

Work/Cited Episode 3 Transcript

Meredith Mann: So welcome, everyone, to the third episode of Work/Cited here at The New York Public Library. My name is Meredith Mann, and I'm the librarian for manuscripts, archives, and rare books at the Library's Schwarzman Building on 42nd Street. We're excited as a new program that showcases the latest scholarship supported by the rich collections of The New York Public Library with a behind-the-scenes look at how the finished product was inspired, researched, and created. In today's episode, Josh Chuang, the Library's Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Associate Director for Art, Prints, and pPhotographs is joined by Svetlana Alpers, Professor Emerita of History of Art at the University of California, Berkeley, and a visiting scholar in Art History at New York University here in the city. Her many books include the new *Walker Evans: Starting From Scratch* as well as *The Art of Describing*, *The Vexations of Art*, and *Roof Life*. Today, they're going to dig into Svetlana's recently published book *Walker*, excuse me, *Walker Evans: Starting From Scratch*, and how the great American artist came to develop his eye, as well as the influential encounters Evans had as a young artist here at The New York Public Library. If you're interested in Svetlana's book, I'm also posting a link to our shop here where you can purchase it and proceeds from your purchase go to benefit the library. Just a little housekeeping for today. Our guests will speak for about 30 minutes. Then we will open up the conversation. Okay. And with that, I'm going to turn things over to Josh and Svetlana for the discussion. And let me project your slides.

Josh Chuang: Thanks, Meredith. And thank you to you, Svetlana, for joining us. Svetlana's joining us from her apartment in New York City. I'm joining you from the Prints and Photographs study room in the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building. Before we delve into Svetlana's research, and the primary source materials available at the library to researchers specifically interested in the subject of Walker Evans, I just wanted to start out with a brief visual tour of [inaudible] book, and point out some of the features that are perhaps unusual about it as a book of art history. So bear with me, I'm going to try to switch, it's a different machine. Okay, can you all see that? Okay. So the first thing I'm struck by with Svetlana's book is the classic non pictorial type only dust jacket. Large black and gray letters are set on a playing field of beige. Upon opening the book just beyond the half title page -- I don't know if you can see that with the glare -- is a uninterrupted gallery of images of Walker Evans' plates, 143 pages worth in roughly chronological order. This makes up about a quarter of the book, and it's only after the section that we encounter the full title page and seven chapters of texts that follow. Meredith, could we advance a few slides to the third slide, please. Thanks. So those familiar with Evans' bibliography may recognize that [inaudible] on his book as a kind of [inaudible] to two of Evans's best-known books -- *American Photographs* which was published in 1938 and the 2nd Edition of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* which like the first edition published two decades earlier, begins also with gallery of Evan's images followed by James Agee's epic prose. They're actually one or actually two small details I'd like to mention before we get to talking. When you, in spite

the scrupulous research that obviously went into the book, there are neither the tiny numerals that usually correspond to notes or citations. Nor are there the parenthetical references to specific plates. Instead, the plate references are found in the margins here, we see that here. And the notes and citations are conveniently found in the back of the book, clearly and cleanly laid out. This elegant, uncluttered layout of the main text, then, is more akin to that of a biography which this is not. So, with that, Svetlana, I'd like to ask you, after a lifetime of looking and writing about old master painting for which you're well known, what brought you to write a book on photography and specifically Walker Evans?

Svetlana Alpers: Oh, I could say sort of parroting Evans so it chose me, right, as he said when I asked how do you find your subjects, he said I don't look for them, they find me. In a sense Evans did. It's a meandering story. I did some work with a painter and a photographer, and then the curator came in. That's Jim Hyde and Barney Kulok and then Peter Galassi. And we made some photographs after [inaudible] in the Met, and I found myself into the practice of photography. So I got interested. I knew people, got to know people in the world, looked at a lot of photographs, and then, in fact, at that moment, Evans picked me. But I was probably also having retired from the academy moved from Brooklyn to New York, I was sort of fleeing in a way my academic past, and photography, and America, photography being Evans and America being where he was born and lived, and I'd always worked on dead Europeans they just were new for me and a way out of my old self and my old work. Though there are certainly connections which will come up as we talk.

Josh: With the extensive literature on Evans -- I'm thinking about my own collection of Walker Evans' books at home at home which stands almost two linear feet --

Svetlana: I got them right there on my shelf around the desk.

Josh: Yeah, yeah. Well why did you feel his work needed a reconsideration?

Svetlana: You know there is a lot of literature there are some substantial hat collection catalogs with marvelous essays, there are many books devoted to certain parts of his work, there were two biographies, one unauthorized, and then one authorized, but really there is no book-length writing about his entire life and work as I'm proposing to do. So actually, curiously, though there is all that, it seemed grist for my mill rather than something that I had to deal with. It was just a part. I just thought I was doing something different. It's not quite true, but that's how I felt in doing the work.

Josh: And as you say in the introduction to your book, this is a book not on the reception of Evans' photographs, in fact that you very rarely write about the reception of any artist's work, what you're interested in is the making.

Svetlana: That's precisely true.

Josh: Can you say a little bit more about that?

Svetlana: [Inaudible] and I mean that's been my way of working in old master painters. And, of course, turning photography, it becomes a much different thing. Because the making of a photograph is more puzzling and enigmatic in his process than the making of the painting. And so it was a challenge for me, a fascinating challenge, to figure out well, what is the making of a photograph? What constitutes the making of the photograph. I mean for Evans, it was [inaudible] something in and editing, and printing as you know, we'll get to that, really didn't matter at all to him. He was not interested in printing, he was interested in editing much before printing.

Josh: So since the thrust of this particular program is research, the act of research, the outcomes of research, how did you start? And where did you go to conduct your research? And I'm also curious --

Svetlana: I'm in New York and the major research archive is held at the Met where his papers have rested since the Met [inaudible] them in the 90s. But so I could go to the Met on the days they were open and the hours they were open, which is not the simplest thing but I did it and it's a marvelous place to work. So I went there and went through really, I mean, every slip, if he wrote you know, "shit" on a piece of toilet paper it's at the Met in [inaudible] Everything. He kept. I mean, he was a collector as he said a photographer is a collector, and he was a collector of much more than just what he saw to photograph. So I went through everything [inaudible] I went through. Images, I went through texts, I went through diaries, I went through letters and all that, but of course the other major place in New York is the New York Public Library. And since, and for Evans, I mean Evans is a man of the book. After all he was a man who wanted to be a writer, and he found he couldn't do it until with despair in a way he picked up a camera and began to photograph. So the writer was with him all the time. He wrote his whole life even if not for publication all the time. And after he started to go to Yale they said uh-uh you're not accepted, he went to Williams for a year, he sat in the library, he didn't like it, we're talking now essentially 22, 23 -- 23, he comes to New York, and where does he end up pretty quickly but the New York Public Library. He becomes a page for the map room, and he reads and he looks, and that lived with him for life. So coming into the New York Public Library on the search for Evans was one of the prime things I knew I wanted to do.

Josh: I remember distinctly when you came once pulling out for you the boxes of Evans' Cuba photographs, two of which you would produce in the books gallery. And I also remember accompanying you to the Schomburg Center where we looked together for documents that might have shed light on certain photographs that Evans made in the south.

Svetlana: Right.

Josh: Yeah, of course, it makes sense that the Evans archive of the Met was the logical place where you spent most of your time delving into Evans' primary materials. But as you also

mentioned in the case of the subject of your book, we have someone whose own research, own looking at the time you spent working here at the library was absolutely formative. And so since I'm here at the library, I've been actually able to pull out a few of the things that I'll try to present in more or less a chronological order that I might ask you to narrate for us. This first one you haven't seen.

Svetlana: You're surprising me, okay.

Josh: Actually, so Meredith can stop the slideshow for a second, okay. And I don't know if you can make this out, I'm going to try to share those with the document camera, it might be too blown out. Do you see that?

Svetlana: No, I think I saw it before better when it was somehow in another way.

Josh: Okay, Meredith, maybe let's revert to the slide, maybe clear. Next slide, please. There you go. Okay. So on the right is what we call internally at the library a page card. I'm actually not exactly sure how it was used. We see it as Evans, Walker Assistant circa 1923 question mark. I think we know that it wasn't 1923, I think he started in 1924. And the memo that's in blue on the left is something that we put together in 1991 I think at the request of Belinda Rathbone when she was working on her Walker Evans book. She was interested in Evans' precise dates of employment.

Svetlana: Right, right.

Josh: So you see here according to our internal records, he began employment March 1st, 1924. He worked in the stacks for a little more than two weeks, was paid \$75 a month. And then he was transferred to Map Room as you say and earned a little more, he got a little bit of a raise. And then later on he was reappointed as a temporary employee to Map Room and worked until really through the end of 1925.

Svetlana: Yep.

Josh: So he spent a good two years, a better part of two years.

Svetlana: I think so. We're looking at 23, 26 between coming away from Williamson, New York and heading off to Paris on a boat. So we've taken care of two of those years. Okay, at the New York Public Library, they're important.

Josh: Right. Okay the next thing I'd like to show is something Evans talks later about encountering and having made a big impact on him. Bear with me here.

[Silence]

And I'll have to try to handle this carefully. Can you see that all right?

Svetlana: As you're holding it in your hands, can't say that I can, but okay. So this is one of our two issues of camera work. Oh, okay. The one of the last issues.

[Inaudible Reply]

Svetlana: It is the last, I mean 1917 was the last issue, right.

Josh: Yep.

Svetlana: And we're looking for --

Josh: Well, this was the -- you with Strand and the good years of his street portraits.

Svetlana: Right.

Josh: And there's one in particular that we're about to happen on.

Svetlana: Okay.

Josh: There you are -- that you illustrate in your book, there it is.

Svetlana: As they say they're printed without Japanese tissue because they wanted it to be as clear and hard as it could be which is exactly what Evans appreciated. And Evans wrote about this later in [inaudible] quality in art 1969. And this was the photograph that when he saw in in camera work and of course, Stieglitz was not his favorite though he credited him with really giving presence to photography in the world, but he didn't like his work, his later work, let's put it that way -- anyhow this was the photograph which just blew him away. Strand's blind lady and that's something that he saw when he was obviously at the, in these dates we [inaudible].

Josh: Right, but it wasn't just pictures that Evans was looking at the library, right. He was also reading literature.

Svetlana: Yeah, well. When he goes to Paris and he writes an essay called [foreign language] "In the evening, I feel isolated." And in writing that essay for [inaudible] his French teacher in Paris -- we're now in 1926, he notes in the essay that it's related to [foreign language] which she had read when he was in the New York Public Library. And he read that in French. She gets, we can -- I won't go into that but he did study French. And in fact later on as his second wife points out that he spoke with a marvelous Parisian accent. I mean he had good French, and he could use it and he was proud of it. So anyhow, he did read Baudelaire in French at the New York Public Library. So it was literature not just the Blind Woman.

Josh: Next I just wanted to pass before the document camera just a few of the first prints that Evans sold to the New York Public Library shortly after returning from a trip to Cuba.

Svetlana: It was his only successful sale he tried to peddle. I mean the Cuban ones were paid for as the trip was by [inaudible] for his book *The Crime of Cuba* which is published right then. But Evans had many more photographs than he needed for the book and he didn't know what to do with them, and so he went and tried to do something with them, and I think the only person who said yes and bought some was Romana Javitz at what was then called, if I'm not wrong, the Picture Collection of the New York Public Library.

Josh: Right. And just wanted to, I'm not sure if I'm able to zoom in on this detail properly but you can see that all the prints actually have a picture collection stamp. They've been inscribed in ink with a title and the artist and the year of the photograph by a staff member of the library a long time ago. We wouldn't do this today. And for those of you who aren't familiar with the Picture Collection or its function or practices, this is a basically a massive picture morgue picture file, very active, artists used it, commercial people used it, people in fashion, theater, television, set designers of all sorts, fashion used it. And so this is the file where pictures were not filed by the maker, they were categorized by their subject. And so I think you can see that on some of these.

[Silence]

Svetlana: So the Cuban photos were not kept together is that what you're saying? They would have been scattered according to their subject?

Josh: Well, the subject could have been --

Svetlana: Cuba.

Josh: Cuba. So I think we can, can you make that out? Maybe not. So this says the subject was Marketplace in this photograph. I'll turn it over in a second. And the locale was Havana, Cuba.

Svetlana: Mm-hm.

Josh: Okay. And this is one of the ones, this is one of the pictures that you illustrate in the book, and I apologize it's blown out for our audience members. But it's illustrated very beautifully in your book.

Svetlana: Yeah. It's a wonderful photograph, actually. And it's one that's not in Beals' *Cuba*, and that's the whole point. I mean [inaudible] other photographs because I do have a page in the book when I illustrate in thumbnail size all the images that were in the book itself. But there are many wonderful pictures that were not in the book.

Josh: Yeah. And then, of course, a few years after that, Evans joins the staff of the, of the FSA as a photographer, hired by Roy Stryker to be part of his team. And, of course, Evans uses that as an excuse to make personal work on the government's dime. And starting in 1936 Roy Stryker began to deposit anonymous packages of duplicate prints, so called duplicate prints that the dark room technicians at the government were making for the purpose of [inaudible] these pictures. And, at first, he did so anonymously. I'm not sure if you're aware of this because he was afraid that the pictures that he was generating with this project might be telling a kind of inconvenient truth, and that some people in congress might be upset and might want to suppress this archive. So we started sending the pictures to [inaudible] that's directly but that it could not be suppressed, that they would be circulated. And so we have as a result of that something like 40,000 FSA prints made by the technicians there Washington DC. And among those are well over a thousand Walker Evans that he had nothing to do with in terms of printing. [Inaudible] pull out a few examples that I think might be interesting to talk about. This might be too blown out for anyone to see but we have two versions of this print. So there are many duplicates, and sometimes triplicates in this collection. And so here we have the sort of full negative, the top and the bottom areas that just are negative areas have been scratched in the negative, meaning that you know Evans wanted them to be cropped out or somebody wanted them to be cropped out, most like Evans. And then here is a picture of a cropped version of that image.

Svetlana: Mm-hm.

Josh: These are very nice prints of Joe's Auto Graveyard, near Eastern Pennsylvania.

Svetlana: Josh, there was a note here from some participants saying if you were sharing these images, everybody could see them better.

Josh: Yeah. I'm not quite sure how to do that, I apologize to everybody. Oh, okay, all right. Let's be open about technology. That's fine. Don't worry, go ahead.

Svetlana: And this is --

Meredith: Josh, I can stop the slide show and pull up your screen if you'd like.

Josh: Yeah. Yes, that'd be great. Thank you, Meredith.

Svetlana: Better.

Josh: Is that better for everybody? Okay. It's probably still blown out. But you can see these pictures. And hopefully you can make out the fact that a lot of these pictures are quite glossy. These were prints that were ferrotyped, which means that they were dried while wet on some kind of smooth [inaudible]. And so as the print dried, it would be imparted with this same smoothness as the surface on which it was dried. And it led to a crisper surface, and I think

greater contrast for reproduction. So we have scores, thousands of these pictures. And you do make a point in the book that for Evans, the printing of his photographs was not the thing, the printing of his actual prints was not necessarily the thing that he was after. And I wonder if you can say a little bit more about that.

Svetlana: Well, I mean, I think he said something he wanted information and clarity. I'm not sure I have the words exactly but that's what he thought his photographs should convey. Of course, the information was partly determined by the camera he preferred. He preferred a view camera that he used many cameras. And his view camera gave one a huge amount of information. I mean more information than the human eye itself takes in when it just looks at something -- a huge amount. And he loved that. So he wanted that, and he wanted his prints to have as much information as possible, and also have clarity. But fine printing was not an interest to him. I suppose that's something, well no, it didn't interest him at all. What interested him was what he called editing -- in other words, what you do with your negative when you get it. And negatives are marked with an orange marking pen and then if you have scissors as in Joe's Auto Graveyard, and just chopped off a piece of an image when he wanted it to look different. So he handled his images but he was handling not through printing but through changing them and factually manually [inaudible].

Josh: Yeah. I'll show this image again because maybe full screen people can see a little bit better but are you seeing that a little bit better, Svetlana?

Svetlana: Yep, I'm seeing it very well.

Josh: Okay. I apologize but, here's an example of Evans editing a negative, not just cutting a print of it.

Svetlana: Although the editing is hard to see from where we're seeing it, but we'll take your word for it. Okay, right.

Josh: Sure. So I know you spent quite a lot of time on Evans' relationship to literature, his relationship to texts, in general. And we just spoke about Evans' perhaps complex relationship with his own prints. How important in your research was it to see a range of Evans' prints in various collections?

Svetlana: I would say probably I was not rushing around [inaudible] many Evans' prints as I could in various collections. No, I did not do that. And I wanted to see as many Evans' images as I could more than as many prints of those images that I could see. Let's put it that way. I did, as you know, you were no longer there, I did go up in fact to Yale to see a huge spread out of the SX-70s, his final photographs which is [inaudible] close to his death. And there, but there, it was a matter of an array because they're essentially made, I feel almost to be seen as an array and not image, image, image, image. I closed the gallery section of my book with color, those were color, of course because it was Polaroid SX-70. I closed the book gallery with some pages

of that just to try to give people a sense of that array. But, again, I didn't run around and look at other SX-70s. All the ones I looked at happened to be in the gallery in New Haven, where they for which they'd been bought. I think you had something to do with that, did you not? Yes.

Josh: I did, during my time there. And I remember when I first saw that large group, I sort of thought instinctively that it was important to keep them together. I think what had happened when Evans' estate got settled and dispersed, there were a number of beneficiaries and so [inaudible] --

Svetlana: They all put them like --

Josh: [Inaudible] got split I think three ways, and then getting sold one by one and maybe the more quote unquote iconic pictures that were sold, and the ones that were less iconic maybe got left.

Svetlana: Because I argue in the book. I mean I argue could you call it a late style and that's an interesting question for many photographers. We can look at Instagrams by Stephen Shore, a late style, I mean there were sort of analogous things going on in the older age of photographers. But I question that here, and it seems to me that the photographs really don't stand up these SX-70s one by one by one as great images. But when you see them all laid out, if I was lucky enough to do or asked to have done in Haven, it is extremely impressive, in a quite different way. So it's a new kind of way of -- a new way of making, God knows and he said that. He said if you're not really know what you're doing, you can't use the SX-70. It takes a man of my experiences that, basically he says, to make this work. And he thought it did. And he did make it work. But it's a new kind of photographic print that you get out of it than what we're used to with Evans.

Josh: Right, I think it constituted for Evans a very different kind of active editing because I don't see any evidence --

Svetlana: You can't. No, it's just, you've got it. You can't really, right.

Josh: Maybe Jeff Rosenheim would, I think is with us today, can tell us if he knows of Evans' example of Evans cutting up a polaroid to get a better picture. But I also agreed with you, when I first saw that cache of pictures, the totality even though it was only a portion of what Evans had made. The totality [inaudible] and that --

Svetlana: Because he saw them that way because he came back at the end of the day and threw the, I mean Jerry Thompson, he threw them out. So he would look at them -- I mean, his day's catch, as it was, which is a little different than day's negatives.

Josh: Yeah. I remember when I was at Yale and speaking with Richard Benson who knew Evans at the time. He remembers Evans on campus with his SX-70. And of course he had, he

was supplied by Polaroid with a limitless supply of film which was, I'm sure, was very expensive then. But as he was taking pictures, he would just instinctively take pictures and the Polaroid would be spilling out the front of the camera onto the floor and he would just still be taking photographs. And, of course, these things take a few minutes to really develop.

Svetlana: But with my comment that Evans, as we know, is not, he was a collector but he didn't really make a big fuss about what happened to everything he collected. So, all the stuff he photographed and all of his negatives as people who went into the houses in the late years, some people were just astonished at the chaos. And that's interesting for a man who obviously was as careful with many things that he didn't fuss about. And I've seen some photographers who really keep everything in total order. You might say ah that's very photographic. But that wasn't Evans.

Josh: Mm-hm. I mean, you make a number of provocative points perhaps in the book -- provocative for those of us who have imparted with say received wisdom in our photographic educations. I admit to being one of them. I admired the book, admire you for being unafraid to challenge these conventions. Or perhaps you just weren't prejudiced by this received wisdom having come from a [inaudible] field.

Svetlana: [Inaudible] of those prejudices.

Josh: Yeah [chuckle]. But you know one of the things, one of the points that you make is that for Evans the sequence, the sequencing of his pictures which many commentators talk about specifically in his book American photographs -- you feel that that is not very consequential.

Svetlana: No, I think there've been I mean people much more into photography than I am have written serious pages talking about one after the other the photographs in American photographs. We don't know if Christine [assumed spelling] did it, you know, but how wonderful the sequence is. Well, I think you can look at the gallery at the beginning of my book which is actually more chronological. It's a working sequence, not a book sequence not an after the fact sequence but on the [inaudible] and it works just as well. So I think given the consistency of his photographs almost any sequence would be something you could write about. Do you understand what I mean? It makes sense they resonate one to the other even if it's not a particular sequence in the book, and I conclude from that that actually, it's the individual photograph which counts more than the sequence. I mean there I might be bucking tradition which, I mean, he believed in the book. To get back to the public library, the book was it for him, he didn't believe in exhibiting on walls as much as he did on book pages. And that was very, very important to him. But I think it's as much that you could hold it in your hand, that the prints are of a certain size, right, that they're visible to you, a reader. It's like a book, it's like reading, right. He said after all that it's the most literary of the graphic arts -- so we could say that about him. He says photography is the most literary of the graphic arts and his being bound to the book as the place for his pictures in a way carries that right out. And there, I think it's not, it's you turn the pages, but you're also gripping something in your hand, and the first edition of American

Photographs is a light book much lighter than the reprints that MoMA has done. Very light. Maybe it's cheaper paper, but it's a light thing. You can sit and look at. It's just fabulous, wonderful!

Josh: By light, do you mean the weight of the book, the feel of the book [inaudible]?

Svetlana: The weight of the book. In fact I think you helped me find that copy in fact. No, it's a very, it's a lightweight book. It comes to the -- you can sit, you don't sit as with a coffee table book with a huge lump on your lap around your table. You can sit comfortably and look at it, it's wonderful.

Josh: The other thing I admire in your book is that you're not afraid to challenge Evans.

Svetlana: Give me an example. Okay.

Josh: You, I think you do take some pains to, go through some pains to examine what he said, what he wrote. And sometimes you find discrepancies. I mean, I'm wondering if you can talk about that a bit.

Svetlana: You know I think you mentioned that to me and talking, and you know as you're saying it to me, Josh, I can't remember exactly. I mean, look he was inconsistent, and of course inconsistency he would have said, well, that's human. I mean he would have just defended that, and he's right. In other words, I mean not only ambiguity which is something else, but do you have something in mind when you're saying that to me or you now yourself can't remember? I mean, I can't remember. He didn't always say the same thing. I mean to point it out ambiguity, for example, he said I'm an aristocrat by nature and I believe in social justice, and I'm schizophrenic because of that. Those two things don't go together. And I think that's a wonderful thing to think about in our time, because I feel like that now too. I believe in social justice, but my taste in art is probably aristocratic. I have to live with it, and I will, and I'll insist on it. I won't give [inaudible] aristocracy and neither did he. I mean that's not what you're getting at but that's typical of Evans.

Josh: Yeah. Before we turn to questions from the audience I just wanted to ask you, Svetlana, if you would respond to this quote by Evans that is also perhaps contrary. He says in a later interview, I think it might've been with Leslie Katz -- excerpting here -- he says I'm not interested in photography really, only in that I can make it do what I want.

Svetlana: Well. Everything he did and he says I have an eye. Now camera people I know say that's nonsense. He has a camera. It's contradictory to say you have an eye, and when he was asked what camera I used he would say it's like asking a writer what typewriter he use. Now, clearly that's not true. A typewriter for a writer is different for a camera, but that's what he said. So that shows you that sort of goes with what you just quoted to me. That in fact he wanted to see, he was a seer. I mean seer, and since transcendent was a huge word, seer is a sense that

he got above things he saw to some other level which mattered a huge amount to him. So in that sense, I think it was a way to something, a way to get beyond all of the stuff of the world which is photography was actually grasping, trying to grasp. There was a contradiction right there. I want to grasp it, I want to lift above it.

Josh: Great, thank you. Meredith, I think we're perhaps ready to take some questions from the audience, if there are any.

Meredith: So, Svetlana, you mentioned looking at Walker Evans' papers at the Met, at the Watson, and I was wondering, you know, what was that experience like how well-documented was his life. Did you, were you surprised by finding anything or was there anything that you were surprised not to find?

Svetlana: Oh, it was, I mean there's so much, it's overwhelming. Because I said he saved everything, right? So I mean we're not talking about letters because correspondence is I'm sure is a fascinating thing. But, of course, letters are not all in one place. But I mean there're his journals, there are drafts whenever he wrote something, he would write endless drafts, and he saved every single draft. Or like his, the things he wrote in Paris. Imagine spending a year in Paris and coming back with everything you wrote for your French teacher. So it's all there. I produced in the book a few pages of his journal -- he kept journals. Unfortunately, we don't have the journals for the significant years in the 30s. It's bizarre, but they're nowhere. But the journal for Cuba is fascinating and I reproduced in my book in two openings some pages of that, so readers can see what it looked like when he was writing in a journal, and I'm comparing two different ways of writing, but get the book and you'll find that. Now, it was fascinating. I mean the Met is just, I mean, they should have, and I'm speaking for the Met. They should have more space. I mean they need more space for people like myself to come and work, and for them to work on their own materials. So you're all crowded in, and I feel for the staff and for Jeff at the Met with this limited amount of space. But it is a goldmine, really a gold mine.

Meredith: So the next question is for Josh. And that question is are there Dorothea Lange photographs among the groups that Stryker sent to Romana Javitz. I ask because our questioner asks because they understand that Lange liked to make her own prints.

Josh: Yeah. I think that's not exactly true for Lange, especially not the FSA work. I think we have something like over 3000 prints by Lange total, and maybe it's 3000, I don't have the exact number off the top of my head. But I know there's at least a couple of thousand that Roy Stryker sent. The library also acquired prints directly from Lange, Romana Javitz did towards the end of her life that were part of the picture collection. And I think she did make some of those prints but also had other people print for her, like Evans.

Meredith: I also have a comment from Jeff Rosenheim who says that he is happy to jump in and add some background on the FSA prints, and I can unmute him to --

[Inaudible]

Meredith: So I think that Jeff you, there we go.

Josh: Hi, Jeff.

Jeff Rosenheim: Hi there. Hi, Svetlana. Hi, Josh. I'm speaking from the sidelines here. That was a great presentation. I think it covered a lot of ground. Just a few things but thanks, Svetlana, about thank you for plugging my need for more space. Yes, we do. We'd also love to be open more days of the week than we have been.

Svetlana: Yes, yes! [Chuckle].

Jeff: It's been a real struggle and, Svetlana, thank you for sticking with us. And, Josh, thank you for giving us Svetlana this forum. I have many things to say. But one of the more interesting things that you talked about, about the RIFSA [assumed spelling] collection at the public library that any of us have worked in the 30s are so jealous about is simply that those prints that were made in the labs in Washington during that era allow us to see something that I really needed to see and I worked on Evans for a big show in 2000. And I borrowed prints from the collection which is that when Evans was working for Stryker, he struggled with that kind of supervision, and he submitted a lot of works that were made before he was a New Deal photographer. And, in fact, Josh and Svetlana, the picture of the three houses in New Orleans [chuckle] was made in February or March of, I think of '35 -- long before he was an FSA photographer. But they had to submit a certain number of pictures to get their paychecks. It was a very, it was a very cut and dried situation. And that was one of the ones, it's in American photographs, but it has nothing to do with anything for the New Deal. And I just love the fact that you chose it, and the fact that there is a cutdown print, Josh, suggests to me -- and I'm not sure I saw it but that print it did not come from the FSA.

Josh: Well, it's stamped FSA and --

Jeff: I know, I know that. I know, but it didn't -- how did it get cut?

Josh: It looks like it was cut after it was printed. So, yeah.

Jeff: And they would never have done that. They, that's not what Stryker did, that's not how they used images. So I think that is something that Evans had, or that Evans got and did some work on. So it shows intentionality, and that's a kind of --

Svetlana: Jeff, that's not one of the ones he was making into a postcard, is it?

Jeff: Yeah, he may have made this into a postcard but I don't believe, Josh, that that's postcard format size, is it?

Josh: No, no, it's not. It's just, you know, it's a contact print, I believe.

Jeff: Yeah.

Josh: And it's just cut down to --

Jeff: Yeah, so I think Mr Evans got there somehow, and I just think that's just basically [inaudible] [Josh laughs]. But I was going say something else about the RAFSA prints. It's very, very, very revealing. And the anxiety that Stryker had is that that part of the story is a beautiful one. I think if there are any students out there, it would be great for people to dig into this issue about government control, even of the New Deal FSA RA archive, and anxieties that had to do with censorship. I think this is a huge issue today and it was then, and I think this is a rich area of research. That's all. Svetlana, congratulations, terrific. We welcome more of these conversations. I think you have a great take. And, Josh, thanks for making this happen. I'm happy just to watch and hear other questions now.

Svetlana: We're happy to have you here.

Josh: Thanks so much for being here.

Jeff: I'm going to mute myself now.

Josh: So, for those of you who don't know who Jeff Rosenheim is he's the curator-in-charge of the photographs department and that he was instrumental after the Met acquired the Walker Evans archive and cataloging it and working with it. And he was curator of a major Evans show as he said in 2000 at the Met.

Meredith: So a question for the both of you. So, Svetlana, you mentioned a bit about what took you to the Met, but I was wondering if you could talk about your first days researching this project here at the New York Public Library, and kind of how you and Josh connected, and what your strategy was for working with the libraries materials.

Svetlana: Goodness. I just came to see what there was. I mean as I say I'm an outsider to all this which makes my burden lighter, in a way, because I didn't have to worry about what everybody thought, said, did because I didn't really know what the right thing was to do. I think I came to the library after the Cuba pictures, initially, and after the Strand photograph in [inaudible] because I wanted to see the blind lady. So the first day I went there, the Cuba pictures came out, and that came out, and then everything else kind of followed from that. And I believe I met, well, Josh is here. But I believe the connection was through a fellow photographer who I believe is [inaudible] from California [inaudible] who knew Josh before I did, and said you must meet, and we met. So we're now friends, and working together on this. No, and I might say of the room, I mean speak about space to get back to Jeff, you've got space. I mean you come

into the New York Public Library room after the small, packed archive at the Met, and there might not be the Evans archive, but there's just glorious space and ease of looking at things. I mean, you know, the Met needs it is what I'm saying [inaudible]

Josh: I mean being able to serve researchers like you is our main business, and it's a pleasure for me to have people like you who are [inaudible] --

Svetlana: The Met is a museum department. It's not a, it's not a public library. So it's a completely different institution I should say.

Josh: It's a different function, right.

Svetlana: Sure. But finding that that Blind Woman right there in that book, and you have two copies, and I wonder which he looked at. You'd think you know because the more worn copy not the fresher stuff.

Josh: Yeah.

Svetlana: But it was just one [inaudible].

Josh: I should think it was the worn one, yeah. I mean, you know, we're far from the only institution that has a copy of that [inaudible], it's special because it's Evans [inaudible] [Josh laughs].

Svetlana: Right.

Josh: Yeah. And, of course, Evans later on in his lecture titled Lyric Documentary mentions a few other choice things that he [inaudible] at the library that became influential to him.

Svetlana: Right. And that came up in that lecture he gave in, so the lecture he gave at Yale. And the [inaudible] association in 64 which helped him in his getting his appointment at Yale actually that lecture was productive. And he mentions a first half. The second half which Jeff has written about marvelously is Picture Postcards. The first half is pitcher essentially the New York Public Library. I mean I'm making a joke. But it's a little bit that way.

Josh: Yeah. I mean I don't think there's that much of a paper trail between Evans and Romana Javitz who is the head of the Picture Collection. But I can imagine Evans spending quite a bit of time in the Picture Collection hanging out with Javitz and also looking at their marvelous collection of postcards which are filed by subject which Evans you know came to use as his own organizing principle, who knows where they got it from the Picture Collection or elsewhere.

Svetlana: When did that collection start at the New York Public Library, the picture --

Josh: The Picture Collection started in 1915. And I think that postcards must've been quite early on, and people started donating them both new and used ones. And the librarians and the staff members at the Picture Collection would dutifully categorize them by place or subject.

Svetlana: The interesting thing about Evans and postcards, of course, is he was interested in old postcards. He didn't just rush the corner shop and buy a new postcard. He only wanted, he bought one or two, the Holland Tunnel, I think. But otherwise, it's all postcards. It was old times that the postcards were redolent with for him.

Meredith: Was he drawn to any particular imagery in them or did he have a wide --

Svetlana: Jeff has worked on that and published it. You can read it all. I don't know half as much as Jeff [inaudible]. And he just loved, he loved the -- and there was a wonderful exhibition more recently that that the Met did of those postcards. I mean it's absolutely [inaudible], absolutely [inaudible] and unlikely. And I think when my parents died at the end of the 20th century, they have wonderful postcards and what did I do, I tossed them all out. I mean it's just terrible you do with things you inherit and don't understand. Now with Evans, I understand I want them.

Meredith: Well, I would imagine too that Evans felt, you know, as you're saying he kept everything and he collected everything. So he probably felt like he'd seen a kindred spirit in the Picture Collection because there is a very similar philosophy to their strategies as well.

Svetlana: Right, that's very interesting. I haven't thought of that. That's very interesting. Right.

Josh: Actually, Meredith, if you wouldn't mind projecting I think maybe the last slide. It's a magazine spread.

Jeff: Can you all hear me? I'm jumping in here.

Josh: Yep, please do, Jeff.

Jeff: You should never have un-muted me. [Laughter]. I just want to, just want to say something about what Svetlana said about them being old cards. Yes, they're old cards, and yes, they're printed in a certain way, and he did have an appreciation for the aesthetics of the printing. Even if he didn't have much of an appreciation of the aesthetics of the printing of his own photographs, he had an appreciation of the aesthetics of the printing of the lithographic postcards. But what I was going to suggest is that Svetlana, it's the way the subjects are described, narrativized in the picture postcard, the way main street is revealed both on its trajectory and facades. It's the style of the picture making, the unpretentious, unvarnished, vernacular style of how the picture works that interested him, not just the subject.

Svetlana: Sure. Yup.

Jeff: I'm muting myself again.

Svetlana: And probably not as much more than the subject is indeed the point.

Jeff: Correct.

Svetlana: Yep.

Josh: Yeah. I just want to point out one other smaller connection between Evans and the library. Later on, this is what we're showing in the slide show is a spread from Vogue in 1949, I believe. And it was an article written by Alice Morris celebrating the centenary of the New York Public Library and called the private lives of public books. Evans was assigned, maybe he volunteered I'm not quite sure as the photographer for the project that that's Evans photograph of the Rose Main Reading Room which was not known as the Rose Main Reading Room then. But later on, and unfortunately I don't have any more slides to show, he photographs stacks, photographs rare books, he's kind of all over the place. And there's a kind of anecdote that I read in the archives [inaudible] our interview with Romana Javitz which he says one day the public relations department of the library calls her up and says there's this crazy photographer who's here, he's on a very important assignment, and he refuses to be escorted by us. He says the only person he'll work with is you, Romana [chuckle]. And so Romana ended up escorting him, and they must've made these pictures together. The other thing that's notable about this spread, and unfortunately, again, I cannot show it, is a selection of pictures from a folder in the Picture Collection called Rear Views. And so Evans edits not his pictures but pictures from this folder and creates a very unexpected array of pictures in this fancy magazine, Vogue. It's --

Svetlana: Where did he take this picture from? What position was he in to take, get this view of the reading room. You know?

Josh: Yeah. So I don't know if you've seen the back of the picture, there's actually a sort of balcony level that is surrounding, you know, it's the whole perimeter of the room. And he must've been standing on the balcony.

Svetlana: Thank you.

Josh: Yeah. The pictures themselves aren't particularly notable but it is an interesting connection.

Svetlana: He still loved the library, in fact [inaudible].

Josh: He loved the library.

Svetlana: Yeah, we're 25 years later and he loves it.

Jeff: Can I ask you all another question? Didn't Alice Morris give Evans the title Message from the Interior? Who came up with that title? Svetlana do you remember?

Svetlana: I don't know, I mean I've tracked his use of the word 'interior' but I don't know where that came from.

Jeff: I think it came from Alice. But I could be wrong.

Svetlana: Okay.

Josh: Oh, that's pretty interesting. Yeah. I think Peter Kayafas is with us. I don't know if he caught that. Peter's the publisher of Eakins Press which published a long time ago.

Svetlana: [Inaudible] the interior, right.

Josh: Peter, do you happen to know?

Meredith: I need to --

Svetlana: [Laughing] let him talk, right.

Meredith: Peter, last name?

Josh: Kayafas.

Meredith: I don't, oh, here.

Josh: I don't know if he wants to talk. He might not want to.

Peter Kayafas: I'm happy to talk.

Josh: Oh, please.

Peter: And appreciate the invitation.

Josh: Hi, Peter.

Peter: Hi. I've always given my mentor and the founder of the press Leslie Katz credit for that.

Svetlana: Ah.

Peter: But I can't prove it.

Svetlana: Okay.

Jeff: Peter, your --

Peter: -- the book and they edited it together. It seems like a natural consideration.

Meredith: Of course. So, we're going to have to start wrapping up. But I did have one more question for Svetlana before we did from one of our attendees who says in the book, you mentioned instances of self-reflexivity such as the relationship between the Belgrove picture [inaudible] camera. And of course there's the studio picture, itself a photograph of other photographs. Did Evans ever speak directly about these things?

Svetlana: I think self-reflexivity is your word not mine. I would not have used that word. I mean, okay. But that's not a word that seems native to Evans, and I wouldn't have put it that way. And I think that those are two very different things. The photograph, the comparing the Belgrove room to a view camera. The idea and I did that, I do that in other places, that is a very different thing. That's saying that, in a sense, your camera is studio-like in a -- I mean it's comparing the space you're addressing with the space you're in as you photograph or momentarily [inaudible]. That's one thing. The photographing of all the other photographs is a different kind of thing. And he, in fact, described them himself, right. I mean those are two, I mean he got so much into a photograph, didn't he? And those are two great photographs for getting something into it, and that he described himself Evans, right. All those people pose originally for the [inaudible] and now they're opposing all again for me. That's a wonderful play typical Evans play with that. But those are very two different instances, and so, I mean you know, it's consciousness itself, okay. So if self-reflexivity doesn't sound, if you, pardon my saying it back to you, doesn't sound Evans-like. It's not how he would have thought.

Josh: Thanks. You also say in the book that you know Evans as a photographer wanting to disappear.

Svetlana: Well that one is Nora Sayre watch me a [inaudible] when he goes around, you know, they're all having, when they used to go and listen to operas outside maybe they can do that before they go inside, in England, they still do that. And he was going to photograph, he said to Nora, watch me I'm going to disappear. And that's Evans, [inaudible] it's just absolutely he was a small man, and he didn't want people to notice him. And I think that's deep in photographing. I mean it seems to be native to photographing. But he lived it out completely is what I would say.

Meredith: Well, thank you so much to the both of you. We're coming right up on 2:00 o'clock. So I want to make sure that we express our appreciation for both of you joining us today, so thank you so much. And everyone, see you next month.

Svetlana: And thank you, Meredith, very much for hosting us, as it were, for the Library.

Josh: Yes, thank you, Meredith. Thank you, Svetlana. It's been a pleasure.

Svetlana: Thank you for having me.

Josh: And thank you all for joining us.