

>> Bob Smith: From WXXI News, it's 1370 Connection.

[Music]

>> Bob Smith: I'm Bob Smith, and in this town, maybe more than any other, you're going to draw attention if you say that the title of your book is "After Photography" on a couple of grounds. One, of course, the industry that made this town what it was for over a century may be facing a challenge to its existence as we knew it, and two, the company that made that industry is struggling for its own survival as we speak even though the city itself is not. Fred Ritchin is former photo editor of the "New York Times", currently professor of photography and imaging at New York University, and the author of "After Photography", and he's joining us now in advance of his lecture at eight this evening at RIT's Webb Auditorium as part of the Caroline Warner Ganett lecture series. Good to have you with us. Thank you for joining us today -

>> Fred Ritchin: Good to be here.

>> Bob Smith: Now I'm going to ask you for a moment to step back to your time in the print media room, and I wonder, first of all, has the use of still images changed a lot just in the daily press, either because of the advent of, of online publishing or the way the hard copy paper is still put together and published?

>> Fred Ritchin: I think it's changed enormously. The days I worked the, the golden idea was, was the picturesque idea. You could do multiple images, and then with television being more and more dominant, there were fewer picture essays. With the need for more and more advertising, there's less pages for the picture essay, and the, even, even now, the, the, the so-called iconic images like they're being [inaudible], you see very few of them, and if you see any of them, they're, they're often done by amateurs at this point with cell phone cameras as opposed to the professional.

>> Bob Smith: Well, sometimes that'll get you an indelible image impression, and sometimes, of course, when it's not in the hands of somebody who really knows what he or she's doing, it may get nothing, or it may get you nothing that's intelligible. So are we losing something by not leaving it, in a lot of cases, to the professionals?

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, I think that the, the, there's a lack of credibility at this point in media. We don't believe the professionals the way that we used to. They're often, the images look stylized. People often see them as manipulated. There's press conferences, staged images, photo opportunities all the time. So there's a very, very high percentage of the images that we see that are staged. Those are done by professionals. The amateur does something raw on the street. That's not staged. And so often the more raw images have more credibility at this point than the professional images.

>> Bob Smith: It's funny because it used to be the other way around. I mean, I, I could remember growing up, and a lot of what you saw was tabloid journalism. We were getting copies of the "New York Daily News" and "New York Post" back up here even as early as, well, probably the early days of those particular papers hitting the streets, and when you saw those, the photos themselves were really

raw, and they were pretty unvarnished in terms of their depiction of a particular event or a particular person. Maybe an unflattering sort of way, and the, it seemed to me that it was the professional who grabbed the unvarnished image. Well, all of us who were amateurs and taking snapshots with our Instamatics wanted to get something that was well staged, well positioned, and well composed and polished. It was kind of ironic that some of the best photography was some of the roughest, and now it's changed?

>> Fred Ritchin: Exactly. You're absolutely right. The field Kodak booklet that we all get with our cameras said to keep the sun over our left shoulder as we took the picture, and we, we do that to, to do a professional style photograph. Meanwhile, the professionals, the Widgies [phonetic] and, and so on would do the more raw images, but I think newspapers, magazines, in order to attract advertisers and so on became more stylized. So the work that they used is more polished and, and, and retouched and, and so on, and it's the amateurs with the cell phones who have more fun. They're, there's no film anymore so you don't have to pay for the images to be processed. So you can make as many as you want, erase them, upload them, distribute them. Your Face, Facebook alone has 60 billion images.

>> Bob Smith: The good news, of course, is that there are online sources for every kind of image that you can imagine. Professionals publish, and sometimes I get the feeling that they publish stuff online that they can't get in the paper or that they know their editors won't necessarily let them do, but even odd wide, there's a certain kind of rawness to it in a way that maybe they, maybe they saved their best stuff for hard copy.

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, the online, though, it's, it's, there's, there's almost layout the way a magazine is a layout online. There's often these small slideshows and, and things like that. It doesn't really have the presence that the older, like a "Life" magazine double page would have enormous presence. There's no equivalent really on the Web to that at this point. So, yes, there's a huge quantity of images on the Web. There's almost no filters at this point on the Web. So how do you look at 60 billion images? It would take you several lifetimes to look at it. So what are the good images, the bad? What should we be looking at? Nobody's really telling us that at this point.

>> Bob Smith: Did the editors, though, always, to a certain degree, kind of control what you saw? That they were able to decide which images and what kind of images were going to make it to the front page or even to the back page on a story, and whether or not they were going to let the full raw truth come out kind of depended on editorial preference, didn't it?

>> Fred Ritchin: But the revenge of the photographer was then to have an exhibition or publish a book -

>> Bob Smith: Yeah.

>> Fred Ritchin: So the photographer could say, yeah, you ran three of my pictures, but here's a book with 200. You could really see it, or, or do something else. You're right. They were the gatekeepers. Now they're not there in any, not the same extent at all. But at the same time, there's so much quantity. In a way, there's almost nothing -

>> Bob Smith: And, of course, getting back to the days of the tabloids at their height, some of them just said, well, let loose the house. There, there was no gatekeeping as such. If it bleed, it led.

>> Fred Ritchin: It still does. I mean, there's, you'll, you'll see on the tabloids over and over again the same kinds of spectacular images, whatever they could find or use. Often, more gory, the Gadaffi images and so on and so forth which would not have been published 30 years ago.

>> Bob Smith: That's interesting, too. Has online opened up the realm of things that can be seen, either online, still sites, or online YouTube? Have they opened up the whole realm of things that can be seen and will be seen to images that might have been considered way too disturbing to put on the air or put in print 10, 20, 30 years ago -

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, completely, and then the print people could say, well, they're going to see it online anyway. Why don't we just publish on print as well because it'll be seen. So completely, it's opened. It's opened in pornography. It's opened, it's opened in so many ways on the Web.

>> Bob Smith: So we're going to get, presumably, the unvarnished truth, assuming it hasn't been manipulated digitally. That leads to the other question. How much of it is reliable, and how much of it has been Photoshopped too fairly well?

>> Fred Ritchin: No, but I, I think all photography is interpretation. None of it is objective. It's always going to be subjective, and whether you, you get "Time" magazine saying this is the way it was, people don't believe it the same way that they used to. So if you could look at 60 images of the same scene and make up your own mind, I think that's really, really helpful. That, that's not there an issue of Photoshop. That's an issue of multiple views of the same scene if you want to see it. On the other hand, you're right. There is Photoshop, and, and that is, it's almost an old issue at this point because there's a skepticism. The assumption is that it will be Photoshopped, that there will be changes made frequently in images. If you're getting married, you'll Photoshop it to, to make sure the wedding dress is the right look or, or whatever it would be. So everybody has Photoshop on their own computer. It's not a big surprise.

>> Bob Smith: And, of course, digital imaging, as you point out in your book, it's been going on for a long time, both the imaging itself and the manipulation of it. You pointed back to the early 80's when "National Geographic" started using digital photographs, and they were, I guess, plagued with it right from the start?

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, these were film-based photographs, but they needed to fit it on the cover of the magazine in 1982. It was on the pyramids of Giza in Egypt, and they had a horizontal photograph of three pyramids. They needed to fit it on a vertical. So they moved one pyramid behind the other to fit the vertical, and when I interviewed the editor in chief, his response was, "It was really nothing. All we did was go back in time and move the photographer a few feet to one side to get a different point of view." He didn't see it as any big deal. To me, it was science fiction at that time in 1980, early 1980's.

>> Bob Smith: And what it meant was you saw an image of the pyramids, but does it exist in real, in reality?

>> Fred Ritchin: But the actual photograph itself didn't exist either. It was a very romantic photograph. The, the conventional photograph was very, very romantic. If you've ever been there, it, it, there's all kinds of people selling things to tourists. That wasn't in the image. It, you know, he waited until the right time, the right hues to make a kind of geographic style, romantic Egyptian image.

>> Bob Smith: The kind of thing that they do in Hollywood.

>> Fred Ritchin: Yeah. It was, all photograph's interpretive. It depends on are you interpreting for yourself, which is the best. Are you interpreting for a corporation, and, and, and when it's for a corporation, there's a manipulation because a corporation has its own style that they want.

>> Bob Smith: Does modern technology make that manipulation still easier, or does it tempt people to even push it further than they otherwise might have back in the day?

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, the reason I wrote, I called it "After Photography" was, was not because of what we're doing to old photographs, but, but is this a new medium, in effect. Is the fact that everything is in pixels, it's all malleable? Does it open up new ideas? Can you, for example, click on the left side of an image and go one direction, click on the right side and go another direction? Does it open up what I call a kind of a hyper photography, like a hypertext, which is a non-linear narrative. Do, does it, are there new forms that are going to merge from the digital?

>> Bob Smith: And I suppose, I mean, there are endless things that you can conceivably do if you have the source material that lets you do it. Change perspective, change composition, change even color, lighting, anything else. Change people's faces, and, and you can create a whole new reality out of it a lot easier than you could before.

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, even at RIT, they were just developed nitro, which is a, an image that's, it's, it's focused everywhere, and you just choose after the fact where you want the focus to be. So it's no more that old Kodak booklet where you have to focus in advance. You can do it after the fact, and, and we're moving from, to post-production like in film, cinema as opposed to everything happening at the moment of release in the shutter.

>> Bob Smith: I wonder, when, when you talk about post-production, and you talk about the analogy to film, are we really going Hollywood now in every kind of imaging we do, including the still image?

>> Fred Ritchin: No. I think we're, we're kind of creating a new language, a new way of talking to each other. Like a cell phone camera is different than a camera largely because it's connected. You're immediately connected. You make the image, you send it to your friends, you put it online, and I think what we're trying to develop is a new language to talk to each other. It's what they call Web 2.0, the social media clicker and things like that where, Facebook. You can talk with each other. I think Occupy Wall Street's an example of that, of a kind of a 2.0 phenomenon where people talk with each other. It's not hierarchal. Like a 1.0, CNN, talk news, that, that kind of a thing.

>> Bob Smith: Of course, it occurs to me if we're doing that, and just maybe another appropriate analogy. We're getting the immediacy and potentially the full motion of live television in our hands.

>> Fred Ritchin: Oh, no. For sure, we're getting that kind of immediacy, and we're also getting the, the kind of, what they used to call the map of the territory, you know, Photosynth and Google Maps and things like that. You, you can now basically see where you're going before you get there, and then the question is why do you want to go there. You know, so, so we're mapping the world with all of this, which we've never really done before to this extent.

>> Bob Smith: It's kind of the final dream that everybody had 50 or 60 years ago of the dawn of the age of electronic communication that we could get some kind of instantaneous link up, one to the other. Now here we are.

>> Fred Ritchin: And it's the nightmare of surveillance.

>> Bob Smith: It, it, it is in a way because I guess more than anything else, we can spy on each other, too, and Big Brother can spy on us. Big Brother could even conceivably find out when we're on the network and where we are in case he cares.

>> Fred Ritchin: He does care.

>> Bob Smith: Well, we'll talk about that in a moment, too, at 263-WXXI. Talking with Fred Ritchin of New York University. Former photo editor of the "New York Times", author of "After Photography", the future of imaging and how digital technology is changing it, even as we speak. I'm Bob Smith. This is 1370 Connection, and we've got Mike on the line at 263-WXXI. Mike, you're on the air.

>> Mike: Oh, hi. I was service engineer for professional digital cameras at Kodak starting in 1989. Nobody remembers that Kodak brought out their first commercially-viable digital camera at that long ago, but I would argue that it is, it continues to be photography simply with different tools, but my great concern is when there's a negative, there is some permanency. We can look back at pictures of the Civil War. When we go back to look at pictures from either Afghanistan, well, actually going back to the Balkans, when we went in there, and I remember getting a camera back for repair that had a bullet in it and a thank you note from a soldier that it saved his life. At any rate, those images are all digital, and they do not have the kind of permanency as we go from medium to medium. They are cold, and family photos will no longer exist as people fail to back up their computers, and those thousands of pictures on their hard drives disappear. Whole family histories are going to go, and I see that -

>> Bob Smith: Unless, unless you burn them to a DVD.

>> Mike: No, well, but that's a form of backup, and so many people fail to do that. So many people go all you have to do is read Nick Francesco's column, and every week there's somebody how do I get my pictures back. Well, if the drive dies, you can pay somebody to recover them, but what you're going to pay, pay is going to look like a down payment on a house. Digital imaging has a tremendous amount in its favor, but it has some serious, serious drawbacks that people don't consider. And one other thing, people taking pictures with their phones has lowered what people can, at least I feel, has lowered what people feel is acceptable for image quality. That's my two cents' worth.

>> Bob Smith: No, that's an interesting point, Mike, and we'll jump off on that a little bit further. Let me thank you for the call. Two six three WXXI. We're sacrificing a lot of things. As Mike points out, two of them are permanency and fidelity. Start with the permanency. There are ways around that, I guess, aren't there?

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, it's a different medium, though. The family photo digitally, you, you can take out your ex-spouse if you're divorced. You, you can put in your cousins from Hawaii who couldn't make the wedding into the image. You can play with it. So, so it's really, my point is really it's a different medium. So it's, it's like they said at the beginning of the automobile that it was a horseless carriage because they didn't know what an automobile was. So we still have horsepower in our cars even though there's no horses anywhere near them. It's the same thing with digital photography. We call it digital photography. It's kind of like a horseless carriage. It's really not photography. It's something different in the way I see it. So I, I accept the point that there's many, many similarities, but I think the point of the family photo in the digital realm is you, you can do things you never could do with film before, and then you have the issue of, you back it up, but a good thing about it is you can send it to your 50 relatives, and they all have copies of it immediately. So that somebody's going to have a copy somewhere of it.

>> Bob Smith: And, of course, the fidelity issue and, and the quality of the image, it kind of cuts in a couple of different directions. If you get a really good camera, and you have really good long-lasting storage, like burning it onto a CD, you're going to be able to keep that image, and the colors will stay, they won't fade or they won't turn funny on, you know, the way a, a print often can or even a negative, and you can have that last a long time providing you've got the technology to retrieve it.

>> Fred Ritchin: Right, but in a digital image, you can click on, on your brother-in-law and hear his voice. You can do things like that you can't do with print. So, again, you know, they, they have pros and cons either direction.

>> Bob Smith: By the same token, as Mike mentioned before, of those cell phone cameras, some of them are really grainy and blurry and, and pretty poor in quality compared to even a good high-quality digital image, much less a really high-quality 35 millimeter film image. And so the pictures have kind of taken a step back in how good they are. A lot of steps back.

>> Fred Ritchin: But sometimes the more grainy is the more believable because it doesn't look like it's retouched. It doesn't feel stylized. It feels more raw and real. So that's an advantage, and it's also true that, you know, you, you can make great oil colors with, with a palette of all kinds of paints, but you could draw with a pencil, and sometimes the pencil is just as good.

>> Bob Smith: And I guess it depends on the artistic judgment that you give it. I mean, sometimes you have film directors that like really bright, crisp, vivid colors, sharp images, and sometimes they'll do soft, gauzy, sepia tone or washed out colors to try to create a feeling of the past, and maybe that's kind of an artistic manipulation in itself -

>> Fred Ritchin: Or they'll have a handheld camera or cinema [inaudible] so it'll be very kind of raw, and, and, but it'll give a different gritty, grainy

feeling. So there's, you know, cell phones are good for certain things; professional cameras good for other things.

>> Bob Smith: We're talking right now, almost interchangeably flipping back and forth between full motion images and still images, and I guess the technology lets us do that, too, doesn't it a lot?

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, full motion and digital is a collection of still images basically. So if you're shooting, if you're photographing with a digital camera that, a motion camera, then you can take the stills out of it. And one of the confusions now, for example, in what we call multimedia is some newspapers will have people do that and then pull a still out of it, but you don't have the same view, the same framing, the same idea of it. You're just pulling something out of it.

>> Bob Smith: And, and, of course, going 30 frames a second, even high definition, ATSC images, and you can create what looks like a live television show -

>> Fred Ritchin: For sure -

>> Bob Smith: Out of these cameras, and at the same time, you can grab one frame out of that 30 per second, and you've got what was happening at that moment -

>> Fred Ritchin: For sure -

>> Bob Smith: You, you can flip back and forth between, is that what's done a lot with the kinds of cameras that a lot of media people are using these days -

>> Fred Ritchin: Oh, it's, it's done some, but, but there's an economic issue that they don't necessarily want to have a still photographer and a motion picture person, and the moving image is good for the Web, and the still. Like in the old days, for example, when I worked at the "New York Times", I'd have photographers have three cameras. One with triex [phonetic] for black and white, one for ectrochrome [phonetic] for color that you could process quickly that was more blue hued, and then Kodachrome, which was, took a day or two to process, and they would photograph the same scene three different times. So even take it to war to photograph the same time, and, you know, now you could do it all in one, one image. You can turn it into black and white. You could exaggerate the colors. You could pull stills. It, it's economics. It's efficient, but there's, it's very hard to have an artistic vision when you're doing so many things simultaneously -

>> Bob Smith: And then you talk about Kodachrome, of course. That doesn't even exist anymore except in the Paul Simon song. You can't get it anymore. They don't make it.

>> Fred Ritchin: No. That's the sadness. Steve McCurry photographed the last roll, and, you know, it was a big deal to photograph the last roll of Kodachrome. People, photographers loved Kodachrome. There was nothing like it.

>> Bob Smith: Whatever, why did it go away, then, if it was that good, and it was. Why did it go away? Why did it die?

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, I think digital had a lot to do with it because we're now in a digital era, and, and to keep the, the processing for Kodachrome that fewer and fewer people are using when you could use digital. You know, there's no cost to digital in that sense. You just, you know, wipe clean your, your memory stick or you put it on your hard drive, and, and it's not like film. Like film would take four pictures, six pictures because we knew it was expensive, and now you just take as many as you want.

>> Bob Smith: About the same time, though, something's lost, and that's something that I don't know if we've ever seen before. A medium, Kodachrome film, basically disappear and die. We, we've always used to be told media never die, they just have others move in along side.

>> Fred Ritchin: No, a lot of things are dying, and, you know, somebody, you see exhibitions of, like, obsolete technologies. You know, typewriters or, you know, things that people don't use anymore, they don't need anymore. I know as a writer, using a typewriter, I'd write different kinds of pieces than, than using a word processor or a computer, but you almost never see a typewriter anymore. So you don't get that kind of writing.

>> Bob Smith: Yeah. When Andy Rooney retired, he was the last writer on network television that wrote with a typewriter -

>> Fred Ritchin: Yup.

>> Bob Smith: That's it. [crosstalk] That's the end.

>> Fred Ritchin: When I worked at the "New York Times", and we substituted computers, we used to have this noisy hectic news room with typewriters clocking, and it was to energetic, energizing to go in there, and then it, it just became silent like a doctor's waiting room or something.

>> Bob Smith: And it, it must have been a sudden change, about maybe 25 years ago because I can remember in the 70's, every broadcast news room had typewriters. Some of them were electric. Most of them were manuals -

>> Fred Ritchin: Yeah.

>> Bob Smith: And typed in very large type, and you could put into a teleprompter and see, or else you could sit there in the studio and have it in front of you while you were on mic and read it easily even if the light was terrible, and, and go through and read your newscast, but it's not the same now.

>> Fred Ritchin: No, no. No, you're right. You could start in the middle. You don't have to start at the beginning anymore. It's, it's not the same linear thinking.

>> Bob Smith: Well, of course, with not the same linear thinking, a lot of leads must be getting buried in stories these days. Two six three WXXI is our number. We'll be getting back to the phones in just a moment as we continue our conversation with Fred Ritchin, the author of "After Photography". He's speaking tonight at RIT at 8:00 at the Webb Auditorium. Speaking with us right now on 1370 Connection about the way the visual image is changing and being changed even as we speak. Back to 1370 Connection in just a moment.

[Pause]

[Background Talk]

[Music]

>> Bob Smith: Thirteen seventy Connection continues on WXXI and 1370. I'm Bob Smith. We're talking with Fred Ritchin, the author of "After Photography". He's talking with us about how the way we take the visual image has changed, and, in fact, it's no longer photography as we knew it. In the digital age, it's something else. Something more. Some might say something less, but it sure is something different. We're finding out how in advance of his speech this evening at 8:00 at RIT's Webb Auditorium as part of the Caroline Warner Ganett lecture series. We're going to the phones right now at 253-WXXI, and hear from Keith on the line. Hi, Keith. You're on the air.

>> Keith: Yes, sir. I have two questions. What is a light field camera, and is that going to be, like, a stepping stone to even taking the author's book title at face value, "After Photography". That leads me to my second question, and I'm going to quote the late film director Robert Altman when he said that film would be replaced as a medium. He said, "I probably won't live to see it," and I think he was talking even beyond digital. He was actually saying that there would be, again, to use that term "medium", different mediums other than film, and in the size five manner, and I'm really asking this out loud. Will we ever have cameras that take pictures of dimensions that we can't see? I know they can take pictures of subatomic particles, but without sounding too fantastical here, we will ever have photography that can take pictures of dimensions that we can't see, and maybe as Mr. Altman suggested, even have films in, actually films made and consisting of dimensions that we just cannot perceive.

>> Bob Smith: Like, like a motion picture that grabs dark matter?

>> Keith: Well, whatever Robert Altman was referring to, I tried to fare it out his statement there, flesh it out. When he made that, he was saying going beyond film, and he said himself, "I probably won't live to see it," but was talking about means of photographing that we just don't have conscious of right now, and so certainly starting with my first question of what is light field camera work and then taking it from there it's up to both of you whether you want to discuss whether I'm too, being too [inaudible] by you're not just aware even in an outlandish way photography is really going to be taking us even 50 to 100 years out.

>> Bob Smith: Hey, we've got to let our imagination run wild, and [laughs], I mean, never say never to anything I guess, but what's your thought on that? I'm not even familiar with that term, by the way, but then I, I'm not that familiar with the general photographic trade anyway.

>> Fred Ritchin: We were talking about the fantastical [crosstalk] kinds of imagery, and, and you're seeing that in FMRI's, you, you know, brain imaging, different kinds of things where, you know, people will. They're, they're trying to get it to the point where they could actually image people's dreams, for example. So, I mean, my intuition is that, you're right. We will be seeing things from dimensions that we don't even know about. I mean, one of the things that, [clearing throat] excuse me, that I find interesting is the future. Can we photograph the future? So one way would be to ask a scientist where are we going

in terms of global warming, and then, and then use Photoshop to construct it, to, to fabricate it, to make it, and just to say the scientist or many scientists think that's what it'll look like. That's the future. We've never been able to do that before, but now we can do things like that to synthesize images. So I think in many, many ways, those things will happen.

>> Bob Smith: Well, [crosstalk] that's the animator, [inaudible], of course, more than anything else. I mean, folks have been trying to do that every since Walt Disney, and he may have been the first to actually preside over it successfully, but, certainly, it's, it's done a lot these days. But by the same token, though, of course, that, that really is, is a matter of depicting or, or trying to figure out some way of portraying our imagination. What's in our mind's eye.

>> Fred Ritchin: Oh, for sure, but I think that photography is more malleable, more open. It's giving us more dimensions to work with than the old film cameras did. We can, we can combine media together. We can use sound. We can use touch even. There, there's work being done, for example, of turning photographs into music. These kind of [inaudible]. The, these trans, transmedia where an image can become music, music could become image because they're all code based. So if you output the code in different ways, you get different, different products.

>> Keith: But there are companies, several of them anyway, I've heard of them recently. They are coming out, and that's what it's called, a light field camera, [inaudible] before pixel enhancement. I think it has to do something with that, but that term of the light field and a camera, those are valid technical terms.

>> Bob Smith: OK. Well, thanks. It's kind of an exciting, sort of cutting edge technology, Keith. Do appreciate that. We have Ed on the line next. Hi, Ed, you're on -

>> Ed: Yeah. Hi. How are you?

>> Bob Smith: Doing well -

>> Ed: I just want to make one comment before my question is the who's watching the people that are watching us. [laughter] [crosstalk] And the other thing is I was wondering, can you, can I make a photograph where everything is in focus? Like when I go to the movie, right, and they shift from one character to another, the other character, when I move my eyes, is out of focus. So I, will they be able to put everything in focus?

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, right now, they, I think it's litro dot com, L-Y-T-R-O dot com, if I remember correctly. You could look at it, and you can play with it, and you'll see the images, and right now, you can choose any plane to put in focus. Anyone you want will be in focus that you choose, and my understanding is they're working on it so you'll eventually be able to get multiple planes in focus as you want.

>> Ed: Right, because -

>> Bob Smith: [crosstalk] In, in a way, that's kind of acting like the human eye [inaudible] it does, isn't it.

>> Ed: Right. Because remember a while back, this guy had a lunge system where they did a commercial, and everything was in focus, and I, I forget the guy's name, but do you remember that?

>> Fred Ritchin: No, I don't, but with, you know, it depends on the amount of light and the depth of field of the lens, but you can often get nearly everything in focus. I don't remember the [crosstalk] what you're talking about

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>> Ed: Yeah. This guy had a special system where it puts everything in focus. And then the other, other comment I had to make is the digital photographic revolution or whatever, is that a lot less pollution causing than what we had with the, the old film that they couldn't determine the pollution from Kodak because nobody in the state had, they didn't have any engineers to, to measure it in [inaudible]. Bunch of consultants called up and say, hey, we're available to do that.

>> Fred Ritchin: Computers have their own toxic issues as well, but it's, certainly, when you're in, you don't have the smells of the dark room, you don't have the chemistry of the dark room, but, but there's a lot of manufacturing issues and energy issues associated with the digital as well.

>> Ed: OK. I, I just wanted to -

>> Bob Smith: Hey, thanks very much for checking in, Ed. Appreciate the call, 263-WXXI. But you know that each kind of image has a different feel and character to it, and sometimes you can even manipulate and change the meaning of the image to the point that you've created something else, and you might not necessarily be able to see it right away, but there was one example that, that you've quoted and talked about. The way different magazine covers manipulated O.J. Simpson's mug shot in 1994. One of them, I think it was "Newsweek", did it natural. Relatively brightly lit, and showed him full front, full lit, and, frankly, the face that you saw was of a man who looked more than a little scared. "Time" magazine changed the contrast, darkened the image quite a bit, and turned OJ from scared to sinister looking, and that was a huge paradigm shift right then and there. A scared, frightened man to a sinister menacing man. Same photo, very different image.

>> Fred Ritchin: It was the Los Angeles Police Department mug shot. They're usually [inaudible]. They both had the same image, and then "Time" magazine changed it, modified it. The, the scariest part of it to me was the editor of "Time" the following week in a full-page letter to the readers said all he did was to take a common mug shot and raise it to the level of art with no sacrifice to truth. So if "Time" magazine in '94 thought taking a, a, an, a historical image and immediately changing it supposedly to art, which I don't see, and didn't see a problem, I think that's where the problem is in, in media, in news media.

>> Bob Smith: Because that really literally changed the meaning of the photo.

>> Fred Ritchin: Oh, yeah.

>> Bob Smith: And changed the meaning of your perception of the character of the man. A scared man, uncharacteristically so given his past public image, as the very affable, very confident fellow that we all came to know in Western New York

when he played football here. Instead, a man literally on the run, frightened for his future, frightened for his life perhaps, and then on "Time" magazine, a totally different person.

>> Fred Ritchin: You know, and they, they've darkened the image, and they were accused, overwhelmingly accused by readers of being racist. Of, of once the guy was a celebrity and turned into a, a possible killer, they darkened his skin, and, and people saw that as an instance of racism.

>> Bob Smith: But, you know, there was even more to it than that in that it basically turned him from a scared man who might or might not be guilty and might or might not be worthy of the benefit of the doubt to a man who was clearly menacing, violent, and, and that just, that just changed your whole perception of who he was, and probably, implicitly whether or not he was guilty of what he did.

>> Fred Ritchin: Except that the "Newsweek" headline, if I remember it correctly, said a trail of blood right over his face, or under his face, and, and that, he wasn't judged guilty at that point. He was just accused -

>> Bob Smith: Yeah, which itself kind of contradicted what you saw on his face. So, I mean, that, it, it, there were so many contradictory images that were there at that time and, and coming out that they, they showed a, a basically mixed messages all over the place.

>> Fred Ritchin: Yeah, and I, I think that was really the moment where news media had to say we can't do those things. I think, kinds of things. We can't change images just for more dramatic cover. You know, when John F. Kennedy was shot, they wouldn't have immediately changed the image to make it more dramatic, add more red blood or something like that. It was a historical image. We didn't do those things. They were documents, and now news media did it, and one of the reasons people I think are so skeptical about news media is because there's so much of those kinds of manipulations.

>> Bob Smith: And at the same time, sometimes it can manipulate things to make people look more sympathetic or more likeable or more affable. I, I'm thinking of one particular image that's photographed and, and lit in a very warm light with former president George W. Bush carrying a Thanksgiving turkey to the table while he's visiting the troops in 2003, and with that smile on his face and the way it's lit and everything else. Well, that is conveying a definite image of the man and a definite image of how you're supposed to think of him that has very strong political content to it. Now that's something photographers have been doing since the beginning of time.

>> Fred Ritchin: But that, that was really, he picked up a turkey that was meant for decoration. Everybody was eating sliced turkey, and he picked up this whole turkey for decoration, and he looked like the benevolent father figure providing for the troops, which is what he wanted, and I think a good press photographer, you have to make your images, take images, but, but it really wasn't fair because the, the criticism then wasn't, the soldier didn't have enough body armor. The, the trucks and, and vehicles weren't protected, and here, he was being shown as the guy, the great provider. The, the kind of outburst which I found interesting was when I think Sarah Palin was on the cover of a major national magazine, I think it was "Newsweek", and the criticism was that they did not retouch her because they retouched supposedly Obama when he was running

for president, but they didn't retouch Palin, and she didn't look as good as she would have looked if they'd retouched her. So sometimes celebrity's important. People, powerful people want to be retouched, and they assume it's their right to be retouched to look as good as they possibly can look.

>> Bob Smith: Did President Obama actually ask to be retouched, or did somebody do that for him, or was he just taking advantage of the fact that he was a guy in his 40's who looked even a little bit young for his age?

>> Fred Ritchin: I, I don't, I don't think he, I'm sure he did, as, as well as I know, he did never ask for something like that, but magazines typically do retouch to make people look the way they want them to look.

>> Bob Smith: Because we're, we're not seeing that now because we're now seeing him depicted with a little extra gray around the temples. He, he's starting to show his age a little bit.

>> Fred Ritchin: You know.

>> Bob Smith: The office wears out, as it will on anybody.

>> Fred Ritchin: [laughs]

>> Bob Smith: Two, 263-WXXI. We have Eric on the line. Hi, Eric. You're on the air.

>> Eric: Hi, Bob. Thanks for taking my call. I apologize. I, I was in my car, and then ran inside to make the phone call, and I missed the very beginning of the program, but I have a question for your guest, and it regards the archival nature or lack thereof of, of photography. And many of our cherished photographs throughout history, important history, and even our family photographs, they exist on traditional film, tend to be quite archival, but the way that we're storing digital images on a CD, which itself they estimate only lasts about 40 years before the film inside the plastic breaks down or the plastic itself doesn't last, and images that are stored on hard drives because hard drives die. And I've heard from many people who, I, I was a student of photography, and I learned the chemical process and appreciate the importance of traditional photography, and I've heard from other photographers and, and historians that even people of library sciences that they really worry about the archival nature of, of digital photography, and are we risking our own history, and the images that we have of history in the future with this race to, race to technology without being concerned about the archival nature of it.

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, you know, certainly, that's, that's a point that people are concerned about. The, in, in the analog world, the, the image would yellow or turn brown or whatever it would do, which was also interesting in terms of showing the age of the image. It, it made certain images feel different, look different because they were older. In the digital world, I remember having a conversation at, at a think tank with, with somebody from a technology lab, and he said would you like to have a program that would age your digital images for you so after 50 years they turn a little bit yellow or [inaudible] yellow or 80 years they turn a little bit brown or something. He said it never occurred to us that that was a problem for you because we thought it would be better for you that they don't age. And so there's, there's multiple issues. You're, you're absolutely right, that are surrounding historically what we're going to see, and

I think one of the biggest ones also is with billions and billions and billions [laughs] of images, who's going to know what to look for.

>> Eric: Right. I think that the, the film, the celluloid sub-strain with traditional film, it just lasts. It'll, it'll, I mean, if you can look down the road 500 years, maybe it won't be around anymore, but it'll probably be archived somewhere, albeit collecting dust, but the sheer volume of any -

>> Bob Smith: You better hope it's mylar, then because [crosstalk] the nitrate stuff, man, if you drop a match [crosstalk] -

>> Eric: Well, nitrate, yeah. But even if, even, like, the [inaudible] how they restore, they have a whole college there to restore film, motion picture films, but I, I just worry that, like, with the masses of visual information that's coming in digitally that a lot of what people perceive to be sort of not that important right now might be cast aside or forgotten about where it breaks down into [inaudible], then 80 years later you wish, damn, darn, pardon me. Like I hope -

>> Bob Smith: You can say that [crosstalk] -

>> Eric: I wish we had [laughs], I wish -

>> Bob Smith: There are seven words you can't say on radio -

>> Eric: Alright -

>> Bob Smith: And that wasn't one of them -

>> Eric: I'll remember that for the next time I call in, but, like, I, I just worry that, that a lot of what we're capturing digitally now will end up just disappearing or falling by the wayside because what we're capturing it on is not that archival.

>> Fred Ritchin: You're, you're right. I, but I think in a way that would be also a blessing that we lose a certain amount of the quantity that we have as well, but, you know, I think the Eastman House can answer your questions more. They, as you've said, they've done an enormous amount of work in terms of archiving and where we go with these, you know, where, where we go with all these images -

>> Eric: Yeah. I just had one other point I wanted to make, and that's just through the word of photography. Like it, it comes from the idea that photons enter our eye, and that's how we perceive the world visually, and people toss it around like photography this, photography that, but I remember, I was listening to you, a really interesting comment you guys had about I think light wave quote on quote photography, and I wonder in the future will it even be, I mean, could you could you even really call it photography. It's, it's, ultimately, we're not even capturing light, natural or artificial. It's, it's not even photons anymore.

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, if photography, the root is drawing or, or with, with light or writing with a light, and what, the, the other question I have is really you, you can capture it in a camera, but you could output it as music. I mean, there's some very interesting projects like that. Is that still

photography, for example, if you photograph somebody moving, and then, and then it comes out as music, is it, you're still writing with a light, but you're not making an image with it.

>> Eric: Right. OK.

>> Fred Ritchin: So I think in a kind of a, a multimedia, transmedia kind of world where everything goes into code, and the code could be outputted into anything you want, you, we're going to have cameras making music, and, and I think that's going to be very, very exciting.

>> Eric: Yeah. Well, thanks for being on the program. It's really interesting.

>> Bob Smith: And thanks for checking in at 263-WXXI. One, one thing that's, that's interesting that I've heard from some of the folks over at George Eastman House is that they have ways of making images last a lot longer in storage than they used to be able to do because a lot of these things had a very definite limited shelf life in the past. Nitrate film. I mean, even, even mylar film doesn't last forever without going off color. But they're worried about if they store something digitally and store it well under controlled conditions, they're wondering if the playback mechanism is going to be usable after a certain length of time.

>> Fred Ritchin: Yeah. I, I think about like a musical score. You can always keep the score, like, a code of the digital, but then to play it or to interpret it will, will change. So whatever print you would make 100 years, 300 years, 500 years from now, you'll have the score, but the output maybe very, very different. So with the intention of a certain red or whatever it would be might, might come out in, in all kinds of different ways.

>> Bob Smith: I mean, you'll have to play with it again to try to make a good guess as to what it was originally intended -

>> Fred Ritchin: Exactly.

>> Bob Smith: Which, which I guess you have to do nowadays even with any image that wasn't originally shot in black and white.

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, even then, you'll have a negative, and then you'll make a print, but, you know, like Edward Weston, only Brett and Cole Weston, his two sons, were allowed to print his negatives because they, they knew what he intended, but anybody else got the negative, they could come out with a, a very different tonal range.

>> Bob Smith: And, and that even for black and white film makes a difference, doesn't it -

>> Fred Ritchin: A huge difference.

>> Bob Smith: So, I mean, there's so many different things to think about just in trying to capture an image. It's such a complex thing when you try to break it down and think about. It's almost like doing a painting, isn't it?

>> Fred Ritchin: It's, I think it's the most exciting time in media, in, in the history of the world in terms of possibilities, in terms of what can be done.

>> Bob Smith: Are we one day going to be able to do genuine 3D and create the illusion of something or someone being right there in the room with you and have it believable? Are we close to that even now?

>> Fred Ritchin: I think we're very close to that right now.

>> Bob Smith: And I know I'm talking about, like, a Star Trek holodeck or something like that, but is that something that's, that's really more than a pipe dream, and what will we do when we're capable of doing something like that, that may even be so tangible we think we can reach out and touch it?

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, there's two ways of thinking. One is do we want to replicate what already exists and make it in 3D so it seems like the person is next to you, or do we want to create new kinds of creatures that never existed in the world, synthetically, and make them as real as the person sitting next to you, and I think the latter to me is, is really, you know, the most, the most exciting set of possibilities.

>> Bob Smith: Creating new creature and making them 3D tangible, I mean, that's, that's, again, that's Walt Disney's dream come true, isn't it?

>> Fred Ritchin: It's lot of people's dreams [laughter] -

>> Bob Smith: Even, even we're not necessarily going to create Mickey Mouse and Goofy.

>> Fred Ritchin: Yeah, but the difference here is we could also have them act, speak, and almost have their own mind with artificial life that, with different kinds of systems. So it's not just an animation coming out of Walt Disney's mind, but it's, it's as if these creatures have their own minds.

>> Bob Smith: That's almost like using the technology to create a creature, create an environment, then hit the button and let them go and see what, see what they do.

>> Fred Ritchin: Well, like Will Wright has a video game called "Spore" which is pretty much that. You create your own creatures, and the creatures go out and, and cohabit with other creatures, and, and, and function, and, and you watch these worlds emerge and develop.

>> Bob Smith: Which could be either really exciting or really scary.

>> Fred Ritchin: Or, and both -

>> Bob Smith: And maybe both. Fascinating look into the future. "After Photography", what we've been talking about this hour with Fred Ritchin, former photo editor at the "New York Times", now professor of photography and imaging at New York University, and he's going to be speaking with evening at eight at RIT's Webb Auditorium as part of the Caroline Warner Ganett lecture series. Fred, thank you very much for sharing this hour with us -

>> Fred Ritchin: It's been a real pleasure.

>> Bob Smith: And thank you all for being with us this hour at 1370 Connection with WXXI AM and FM HD2 Rochester. I'm Bob Smith. Stay with us. There is more to come after the news. We'll see you then.

[Music]