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Interview with Ansel Adams, 1976 December

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WEBVTT

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<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: It's very funny when you've been there, that's right.

<i>Ansel Adams</i>: Yeah.

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Yeah. I have a good friend who is the curator at the Whitney, Marsha Tucker, who calls herself an "elucidator." It's an awkward word but it's a better idea--

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<i>Ansel Adams</i>: Very good. Very good.

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: --a better idea. Because, instead of saying, "I stand here, and I tell you, 'This is bad and this is good,'"

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it simply says, 'Somehow, I can,

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if I can open a door or we help you see a different way or tell you how I saw, maybe you won't see that way.'

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<i>Ansel Adams</i>: Well, if I try to photograph, um, criticize a photograph--I have to tell them, I said, "I don't know you, I don't know your background,

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I don't know your work at all, your [[[?]]] But it's--what do I do? All I can say is, "What did you see? How did you see it and how did you do it?

Now, you want a comment--free comment?"

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Or, and you find if it's good, why you can help them humongously by just saying, "My gosh, I mean it's a perfectly beautiful thing you've done to this thing--but, let's take half an inch off the edge and see how that line becomes--" not that way exactly, "Does the line become--"

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<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Better.

<i>Ansel Adams</i>: Better. Because I was taught in music-- none of my teachers ever played notes for me but they [[interviewer appears to whistle surprise]]I think they would always say, "Now, "Did you think he got that phrase or didn't he?', 'Did you hear that second voice?'"

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<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: That's interesting.

<i>Ansel Adams</i>: Or uh, you know, "Maybe I'm just listening to the piano but the bass sounded a little overpowering." I'm just making up things--

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<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Sure. Sure.

<i>Ansel Adams</i>: That was the approach of dialectic. They made me inquire myself, you see--

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<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Teaching now is really an art.

<i>Ansel Adams</i>: Instead of pounding on the table and saying, "It stinks. Tear it up and throw it out--"

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<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Stinks for whom? [[Cross Talk]]

<i>Ansel Adams</i>: --and making you feel like a worm.

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<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Yeah. [[Cross Talk]]

<i>Ansel Adams</i>: This is very bad behavior.

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<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: There's also, there's a thing that has to do with, criticism has to be relevant for that person at that point in his or her development in terms of what they are trying to accomplish, not in terms of some vague abstraction. Did you like teaching at the institute?

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<i>Ansel Adams</i>: Yes. I think if you can teach, if you can first get the craft over to them, enough craft so they can handle it--

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<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Mhmm. Mhmm. [[affirmative]]

<i>Ansel Adams</i>: And you tell them, you're gonna like the devil, you're gonna learn fundamentals--

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<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Mhmm. Mhmm. [[affirmative]]

<i>Ansel Adams</i>: --you gotta be able to make a photograph on their own with any condition, whether it's a picture or not, I'm not interested. But how do you read a meter? How do you--[[expose your skin?]]. You've got your tools. Now you go out and you give--



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