

breakfast at five p.m.

a conversation with william klein

vienna, 2015

günter hack



This is a non-zine. It consists of two parts. Part one is a transcript of an interview I conducted with William Klein on the occasion of his visit to the Vienna Photobook Festival 2015 at Hotel Sacher on Friday 19th, 2015. Klein, 87 at the time, was a bit exhausted from travel and adjusted to another time zone, so that Andreas W. Bitesnich, who showed him around town, had the Hotel Sacher kitchen prepare a breakfast for the renowned guest at 17:00. Afterwards, we spoke for about an hour.

The second part is a transcript of a public conversation between William Klein and Gerry Badger at the old Ankerbrotfabrik in Vienna on Saturday 20th, 2015. The talk was part of the lecture series of the Vienna Photobook Festival 2015.

Both transcripts are unredacted, unchecked, left raw, as it is. The target audience for both the interview and the public conversation was the interested general public.

I want to thank Regina Anzenberger and Andreas W. Bitesnich for making the interview possible.

Günter Hack, June 2015.

Part One: Breakfast at Hotel Sacher





Q: What makes a good photobook?

William Klein: (Laughs) You're asking _me_?

Q: Yes! You're a classic! You ought to know.

William Klein: You know, when I started to take photographs, I asked myself: What do you do with a photograph? In those days there were no exhibitions, people didn't collect photographs and there were no photobook festivals. I thought that the only thing to do with a photo is to make books. And so my first work and first preoccupation with photography was to see how I could make a photobook.

Q: You did it all by yourself: The layout, everything.

William Klein: Everything. I didn't know there was a tradition of making photobooks. I just went ahead and did the books and while I was taking the photographs I would often think: Ah! This photograph is a double page, this photograph will be in two pages with many, many small photographs. While I was taking the photos, I thought of the book. That was the difference, maybe, with what I was doing and what other photographers were doing. I was always thinking about the book.

Q: So you already had a sequence of pictures in mind.

William Klein: Not a sequence, but every time I took a photograph, I thought: What would I do with this photo? My preoccupation was the book. Nowadays, there are festivals of photobooks. There weren't, in the old days. (laughs)

Q: You worked together with Chris Marker...

William Klein: When I was in New York, I showed my photographs to New York editors and the reaction was always negative. First of all, they didn't like the way I took photographs. Secondly, they thought that the photographs I collected gave a view of New York and America which was anti-american. And they said: We cannot publish a book like this! And so I never had a positive reaction with American editors. And so I thought, maybe if I go back to France, I could find somebody who would relate to what I was doing. The French are Europeans, they have a critical view of America. They thought my photographs fit in with their conception of what you could do with a photograph. I was lucky to find Chris Marker. Chris Marker was working at a publishing company and he was doing a little collection of travel books that gave people an idea of another way of looking at a country. It fit in what he was doing. He said, these photographs will be a book or I will slam the door, I leave! And he was working for a publishing company (Editions du Seuil) which was very traditional, very square, and they had never done a photobook before. Chris Marker was not obliged to slam the door. When he threatened to leave, they did the book. (laughs) There was a dinner, when I received the Prix Nadar, and the publisher spoke about the book and he said: When I first saw the photographs, it was like I was drinking something very harsh and violent. And I brought this strong beverage to my lips... But it wasn't true. He didn't like the photographs, like most people, he didn't like them. He pretended that the photographs were strong and violent and that he appreciated them. But in truth, he didn't like the photographs at all and he thought that that kind of photographs should not be in a book. But the press and the journalists thought that the photographs and the layout and the idea of the book were something that they relate to and it created some sort of a scandal. It went against most conceptions of how to do a book and how to take photographs so they gave it a prize, the Prix Nadar and it was looked upon as something special and rare. Many of the photographs in it were taken against the tradition of sharp, legible photographs. And I was thinking of what you could do with a camera and the photographs and the book were experimental. It was a certain success when it came out. Nowadays, there's a festival in Vienna about photobooks. I didn't know that there was a tradition of photobooks. Photobooks were part of the imagination of avant-garde photographers like the Russian revolutionary photographers.

Q: When you were shooting in 1950s New York, you were the only person in the street with a camera, whereas nowadays...

William Klein: Nowadays, everybody is taking photographs. What's funny is, anybody can take photographs or film. Very often I would see someone using their camera in a very revolutionary way. Since the cameras are automatic and always in focus, somebody would start to film and walk backwards and turn and do this and that. And this was part of the language of experimental photography. People who are using cameras in that way are amateurs and they depend on what the camera is able to do. They would walk backwards and stop and go down and up and I would look at them and I would smile, because this is something that only very sophisticated photographers or filmmakers would do in their work. But people who do that today do that naturally. They are primitive, but they depend on the performance of their camera. I'm amused by the fact that those were very daring and sophisticated movements of people with automatic cameras. OK, fine. Let them do that. That's part of the possibilities of cameras. And that's something that I've felt from the beginning: You can do anything you want, taking photographs and for me the reaction often was very traditional. Photographic critics and photographers were negatives. They said: You can't do that with a camera! Now, everybody does it.

Q: What made you abandon the traditional approach to a "precise" photograph?

William Klein: I had come from painting. There was this liberty that existed in the other domain of imagemaking. I thought: Why not? Let's go along with these possibilities. It's something that surprised and made traditional photographers angry. Because many photographers would say: Oh, I took photographs like that but I threw them away. And here is somebody who takes a photograph, blurred, out of focus and he put it on the pages of a book. Very often people were not only surprised but angry. And I thought: Let's go along with the possibilities of the camera. Unusual or negative. As long as you could see what was on the page I thought: Let's use it, let's not throw them out, let's see what's possible. My credo was: Anything goes! When you saw the impressionists, when you saw Monet doing a picture of a lake or running water. I learned recently that the French prime minister, Clemenceau, called "The Tiger", who was a very courageous and unusual politician - his best friend was Monet, and he made an apartment in the Elysée palace and he would invite Monet to spend a week-end any time he wanted to and work. And these were two very very opposite characters. Here in Vienna you have a show called Monet and Picasso. Picasso attacked traditional use of drawing and painting and he's considered a revolutionary and he was. But it's strange that Monet and Picasso should be such good friends and Clemenceau had this admiration for Monet and painting to shock the viewer didn't always have to be like Kokoschka or Van Gogh. There was a cool way of revolutionary work with a paintbrush. This was Monet and Picasso.

Q: You've made films, too. Experimental as well as traditional. In how far did your work with photobooks help you with making movies? Or was it something completely different?

William Klein: Well, the books I've made, were like movies! You turn the pages, there was a sequence, there was a way of going from one image to another. I thought that I was doing a movie when I was doing the layout of my books and other people thought so, too. That was the surprise of the first books that I did. I really loved making photobooks, turning the page and going from one image to another and telling a story, a graphic story, was my aim. It became a tradition, nowadays there are more photobooks than ever. I was speaking with Manfred Heitung last night and he said that he collected photobooks, but he stopped in 1978. He thought that after that there was nothing new, I guess I agree with him in many ways. I'm interested in seeing what is going to be shown during this Vienna photobook festival. It's part of a language that designers and photographers have developed. But I'm surprised to see over the years that many many important and good photographers do not choose the photos for their books themselves, they prefer that a good designer, a book maker like Delpire would do the book, choose the photographs, put them next to another. I think a photographer should be responsible, to start with the choice, the technique and this is part of his work, a very important part of his work. I think a photographer who does not do that is not doing his job. He's not a full-time basic photographer, if somebody else chooses the photograph and chooses what goes next to the photograph and makes the sequence - then I think that the photographer is not doing his job. This is a thing that was very important for me. Something that for me was indispensable in so far as the gesture of taking a photograph is concerned, and the conception. I don't know what people are going to talk about on this festival, but this is my opinion. I was very surprised to learn that somebody like Delpire would choose the photographs of Koudelka, Salgado, even Cartier-Bresson! He would choose the photograph and say this is the photograph that should be published. And this is the way it should go next to this photograph and so on. I think that it is not complete. The gesture of photography is not complete unless the photographer does everything from A to Z. I still make photographic books. I just did one two years ago. I went to Brooklyn and did a portrait of Brooklyn. It was once again a discovery for me, getting the photographs and see how they go together. For me it's a big excitement. I am as much excited doing the layout as taking the photographs!

Q: It's part of one movement.

William Klein: Yes, it's like breathing. The breathing of the photographer.

Q: When I make a sequence, I often notice that a picture which is not technically perfect, might be the perfect picture for the sequence.

William Klein: Yes. I find that not every photograph is a masterpiece or a discovery. Some photographs which are not the best - not second-rate, but not the best - fits in a sequence and becomes indispensable. That's a surprise! You'd think that you'd have to have the best photos, but that's not true. A photograph which is part of the story, part of an idea, can be not as good as the famous completely successful photographs, perfect photographs. In football, in soccer, in the club of Barcelona, somebody like Messi, who is a great football player, if he didn't have somebody like Iniesta to give him the ball in the right moment, he wouldn't be as good as he is. There was an interview of Cantona and he was asked which is the photograph he'd especially like. And he named a photograph which was not the best photograph. But he said, I gave it to another player because he knew that he was in a position to make a goal. And Cantona said that the photograph which was the most important to him was this photograph of an assist, which made the goal possible. People were surprised to hear that, because they thought that he'd say the best photograph would be a perfect feat of his work. But he thought that it was part of the work of a team. And that's the way he felt, so it's like what you said before. It's not always the best photograph that works with the other best best photographs, it's part of a combination. And this combination can be a surprise.

Q: Throughout your work, you've always been very critical of what you've been doing. You kept a certain distance. You've worked in photography but you're playing with the rules. You were a fashion photographer but you kept a certain distance to the fashion industry.

William Klein: When I took my first photographs in New York, there was something that struck me. I grew up in a poor family and my father, my mother and my relatives kept saying that this is the greatest place in the world, the Big Apple and everything that's important comes from here. I would be in the subway and I would see these faces of people who are worried and anguished and their faces showed a preoccupation with life which is not ideal for these people. The Big Apple is not ideal for everybody. My father would go in the subway, go down to work and I would see his face which was worried and tired and things that I showed were not ideal and I wanted to show that the Big Apple was full of worms and people not so happy with the life they were leading and the fact that they were in a big city where things were ideal. They were dreaming. They were thinking, listening to advertising and how everything was so great. I did this book and the book was very black and often very negative. And then I did a film called Broadway by Light which showed the most beautiful thing in New York which was Times Square and the Broadway spectacle of electric lights. What would people see? People were seeing the result of advertising saying: Buy this, buy that! And these films which were part of a brilliant language of amusement were actually saying: Buy this, buy that! They were manipulated and told how to live, how to be happy. Because they were buying the right things. People who watch the Broadway show of electric lights were actually

victims of orders from above: Buy this, buy that. Do this, do that. And you'll be happy. But this is how people were happy with what advertising companies would tell them. And I thought that's bullshit. You can be happy in your own way and you don't have to listen to what the advertising people tell you to do and to buy and to be happy with. So this is something that American publishers reacted to in a negative way with my photographs and my films.

Q: In *Broadway by Light*, I remember that you see people rearranging the letters for the movies and the Broadway shows. This was a montage within a montage. A metaphor for your own work.

William Klein: For me, this was the most exciting moment during the film when I saw people taking down the letters from last week to put them together in combination for next week's films. It became abstract, Dada. I was very excited myself to see how all these things were taken apart and put together again. Here, these men manipulating the letters were preparing a message for people watching, a message like this film you have to see. For me it was a very exciting moment and I was amazed to see how confused and illegible the letters were before they were rearranged for the next week's films. I like this very much. For me, it was a symbol for what people can do with their lives. They saw the film this week and next week, they're going to see another film, but before the message was put together, they had to wait and see how these mixed-up letters became a message and this message-men putting the letters together had a list of the words that would become next week's film and this is the way people live. People have all these elements together and they can choose. They are told what to choose, what to buy, what to wait for in next week's film. There's a certain excitement to see the program of a movie they heard of, they hadn't seen yet, but were laid out for them. I like the whole process of taking apart the titles of a film, taking apart the message and the message was very clear. People didn't know that this film would make them happy, made their day, but. People who saw these signs being put up had to trust the author of the layout of the message and they had to go along with it.

Q: You mentioned the Russian constructivists. Did you study their work, their montage techniques?

William Klein: I did. Yes. I was very excited by what Dziga Vertov did. He was there and showed life through a movie camera... Rodtschenko would do the layout of the books and this is something only the Russians did or the Germans in the Bauhaus. American photographers did not do their books like Rodtschenko did his. I didn't know very much about how he proceeded. I saw the result piecemeal, little by little. And I went along with this way of working with the raw material, my own material and the message that I put together was very exciting to me to discover how I could make these pages come together and tell their story. That was something that wasn't really done at that time. Now it's being done in a certain way, but you know people who take photographs for themselves, they put a book together about their vacation, their trip to Paris and they tell their story. And the story that they tell is for them. Good for them, power to them. But this is not essential process for photographers. They would have a theme, somebody like Atget would have a theme which was Paris changing and he felt that since Paris was changing, the front of a store or a window, was something that had to be preserved. And he went out with his big camera and document all these things that he knew would disappear and he wanted to keep. This was a personal project which he had which was essential. I felt I was doing something similar because I was watching Broadway and how things were changing and how things should be preserved and kept because I knew they would disappear.

Q: So, to wrap it up, there are books of photographs and there are photobooks. And you are making photobooks. Could one put it like that?

William Klein: Yes!



Addendum: On the way out, Klein asked me where I came from. I answered that I came from Munich. He said that he had been to Munich with the US military after the war and that he had to supervise German art historians identifying Beutekunst - artworks robbed by the Nazis. He was deeply worried about the rise of the extreme right in Europe. I said that I shared his view. To leave on a more positive note, I made a remark about how important a city Munich used to be for the arts before World War I, that even Marcel Duchamp came from Paris to Munich for a certain time to check out the scene and recover from a problematic love affair. "Duchamp was a real revolutionary", Klein said and laughed.





Part Two: Klein vs. Badger

Gerry Badger: William Klein. He's painter, designer, painter, sculptor, fashion photographer, character in Chris Marker's film *La Jetée* and also, as important as in photography, a filmmaker of great distinction. A filmmaker, unlike some other photographers, his films you can actually buy at Gilbert Jeune's in Paris, not from specialist booksellers. I think we are in the presence of a very very special creative person. One of the issues I'd like to talk about is: How did you do it. The normal thing in these conversation is to ask how you began. But I would actually like to begin asking you about Brooklyn, your latest photobook and how that came about.

William Klein: I haven't understood one thing you've said (laughs)

GB: What a good start! Could you talk a bit about Brooklyn, the book you did two years ago?

WK: You want me to talk about Brooklyn?

GB: Yeah!

WK: It's the last thing I wanted to talk about.

GB: I also wanted to ask you about some people you met throughout your career. For example Fernand Léger. You did a course in his studio and I reckon that he was a great influence for the way you thought about art.

WK: Well, I was in the Army, for two years. And the deal that we had with the government was that people who would be in the Army would be reimbursed for the time they wasted in the Army. If we went to school, we would have two years of school paid for by the government. And people could continue to work in the job they had when they were drafted. I took

advantage of the deal. I was in the Army for two years and when I came out, I would discharge in Paris and I had the possibility to work with a painter. There was a choice of four places to study painting: The Beaux Arts, André Lhote, La Grande Chaumière and Fernand Léger. In French you say, if something is obvious, "Y' à pas photo!" And for me and for several others, it was "pas photo" to work with Fernand Léger. It was something worth being in the Army for. He was not a fashionable creator at that time. Léger was somebody who was more or less forgotten. He was not fashionable. A young photographer or painter who wanted to learn something about the plastic arts would go to Légers studio. And that's what I did.

GB: So you began painting.

WK: I was studying painting but that's not really something you could study and learn. Léger was somebody who was like a myth. He was a big hulking peasant from Normandie. He was a little bit like Lee Marvin and he didn't talk "Bla bla bla" about art. He would say: "That's good. That's strong. That's shit." No bullshit. It was really great to see this myth look at what we were doing in the studio. It was a traditional studio. There would be a still-life in the middle of the room and there would be thirty, forty young artists who would paint the still-life in the manner of Léger, actually. And somebody would come into the studio and say: "Ah. All these guys think they are Léger. But we all thought that we'd have found a way using Léger as a springboard. That's the way things happened in the studio.

GB: The next big step in your career were two shows in Milan, I believe. A very important step.

WK: I had the possibility of doing a show in Milano. I was invited by this avant-garde theater director called [Giorgio] Strehler. It was the possibility to make an exhibition in the corridor, in the entrance to the theater. I had this show there. And a gallery director who ran an avant-garde gallery, called Il Millione saw the show and said: Why are you showing your stuff in a theater? Come to my gallery! I said: When? - Right now! So when the first show at the theater was over, I went to his gallery, it was a real gallery and there were a lot of people and I had the luck of meeting an architect, an avant-garde high-tech architect who had made a construction made of panels, seven panels that were on rails, to divide a room. He said: Can you do this? I want those panels to be painted on both sides. I was 22 years old and I thought I could do anything and I said: Sure. So I saw those panels, they could work as a mural or as a space separator. What happened was: I photographed the result. And the panels were on rails. They could slide, they could turn, when put together they became a mural or a space separator. That was the first commission I had. I was very excited to do that. I photographed this construction. What happened was that I had somebody to turn the panels, to move them. And they spun and they blurred. And those geometrical abstract paintings I did at the time blurred. I thought: That's something interesting you can do with photography. You use long exposure times and get a blur. So these geometrical forms became something else. This was my first experience with photography and for me it was a new way of dealing with geometrical forms.

GB: Then you must have met the people from domus, the magazine.

WK: The architect was a friend of the people who put out this magazine called domus. It was a magazine about architecture, about painting, about dealing with space. They did eight pages on this work. For me, it was pretty exciting to have something published. I realized that photography would be an interesting way of working with graphic forms and working with geometry. So those were the first really serious work I did in that direction. I had the commission from this architect, and I did several of these murals.

GB: Some of those were published as covers of the magazine. That was later?

WK: Some of the things that I did in my studio became covers of the magazine. They were popular.

GB: How did you come to meet Alexander Liberman and go to New York?

WK: The work I did, using blur plus geometrical forms, were shown in a festival in Paris called the Salon of the New Reality. And Liberman saw my work in this exhibition and he contacted me and said: Come and see me in my office. I knew who he was. I knew he was the art director of Condé Nast, all the magazines, Vogue, Glamour and all that. I went to see him and he asked me: How would you like to work for Vogue? - Doing what? - I don't know, maybe you can be my assistant. Or you could take photographs. I was really a primitive in far that photography was concerned. One could call it "photographia povera". With no means. One camera, two lenses. And working with a magazine like Vogue which had money and was willing to spend it was a revolution for me and photographia povera became photography with means. Those were the beginnings of my serious work in photography.

GB: Did he commission you to do "New York" or did he say: Do anything you like.

WK: Liberman had an attitude that doesn't exist today. He would be willing to finance experiments of young photographers, projects. I really had no technique, no idea what could be done with photography. After these first experiments with moving panels and blur I worked in the darkroom doing further experiments with these things in color and so on. These were my first serious contacts with photography. And I had this idea that I could do anything with a negative. If I had a negative, I could improvise and develop. When I had this idea of doing a book on my return to New York, because I've been away to Paris for five or six years, I had lost contact with New York and I knew that with photography I would be able to say something different, something new. It was very pretentious, you know. You think you can do anything and that's what I did.

GB: Do you remember the first time you went out on the streets and the kind of things you were bringing back?

WK: Well, I had no plan of what to do with a camera. Instinctively, I used the camera as an attack on the crowds and the people. They would move into the situation and I would photograph point-blank. Then I would go back to the darkroom and do the enlargements. Very often, I would see the contacts and be surprised at what was happening. The experiments I did that way were very personal. My motto was "anything goes". I realized that, coming from painting, photography was an open book. Photography was, I felt, the least daring and the least experimental of the graphic arts. I thought that anything goes and lots of things can happen with a camera.

GB: Did you look through the viewfinder all the time?

WK: Yes. I even looked through the viewfinder when I was amazed by what I saw. I took photographs instinctively, using a wide-angle lens, plunging into situations where the camera would answer what I was hoping for.

GB: How long did you shoot until you had all the material that in the end became "New York"?

WK: Four, five, six months. I was really amazed by what was happening on purpose and by accident. My assistant, who is here, was very much surprised that the photographs that I took a year and a half ago in Brooklyn were much more numerous than what I did in New York. In New York I just did maybe six- or seven hundred photographs. But in Brooklyn, where I happened to have a deal with Sony - Sony would be making a new camera, digital, automatic, and I found that it was very very easy and painless for me to take photographs with a digital automatic camera. My assistant told me that I took two thousand photographs for this project. And New York was five or six hundred photographs. That was it, in a period of four or five months. That was all.

GB: This interests me. When you were shooting in New York, did you go and look at other photography? If so, did something interest you at all?

WK: You know, when I was taking these photographs, I had very little contact with the photographic world. I didn't know any photographers, There was no atmosphere of emulation. It's not like today, you know, When I took a photograph, I thought: What do I do with a photograph? At that time there was nothing like what's happening today. I thought: What can I do with a photograph? There were no exhibitions, no big blow-ups to cover a wall, I thought: What do you do with a photograph? You make a book. My idea was that a photograph was useful for books. And it was really the only thing that I thought was worthwhile, using a photograph, was to make a book. I had already done graphic work to make a living, I have worked with pharmaceutical outfits, I would do abstract graphic experiments. I thought: I'll take these photographs of a New York that I was rediscovering, I was living in Paris. I had this instinct of knowing what I was seeing, what was important. I grew up in New York and every detail I saw that I thought was important, I would be right. Because there was no way of being wrong. This was it. Each time I took a photograph I kept thinking: This is it! I guess I was right, most of the time.

GB: For making the layouts of the New York book, you'd use the famous Xerox machine.

WK: I had the possibility of cooperating with Condé Nast and I saw that they had this really state of the art photostat machine. And I was able to do the layout exactly how I wanted to. And that was. He didn't imagine that the photographs that fashion photographers took were really a ??? to a new way of taking a photograph. And dealing with anything that came out, there was a way of working with crappy photographs, out of focus, blurred... I was excited by the things I discovered the day after I was taking the photographs. I would take a photograph in an impossible situation and I would see the results and learn something about what was happening.

GB: You were able to produce copies of each photos in different sizes with the machine and experiment with them.

WK: When I took the photographs, It would be exciting to imagine how they looked blown up on a double page or as a chessboard (?) combination on a double page.

GB: Would you work on two or three spreads at a time? Or more? And gradually put the thing together?

WK: Each double page in the book was for me a new problem. I thought the pages of the book were going to be all different and there would be no regular plan. Each double page was another problem. And when I put them all together, they became the book.

GB: This really is the key to the whole book. No double page is the same. That's very difficult to do and you pulled it off. Can you tell us about the publishing of the French issue of the book? I believe you carried it to Delpire, first.

WK: I had some friends I knew, people who worked at publishing houses and I would show them the photographs that I took in New York and they would say... either they would say: This is unpublishable, these photographs are shit, forget it. And I had to forget it, because nobody would go along with it. I had the idea that if I went back to Paris with these photographs, perhaps I would be able to do something with them. I had the luck of meeting somebody called Chris Marker who was an editor at a publishing house which was very square. And he had a small project of pocket books for travel. Kids would buy these books if they were going to Vienna or Tokyo, they would have an insight, an idea of where to eat, where to sleep, what to discover. Chris Marker saw the book, he was the contrary of the publishers I contacted in New York. He thought that this out of the way of treating photography was right up his alley, and he said: "We'll do the book. And if we don't do the book, I quit." He was like a wunderkind of the publishing house and they didn't want to lose him. He was a filmmaker, he was a writer, he was a layout man. He convinced the publishing house to go along with my project. And that was it. The book came out, it was well-received and it won a prize, a big prize in Paris, which was the Prix Nadar. Nadar was a real hero of photography in France. The book won the prize for that year: 1956 for photographic experiments and research.

GB: It was published in France, then there was an Italian edition and I think there was a British edition, but not an American.

WK: There never was an American edition of the New York book. There was an edition that was done maybe 15 years later. It did come out. It's true that the reaction of the editors that I contacted in New York was: Shit. The take on New York, on America, was unacceptable. The Big Apple was not so great. My father would go out to work, he would take the subway and look at the people in the subway. For them, the Big Apple was very far away, on a tree, too high for most people to get a piece of.

GB: So the negative reaction was due to the subject matter as well as to the anti-technique, if you like. Because American photography at that time was very oriented to large format photography and glossy things like this.

WK: I have a theory. I don't know whether this goes on well here in Vienna or Germany. For me, there were two kinds of photography: Jewish Photography and Goyish Photography. If you look at what was interesting in photography in that period, in the 1950s and 1960s, all the work, all the books that I've run into were done in the style of Jewish photography. These were urban visions: Crowds and no landscape, no trees... I mean, I couldn't imagine that somebody like Ansel Adams would be a Jewish photographer. But all the people I liked at that time were part of that crowded... way out... take on the city. The Big Apple for me was really a ??? that would confront the actual life in New York which was heavy and harsh.

GB: There was at that time quite a concentration of photobooks about cities. I guess it is kind of a part of the reconstruction of Europe. Your book influenced a lot of others. I was doing a talk only two weeks ago on the Portuguese book "Lisbon" of which those two Portuguese artists admit how much New York influenced them. They even have their index in the back which is ?? to the booklet which was in the book. Then you went on to... I guess you could think of them as a quartet of great city books. You did Rome in 59 I think, and then finally Moscow and Tokyo in 1964. Could you tell us a bit about your Tokyo book, because your New York book was an incredible influence on Japanese photography.

WK: For me, photography was a way of not being a tourist. Of speaking about cultures you didn't know, I preferred to know. The books I did, New York obviously something I knew by heart and by instinct. Then I had the possibility... I showed the book to Fellini in Paris. He was in a hotel, I knew where he stayed and I called up and I said: May I speak to Mr. Fellini? In those days, you know, a director or an artist was not surrounded by an army of public relation assistants. I said: Can I speak to Mr. Fellini? And they said: One moment. And I spoke to Fellini and I said: I just did a book on New York and I'd like to show it to you. He said: You know what, come tomorrow at four o'clock and I went there and he said: I know this book! There was an Italian edition and it was interesting for me... If I knew New York, I would also know something about Rome, Italy. I read Italian literature, I saw Italian films. I grew up in New York, which was one fourth Jewish, one fourth Italian, one fourth... whatever. So I went to school with Italian kids... I learned to swear in Italian... Vaffanculo mamma... I was amazed by the nerve of the Italian kids in class, you know, they didn't have this American respect for teachers. They would say Vaffanculo all the time and we picked that up. I had an instinct of collaboration with Italians and when I went to Rome I found that the attitude of the people who had been in the photographs was very close to New York, because in New York, you know, at that time, everybody thought they deserved to be photographed and eternalized. There was a program called "King of the Day" or "Queen of the Day" and everybody, when they saw me with the camera... It wasn't so obvious for somebody to be in the street with a camera. People were not insulted, they were flattered, because they thought they deserved to be famous, they deserved to be eternalized with a camera. And I took advantage of that. People would say to me: What do you do here in the street? What's this for? And I said: Well. There was a newspaper called the New York Daily News which was printed at two or three million copies per day. There was a page opposite the editorial page... There was a column called The Inquiring Photographer and you would see somebody photographed and people would have to answer questions

like: "Do you think it's right to beat your wife?" or "Do you think it would be the end of the world if the communists took over America?" and things like that. When people asked me: "What's this for?", I'd say: "I'm with the Inquiring Photographer. It's for the Daily News." Then they would ask: "When is it coming out?" - "Tomorrow." - "Tomorrow!" I would say. They would go along with it, be flattered. What was true in New York was true in Rome. It was not true in Russia, in Moscow, in the Cold War, I had the impression that I wouldn't be able to take photographs in Moscow, because an American with a camera would obviously be a spy, that it would be awful, in a communist city. But I never ran into problems, taking photographs in Moscow. I found that people didn't care, really and were very often cooperative. I remember this one photograph in the book where you see a girl in a bikini on the beach, on the Moscow river. When I aimed the camera, I thought she would run away, but she didn't. It's one of my photographs that I like the most, because you would see her, her father, her mother and her grandmother in the same photograph. And that was part of the game, because photography depends, of course, on technique and the lens I was using was a wide-angle lens. I would aim it at this girl in the bikini, she would think she was the center of my world and go along with the photograph and not realize that the photograph was not only of her, but also of her father, her grandmother... That was the advantage of using a camera. I would take photographs of people in New York... People that I wouldn't dare to look at or talk to. In New York, it's kind of dangerous when you're a kid, to walk down the street, because sometimes you'd be looking at some guy and he'd go "What are you looking at?" And I would say: "Uh, nothing." And he would go: "What? I'm nothing?!" It was kind of dangerous to look at people in the street. But with a camera, I found there was something abstract between you and the person you are photographing, because one would say: Here's a guy with a camera, he must have the right to take a photograph. I took advantage of this official status, taking a photograph of somebody. Somebody had to have the expression that you'd have the right to take a photograph. Very often, I didn't run into problems. It's only much later, when computers were tabulating people for God knows what use that I had the feeling that people were worried that somebody was taking a photograph... is dangerous for them. There was a distrust. But I never really ran into problems taking photographs of people, because I moved very naturally... I'm kind of big... When I took a photograph, people would often think: "Well, he takes a photograph, but he probably has the right to take a photograph." I never had really problems photographing people in the streets.

GB: Did you find any differences when you came to take photographs in Tokyo, because that's probably the most different culture - and at the same time, the kind of cityscape of Tokyo was probably more like New York.

WK: First of all, Tokyo was a commission. My photographs were well-known in Japan. When I went to Tokyo, I accepted the commission by an editor to work on Tokyo, but I had no idea, like I had in New York or in Rome, whether I was photographing or whether I was looking at something, it was a real thing and it was something I could relate to. I had no notion what things I saw were really worthwhile and it was a strange experience. It was the first time I took photographs of things I had no knowledge of. For me it was something that... an experience all the time, where I had no idea whether I was right or wrong, photographing this or that. It's only nowadays that I realize that the book... First of all, the Japanese had a way of taking photographs which were very discreet and distant. I thought that I would learn something from them. But what happened, I found out that Japanese photographers were more interested in learning something from me than in me learning something from them. And that means photographers who took photographs that I admired didn't understand were sick of being the model for photography and I found that young Japanese photographers were more interested in what I was doing in photography than me learning from them. There are photographers in Japan who are taking Photographs the way I took photographs, people like Daido Moriyama and others.... would take consciously New-York-style photographs of Tokyo, of Japan and it was a strange situation, because it was the opposite of what I imagined.

GB: Hard to believe... we had almost an hour... Would you take questions from the audience.

Q: Do you remember your film "Freedom"? Could you tell us about the making?

WK: I wanted to do a film about superheroes and I was struck by the fact that you would see a superhero doing all these incredible actions, but you would never know who he is working for. I mean Spiderman, Superman... Who sent them out to clean the world? Who is he working for? I thought I would do a film where I would show actually what was the motivation and who was behind the actions of Spiderman or whoever... Let's make it clear! In my film, you found the outfit which was sending Mr. Freedom out to clean up France... I treated France like a third-world country and Mr. Freedom came to France to clean up the commies and the maoists and I thought I would make it clear that Mr. Freedom was actually working for a fascist organization. That was Mr. Freedom in Paris... What do you want to know about Mr. Freedom?

Q: Was it a success, this film?

WK: It was kind of successful, it wasn't a blockbuster. He was a tool of a fascist organization, I guess you people know a little bit about what a fascist organization is. But Mr. Freedom was out there, cleaning up the world for his sponsors. His sponsors, who were... There's a scene in the film where he's taking the elevator and he pushes the different buttons for the different floors and you see Unilever and General Motors and all the big companies who would be profiting by the interventions of Mr. Freedom. He pushes the button for the top floor, for Freedom Incorporated. And you get a good idea of where he's coming from and where he's going. I guess you people know a bit about that.

GB: Thank goodness, it isn't like that today.

Q: When will you have an exhibition in Vienna? People would appreciate it very much.

WK: Aren't we having one here right now? This is an exhibition.

GB: Any more questions?

WK: I was surprised that, opposite the Sacher hotel, there's the Albertina where they show Picasso and Monet. I liked the idea of the show, because Picasso is obviously a revolutionary painter, violent and using every tool in the history of painting to do what he were doing. Monet was painting very cool subjects, a pond, water, trees and I was struck by the fact... He was a revolutionary painter, but in a French way. There was something I discovered recently. French prime minister who was called The Tiger who was a very strong political person... his best friend was Monet. In the palace of the prime minister, he had set up an apartment for Monet to come and rest and work. Here with this prime minister from the First World War who directed an army, who was turned on by Monet. I thought that was very cool and great. The prime minister today in France is a little bit like The Tiger. He is Catalan, I knew his parents, I knew his father, he was a Catalan painter. He is very strong and violent against the fascist movement in France. He is the only politician who dares to confront the fascist movement which is taking more and more importance in France, because people are not happy, not satisfied with the lot that they are dealt. The prime minister of France, Manuel Valls, is a friend of mine, he is very strong and definitive politician. I think that's good. Good for him and good for everybody.

Q: What advice would you give a young street photographer?

WK: I always say the same thing: Find a rich woman. Or, for a woman: Find a rich man. Because you need independence. It's money, that gives independence, unfortunately. I guess, in Vienna, you could find a rich woman, if you look.

GB: Well, we've been talking about an hour and I guess it's appropriate at the Vienna Photobook Festival, all we managed to talk about... probably the best and most consistent quartet of photobooks in the history of the medium. We'd have so much more to talk about, we could go on about film, materialism, fascism, as has just been touched upon, but time is up, I'm afraid. Thank you!

