—whether it's people living and dying, or objects which are in transition, or nature which is also in it's own completely ephemeral, transitory way—or another way of looking at that would be thinking about this emptied-out museum building during its time of change.

ALEX FIALHO: As we are talking about change—are there technological shifts that have happened that have impacted the type of work that you have been interested in making?

BILL JACOBSON: Oh, good question.

ALEX FIALHO: Are these—all the works you are still making are analog?

BILL JACOBSON: You know, the Whitney pictures are—the black-and-whites are done with 4x5 view camera and the color were all done with a digital camera.

ALEX FIALHO: Okay.

BILL JACOBSON: Just probably in terms of speed, pretty much all the commercial work I do now is done digitally.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. The figure, ground are analog, though.

BILL JACOBSON: The figure, ground are analog, done with an 8x10 view camera. But all of the—all of the prints I have done since I went in-focus about 10 years ago are inkjet pigment prints. Partly, I think the papers are very beautiful, and I have been able to get a kind of color print out of it, that's more special than anything I could get as an analog print. You know, all the—if there's a call for the old out-of-focus work, that still needs to be printed analog. And I'm going to pay a big price when it's no longer possible to get analog color material, because it's really the ideal way to print that work.

ALEX FIALHO: Are there any responses to your work, over time, that you think are particularly noteworthy? I like Vince Aletti's review in the *Village Voice* a while back. I think it was '96. And I read the good conversation that you mentioned. Is there anything that you have felt has been particularly representative—Bill Arning I know has been a champion of your work for a long time. I was texting him. He said you were a master, which I loved, and I love what he wrote in the Julie Saul catalogue: "Rigorous attention to formal values, minimalistic refusal of extraneous informality, carefully calibrated subtleties, luxurious sentimentalities, sensuous visual pleasures, intoxicating erotics." So he's someone that I think has been an interesting perspective on your practice.

Are there other responses, either in written form—but I guess maybe curators or people that you are in dialogue with—and their specific response, or championing of your work that's been helpful, stewarding it?

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Not as many as I would have liked, possibly. But, you know, Tom Sokolowski, you know, for one—who, you know, really got the work into that Grey Art Gallery show early on in 1994. I have a lot of gratitude for his involvement with the work at that time.

There's a German curator named Peter Weiermair, who for a long time was on the board of Leslie-Lohman, and who has been a major curator in Europe up until his recent turn of bad health. But Peter put me in a number of shows in Europe—in Bolzano, a very nice group show a number of years ago. Early on he put me in a show in Frankfort called *Prospect* at the Frankfurter Kunstverein, which got a lot of attention and put one of the Songs of Sentient Beings on the cover of the catalogue. He later went to Salzburg and gave me a very nice show at the Salzburg Kuntsverein. So—a number of other shows here and there, so I'm very grateful to Peter for his big support of the work over the years.

But different people have come and gone at different points. In the late-'90s I had a very good mid-career retrospective that went to University of Michigan Museum of Art. It went to the—oh, in Honolulu, a very nice museum there—[The Contemporary Museum –BJ]. Then also went to the Blaffer Gallery in Houston where Don Bacigalupi was the curator at that time.

So, yes, different people have come and gone. In terms of consistent support over the years, honestly, it's more been the various galleries I have worked with that have shown really consistent support. Maybe because my work has changed so much over the years, different people come to it based on what they find in the work. And as an artist kind of goes through ups and downs, you know, you find different people come to you at different points depending on what they take away from it.

ALEX FIALHO: Who were the galleries? Julie Saul—

BILL JACOBSON: I worked for a long time with Robert Klein in Boston, and—they have been my main two galleries, and there have been a lot of other galleries that have come and gone over the years—in part, by them leaving me, or me leaving them.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's do a few more general questions. Travel seems like it's been important. India, Seattle. Different contexts—

BILL JACOBSON: Even France, when I was a teen—

ALEX FIALHO: France. Are there other travels that have influenced what you have worked on?

BILL JACOBSON: I think my times, aside from the seven times I have been at MacDowell Colony—I was at Yaddo in '97, I have done two really wonderful residencies in Italy. One was Bogliasco in 2014, and prior to that was Civitella Ranieri in 2013. And I think any time I leave New York, and I leave the confines of one large room that I live and work in here—just being in different situations and different landscapes is visual information that I take and I use somewhere, somehow going forward. But in terms of specific trips—I think all of it. Any time I get on a plane to go anywhere, it somehow is something to look at, and that's always—or never not an inspiration.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you think of yourself as part of the global art world, or a particularly American context? How does your work, do you feel circulate nationally, internationally, otherwise?

BILL JACOBSON: I think when I was doing the work that people really related to the AIDS crisis I was showing much more in Europe, in the '90s. But I also think the '90s was a time when Europe was really looking much more to America. You saw a lot of American artists, and they also had the budgets, you know, in Europe in the '90s, to be flying a lot of work back and forth, and to be flying artists back and forth. And I think as we got more into this century, I think a lot of European countries have started to acknowledge their own artists and have—the idea of needing, or wanting, American artists has become less, so I find that I have less of a career in Europe now than I did in those years. But, I don't know, I like to think the art can transcend borders and boundaries, and it's just a matter of finding the right audience for it and one never knows where that's going to be.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the ebbs and flows of a career? How have you navigated those as an artist?

BILL JACOBSON: It's a good question. You know, for a long time, probably, my work got a bit pigeonholed, because of its more obvious relationship to the AIDS crisis. I think when I made the shift from the out-of-focus work to the in-focus, people who were looking at my work more superficially failed to get the connections of where I was going. And I probably lost an audience, in part. But I also might have gained an audience in other ways. Whereas, I think the people who have the ability to look a little deeper into an artist's practice, really got the connections and the formulations that brought the whole thing together.

ALEX FIALHO: How about teaching? I know you teach at International Center of Photography.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: Had you taught before that? What's your pedagogy?

BILL JACOBSON: Not really. My teaching started at ICP by doing some weekend workshops in their general studies program. And then [… -BJ] about eight or nine years ago, Nayland Blake invited me to do a master class as part of the ICP/Bard MFA program that he started and chairs. So I did the master class and had quite a good experience working with the students. And then the next year Nayland asked me to join the critique faculty and be part of the Wednesday critique class that happens.

So, I do that in the fall, some years for all 15 weeks and some years for seven weeks, depending on—it's a class that has three faculty for the 20 students, and we're all there every Wednesday in the afternoon. And it's a very formulaic class on some level, but the conversation is very open-ended and pretty challenging, where only two students show work over the course of the three or three and a half hours. All the students talk about the work that's on the wall, and then the three faculty talk about the work that's on the wall. So there's very much a structure to it. But I have gotten very close to the program and the co-teacher, aside from Nayland, is often David Deitcher, who is a well-known scholar and curator, and very articulate about photography. So I find I end up learning from David and from Nayland as much as I learn from the students and I really felt lucky to have been part of a dialogue in that program.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you assign readings in the class? Is there a pedagogy that you bring to it or what—

BILL JACOBSON: No. It's only critique. It's only—there are elements, I think in the spring semester, that involve, perhaps, readings. But primarily it's students putting up work and people talking about it. That's it.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you have a method or sort of a teaching philosophy around that? A process of critique?

BILL JACOBSON: Just to be as open and honest as I can. You know, it forces you to be on your toes.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

BILL JACOBSON: You know, you're basically—you know, each student gets—of the two students who show weekly, each gets an hour and a half. And it's basically about sitting there looking and listening, and then trying to give the most insightful feedback you can, which is sometimes a challenge and sometimes it comes more easily. It just depends, kind of, on the work that's up and whatever my relationship to it might be.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. Let's take a quick pause.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[Audio break.]

ALEX FIALHO: So, to sort of bring us to the conclusion of this oral history, I think it might be a nice arc to go back to both the prompt of the Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic Oral History Project, and also just use—returning to the topic of AIDS as a way to circle back on a lot of themes—

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —that have come up throughout the course of the conversation. And I think a good way to start with that is to just ask—just talk a little bit about the recent exhibition *Art AIDS America*, which included work by over 100 artists, and also included your work, and showed at the Tacoma Art Museum, Bronx Museum in New York, in addition to a couple of other locations.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: And just tell me about the two works that were shown in that show, and maybe, how they did and didn't reflect considerations of AIDS, and maybe, why they were included.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: The curatorial angle on it.

BILL JACOBSON: Sure. I mean, one of the pictures that was there was a work from 1992. One of the Interim Portrait pieces—20x24, white, bleached-out, out-of-focus portrait of a man's face. It's also a bit of a signature picture for me because it was on the cover of the *1989-1998* book which featured pretty much all of that out-of-

focus figurative work from the '90s. And then, the other piece was one of the desert pieces from 2007, from the period—from the body of work called Some Planes.

And I think the curator's idea was to—for every artist who had been working in the '90s, and is still alive and working today, to include a work that spoke perhaps more specifically to the epidemic from the early years, and then to show where those of us who are still living had gone with the work, whether or not it had directly spoke to the epidemic or not, now 20 years later, 25 years later.

And so, their choice was to do the white Interim Portrait. And then they included this desert piece. You know, it's quite large at 45x50 inches and, as I spoke a few minutes ago—well, this one in particular they chose for the exhibition, has a very pale, blue sky; a very, very straight horizon line; and a very pale yellow base, which is how the light looked and felt that day when I was shooting in the Great Salt Lake.

So—these works on the surface are all very different, but I also think they are very similar. They are about a very kind of ephemeral experience. One is looking at a person who feels they are at the point of disappearing, and the other is looking at both a landscape and a horizon line and a tonal range that also implies its own sense of disappearance or imminent change. So, even though the latter work doesn't address the AIDS epidemic nearly as explicitly as the earlier work—I think ultimately my work, as I have said before, has never really been about the AIDS crisis specifically, but rather it has been much more about this idea that everything in this world we live in is ephemeral and most likely in transition at all moments.

ALEX FIALHO: Though it may not be about that in specifics, your work—as an individual practice emerged at—you know, in late-'80s, early-'90s moment—

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —when AIDS was ravishing the arts community and beyond. Do you think that interest in traces, ephemerality, passing—that has been more or less a preoccupation of your work for almost three decades now—

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —was informed by the AIDS crisis? And maybe your initial interest probably more so, but also your ongoing interests as well as the ongoing AIDS crisis itself?

BILL JACOBSON: I think, for sure, the AIDS epidemic, for me, was the catalyst that got me back to making work in 1989 after that seven-year hiatus. I would say without doubt, I just felt, perhaps, that I just couldn't be silent anymore. I also think it had a lot to do with getting my ideas back on track. You know, combined with shooting the Ryman works and the Agnes Martin works and the Kellys and the Tuttles. And I think—plus the scavenging for flea market vintage photographs that I did.

I think all of those three came together, you know. I think when I shed some tears in the midst of our questioning last night, you know, it wasn't really about the camera that brought my ideas together, but it was a real time in 1989 of thinking about all of it—you know, everything that I was interested in, you know, plus this horrible epidemic that, you know, had landed like an atom bomb in our midst. And I think the gestalt of all of it was really the deciding factor for me to start making work again. Along with those kind of accidental experiments, you know, while taking snapshots where they ended up out-of-focus.

So, all of it just said, "Get back to work. It's time to do it." And probably, formed a kind of kernel of vision and desire and practice that has stayed with me to this day, even though it has been incarnated in a variety of image-making pathways.

ALEX FIALHO: What impact do you think the ongoing crisis has on the younger generation today? Those who may not have lived through the '80s and '90s as adults?

BILL JACOBSON: You know, I think the younger generation—it's hard to say what the cut-off point is for that—but I think it seems like most people under the age of 30 are on PrEP, and they have no knowledge or recollection or understanding for the most part of what people of my generation—or people 40 and above—or maybe 50 and above, it's hard to pretty much say—but I think it's a kind of before-and-after, you know? It's, like, before cell phones and after cell phones. It's two different worlds out there. And people just don't know what it—what we went through back in the '80s and '90s. And I just think it's, you know, a very different world. And a wonderful one, that you don't have people dying left and right around you.

ALEX FIALHO: How about—yesterday we talked off record about Marcelo [Gabriel Yáñez] and his newspaper and—do you see younger artists, younger thinkers, being influenced by that moment in ways that are inspiring to you?

BILL JACOBSON: I think we—as much as there is information about everything on the Internet these days, you know, I don't see enough understanding of history, even recent history, amongst younger artists. You know, you have wonderful young curators like Rick Herron, who is—recently did a show with Bill Arning, acknowledging artists who were influenced by Keith Haring, at a museum in Sweden.

When I was first in school and learning—the idea of who had worked in my medium prior to me was really important. [… -BJ]—I wish younger people had a better understanding of history, not only of the last 30 years, but of the last 100 years, because the bit that I teach, I just find it, you know, purely lacking.

ALEX FIALHO: There's a couple people that we mentioned in chatting that I—one, I hadn't heard of, one I thought you had an interesting perspective on. So I just wanted to put them into the room.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: One was Fawbush Gallery and one was Marlon Riggs.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: I'm going to prompt you to just sort of talk about your experiences with both of them, as they are people who are no longer with us as a result of AIDS and I thought it would be good to have a take on it on record. And then, also, open up space to bring in any other voices or people that might have been lost that you would be interested in having marked in some way with this transcript.

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. First off, I'll say that, for whatever reason, I have been very lucky, in that I have really only lost one very, very close friend to AIDS. As much as I had other friendships, but far less close, with a number of people, who I met or slept with or had a friendship with over the years. But for whatever reason, there really only was one person who I was with them throughout their dying. My brother who passed away about three years ago had been HIV-positive for—since the early-'80s, he assumes—but didn't die from AIDS. It was a variety of other issues that, you know, caused his death.

So, as much as I have also been very affected by the disease, I have not been nearly as affected by it as many people who I know. I was not friends with Marlon Riggs, although I met him a couple of times through the gay film festival world and it's—everybody says, "I love Marlon Riggs," and everybody's said it for good reason. He was as warm and as open and lovely a man as I had ever met. We met briefly several times, like I said, in the gay film festival world, which my boyfriend at the time was very much a part of. And then, Joe Fawbush had a wonderful gallery on Grand Street back in the, I guess, late-'80s into the mid-'90s, along with his partner and lover, Tom Jones. So, Joe showed Kiki Smith early on and a number of other really extraordinary artists, and died of AIDS probably around '96, '97.

The art world is filled with absences, creative absences, through so much loss around the AIDS epidemic. And—as is every other field, honestly. I think it's almost too easy to cite the lack of creativity in the art world, because really every field was affected. And, you know, both Marlon and Joe were people I felt honored to know, although neither were people that I was that close to.

ALEX FIALHO: How about Jeff Siegal, someone that you were really close to, if that's a presence that you wanted to talk a little bit about—his impact on your life, and your friendship?

BILL JACOBSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Sure. Yeah, it's always a pleasure to think about Jeff. We met through mutual friends in San Francisco, back when I was living out there around 1979, 1980. I honestly don't remember who introduced us but he was just lovely and warm and open soul who moved to New York and proceeded to get a Master's degree in Social Work, and also seroconverted in those years and died around '95.

ALEX FIALHO: Has there been—in thinking about this, the range of your work and the range of your life over this oral history process—what has been your reaction to thinking about and returning to those '80s, '90s years around AIDS? To returning to the work you have made over the course of your life?

BILL JACOBSON: I don't know. I think I'm constantly, in my daily life, probably always revisiting my own history—whether it's through sleeping dreams or waking dreams. And so I probably don't do it this concisely, but I'm always thinking about the arc and the movement and my own process and my own work, and thinking about connections between the two. So, just, in this case, it has kind of gone from being an internal dialogue to an external monologue perhaps. And—but with a lot of pleasures and some emotional challenges to kind of go through it all in a short six hours. But you are a very good questioner, and you have a wonderful ability to pull it all together, so I'm grateful for it.

ALEX FIALHO: I think, just as a sort of wrap-up: Do you have stakes on how you would like for your work to be considered or viewed, into the future?

BILL JACOBSON: Well, I hope future audiences and generations, again, can see the subtexts in my work. I think for too long it's—you know, people remembered or or remarked or talked about, you know, kind of the more obvious connections to the AIDS epidemic, which were there in the work from the '90s. And on some level, I think people still feel a little bit stuck with that kind of representation of my work.

It was interesting, when I went to the opening for *Art AIDS America*, the number of people who basically saw and acknowledged the Interim Portrait and said, "Oh, I loved your picture in the show," but basically had no idea that that Some Planes picture that was hanging, not next to it, but in another room, was also mine. And I think maybe many artists get identified for one thing, but I think—I just hope people will think about what brings my work together, as opposed to one smaller kind of body of work. And this idea that we have talked about of images that suggest a more human journey through the world is part and parcel, probably, of everything I do, and is what ties the older work and the newer work together.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. Anything else you would like to add to the conversation?

BILL JACOBSON: Thank you for your time and your interest.

ALEX FIALHO: Yes. Thanks. It has been an honor to get to know you and your work.

BILL JACOBSON: Thank you, Alex.

ALEX FIALHO: Thank you for your generosity.

BILL JACOBSON: Sure. My pleasure.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]