

An Interview with Garry Winogrand

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Garry Winogrand is one of the most important photographers at work in America today. His sophisticated snapshot-aesthetic pictures celebrate ordinary events, and transform them with precise timing and framing into astute visual commentaries on modern life.

Barbaralee Diamonstein: Garry, the New School is not unfamiliar ground to you. As I recall, you studied here for a short time in the early part of your career.

Garry Winogrand: Yes. It might have been 1949.

D: You began to photograph just at that period when you were less than twenty years old. How did it all begin?

W: Cameras intrigued me.

D: You started out studying painting, though, didn't you?

W: Yeah, well, cameras always were seductive. And then a darkroom became available, and that's when I stopped doing anything else.

D: How does a darkroom "become available"?

W: There was a camera club at Columbia, where I was taking a painting course. And when I went down, somebody showed me how to use the stuff. That's all. I haven't done anything else since then, it was as simple as that. I fell into the business.

D: You started out supporting yourself with commercial work — advertising photography and such things.

W: Yes, and magazine work, industrial work. I was a hired gun, more or less.

D: Why did you decide to give all that up?

W: I enjoyed it until I stopped. You could travel and get around. I can't really explain why, I just didn't want to do it anymore.

D: That wasn't very long ago...

W: Well, it was 1969 when I got out of it, more or less.

D: And then you turned to teaching, as well as your own work?

W: Well, it was strange, because the phone rang and a teaching job turned up that sounded interesting. And I always did my own work. *The Animals* and a lot of *Public Relations* were done while I was doing commercial work.

D: When you refer to *Public Relations*, you're really talking about the title of a book that describes a very extensive body of material you started in 1969 on a Guggenheim Fellowship. During that period,

you decided to photograph the effect of the media on events. And you studied ritual public events that very often were planned for the benefit of those who were recording them. What did you find out about that period, and what were you trying to tell us in your photographs?

W: I don't think anything happens without the press, one way or the other. I think it's all done for it. You saw it start, really, with Martin Luther King in Birmingham. He did the bus thing. And I don't think anything that followed would have happened if the press hadn't paid attention. As far as my end of it, photographing, goes, all I'm interested in is pictures, frankly. I went to events, and it would have been very easy to just illustrate that idea about the relationships between the press and the event, you know. But I felt that from my end, I should deal with the thing itself, which is the event. I pretty much functioned like the media itself.

D: But weren't you the media then?

W: I was one of them, yeah, absolutely. But maybe I was a little slyer, sometimes.

D: How so?

W: Well, at times people in the press were also useful to me, you know.

D: As subjects?

W: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

D: I'm reminded of a picture of Murray Kempton and Norman Mailer in that series at Mailer's 50th birthday party, that has been widely reproduced and discussed in critical essays. Are any of those events ever held just for fun or for the sheer relief of the participants? Are they always done to promote an idea, a cause, a person, or a product?

W: In my experience, I think it's the latter. I mean, people are going to have a good time, you know. One can go have a good time at these big openings in museums. And people go to have a good time. But the thing has another purpose.

D: What is the larger purpose?

W: In the case of museums, it's always got to do with money, people who donate and things like that. And I believe a certain kind of interest has to be demonstrated. The museums want large crowds coming to the shows — it's the same thing. It's hype. Absolutely. But there's nothing evil about it.

D: Are you really saying that it's marketing?

W: A lot of it is. And then, of course, you have politics, the Vietnam war and all that monkey business. There are all kinds of reasons. At every one of those demonstrations in the late 60s about the Vietnam War, you could guarantee there'd be a series of speeches. The ostensible purpose was to protest the war. But then somebody came up and gave a black power speech, usually Black Muslims, then. And then you'd have a women's rights speech. It was terrible to listen to these things.

D: How was it to look at?

W: Well, it was interesting; it's an interesting photographic problem. But if I was doing it as a job, I think I'd have to get paid extra. If I ever hear "Power to the people" again, I'll... I just found out that John

Lennon wrote that song, "All we are saying is give peace a chance." I couldn't believe it. I thought it was terrible; I hated that song. They used to bring out the Pete Seeger wind-up toy to sing it. Tiresome.

D: I hope that what I'm going to bring up won't be tiresome for you, too... The term "street photography" and your name have been synonymous for quite some time. But the streets are not the only place where you've worked over the last twenty-five years or so. You've worked in zoos and aquaria, Metropolitan Museum of Art openings, Texas rodeos. There must be some common thread that runs through all of your work. How would you describe it?

W: Well, I'm not going to get into that. I think that those kind of distinctions and lists of titles like "street photographer" are so stupid.

D: How would you prefer to describe yourself?

W: I'm a photographer, a still photographer. That's it.

D: If you don't like "street photographer," how do you respond to that other tiresome phrase, "snapshot aesthetic"?

W: I knew that was coming. That's another stupidity. The people who use the term don't even know the meaning. They use it to refer to photographs they believe are loosely organized, or casually made, whatever you want to call it. Whatever terms you like. The fact is, when they're talking about snapshots they're talking about the family album picture, which is one of the most precisely made photographs. Everybody's fifteen feet away and smiling. The sun is over the viewer's shoulder. That's when the picture is taken, always. It's one of the most carefully made photographs that ever happened. People are just dumb. They misunderstand.

D: That's an interesting point, particularly coming from someone who takes — or rather, composes and then snaps — lightning-fast shots.

W: I'll say this, I'm pretty fast with a camera when I have to be. However, I think it's irrelevant. I mean, what if I said that every photograph I made was set up? From the photograph, you can't prove otherwise. You don't know anything from the photograph about how it was made, really. But every photograph could be set up. If one could imagine it, one could set it up. The whole discussion is a way of not talking about photographs.

D: Well, what would be a better way to describe that?

W: See, I don't think time is involved in how the thing is made. It's like, "There I was 40,000 feet in the air," whatever. You've got to deal with how photographs look, what's there, not how they're made. Even with what camera.

D: So what is really important...

W: Is the photograph.

D: ...is how you organize complex situations or material to make a picture.

W: The picture, right. Not how I do anything. In the end, maybe the correct language would be how the fact of putting four edges around a collection of information or facts transforms it. A photograph is not what was photographed, it's something else.

D: Does it really not matter what kind of equipment you use?

W: Oh, I know what I like to use myself. I use Leicas, but when I look at the photograph, I don't ask the photograph questions. Mine or anybody else's. The only time I've ever dealt with that kind of thing is when I'm teaching. You talk about people who are interested in "how." But when I look at photographs, I couldn't care less "how." You see?

D: What do you look for?

W: I look at a photograph. What's going on? What's happening, photographically? If it's interesting, I try to understand why.

D: And how do you expect the viewer to respond to your photographs?

W: I have no expectations. None at all.

D: Well, what do you want to evoke?

W: I have no ideas on that subject. Two people could look at the same flowers and feel differently about them. Why not? I'm not making ads. I couldn't care less. Everybody's entitled to their own experience.

D: You describe very complex relationships photographically, in a very sympathetic way, but a very humorous one. Often you do that with juxtaposition, whether in zoos or rodeos or museum celebrations. Let's talk about your animal project. There, as in so much of your work, juxtapositions and gestures that usually pass unnoticed are very significant. You find them worth recording. Here you were, a city boy, how did you come to do a project that involved spending so much time in zoos? Do animals interest you that much?

W: Well, zoos are always in cities. Where else can they afford them, you know? When I was a kid in New York I used to go to the zoo. I always liked the zoo. I grew up within walking distance of the Bronx Zoo. And then when my first two children were young, I used to take them to the zoo. Zoos are always interesting. And I make pictures. Actually, the animal pictures came about in a funny way. I made a few shots. If you could see those contact sheets, they're mostly of the kids and maybe a few shots where I'm just playing. And at some point I realized something was going on in some of those pictures, so then I worked at it.

D: Consciously?

W: Yes. Then at some point I realized it made sense as a book. So that's what happened.

D: How important are humor and irony in your work?

W: I don't know. See, I don't get involved, frankly, in that way. When I see something, I know why something's funny or seems to be funny. But in the end it's just another picture as far as I'm concerned.

D: When you looked at those contact sheets, you noticed that something was going on. I've often wondered how a photographer who takes tens of thousands of photographs — and by now it may even be hundreds of thousands of photographs — keeps track of the material. How do you know what you have, and how do you find it?

W: Badly. That's all I can say. There've been times it's been just impossible to find a negative or whatever. But I'm basically just a one man operation, and so things get messed up. I don't have a filing system that's worth very much.

D: But don't you think that's important to your work?

W: I'm sure it is, but I can't do anything about it. It's hopeless. I've given up. You just go through a certain kind of drudgery every time you have to look for something. I've got certain things grouped by now, but there's a drudgery in finding them. There's always stuff missing.

D: You sold your very first work to the Museum of Modern Art. How did Edward Steichen come to know your work?

W: I had an agent. When Steichen was doing "The Family of Man", I went up to the office one day. I think Wayne Miller, who assisted Steichen with "The Family of Man," was up there and pulled out a bunch of pictures. So I got a message: "Take these pictures, call Steichen, make an appointment and take these pictures up there." And that's how I met him.

D: Did the museum buy any?

W: Yes, they bought some for that show.

D: How many did they buy? That was about 1960.

W: I don't remember.

D: Do you remember how much they paid for them?

W: Ten bucks each. Nobody sold prints then and prices didn't mean anything. In terms of earning your living, it was a joke.

D: Did you ever expect the public to celebrate the works of photographers either aesthetically or economically?

W: No. First of all, I don't know if they're celebrating. But yeah, I'm shocked that I can live pretty well, or reasonably, or make a certain amount of my living, anyway, off of prints. I guess it's nuts. I don't believe in it. I never anticipated it; I still don't believe it.

D: How do you explain the current rise of interest in photography?

W: Oh, I'm sure some of it has to do with taxes, tax shelter things. There are all kinds of reasons. There are people who like photography; there are people who are worrying about what's going to happen with the dollar. They want to get anything that seems hard. I don't know, but I think it's got to do with economics. Now and then you get somebody who buys a picture because he likes it.

D: What about all those young people who are so interested in photography?

W: They don't buy pictures. Young people don't have money to buy pictures. I don't really have any faith in anybody enjoying photographs in a large enough sense to matter. I think it's all about finances, on one side. And then there are people who are socially ambitious. If you go back away, the Sculls, for

instance, had a lot of money and they were socially ambitious. If you get an old master, it's not going to do you any good socially.

D: Besides, you can't get enough of them.

W: And likewise even French impressionists. So the Sculls bought pop. It was politics, and they moved with it. And I think that could be happening, to some degree, with photography, too. It doesn't cost as much to do it, either.

D: Then you don't have much faith in the longevity of the surge of interest, either economic or aesthetic, in photography. Do you see it as something typical of this moment?

W: I don't know what you mean by aesthetic.

D: Well, we're assigning the surge of interest to economic reasons, rather than the fact that more and more people think of photography as a legitimate art form.

W: I don't care how they think of it. Some of these people are acquiring some very good pictures by a lot of different photographers.

D: For whatever motivation...

W: Right. Who cares?

D: But if their interest is economically engendered, then photography could be a short term pursuit.

W: Possibly. I'll take one day at a time; that's enough! I have no idea what's going to happen. Who knows — if they can't afford to buy a boat, maybe they buy a print. Who knows what happens with their buck?

D: When I was taking your photograph earlier today, with well-intended whimsy I tilted my camera in an attempt to make my own Winogrand. From what I understand, that's not how it's done. What is the meaning of the horizontal tilted frame that you often use? And is your camera tilted when you make the picture?

W: It isn't tilted, no.

D: What are you doing?

W: Well, look, there's an arbitrary idea that the horizontal edge in a frame has to be the point of reference. And if you study those pictures, you'll see I use the vertical often enough. I use either edge. If it's as good as the vertical edge, it's as good as the horizontal edge. I never do it without a reason. The only ones you'll see are the ones that work. There's various reasons for doing it. But they're not tilted, you see.

D: How do you create that angle, then?

W: You use the vertical edge as the point of reference, instead of the horizontal edge. I have a picture of a beggar, where there's an arm coming into the frame from the side. And the arm is parallel to the horizontal edge and it makes it work. It's all games, you know. But it keeps it interesting to do, to play.

D: There is another photograph that has an arm coming in from that edge, in almost Sistine Chapel fashion. That arm and the hand on the end of it are feeding the trunk of an elephant.

W: Oh, you mean the cover of the animal book. That has nothing to do with what I'm talking about now. It's just that I carry an arm around with me, you know. I wouldn't be caught dead without that arm!

D: Has teaching affected the way you take photographs?

W: I really don't know.

D: Do you learn a great deal from your students? Do you have any new ideas, any reactions to their reactions?

W: No, the only thing that happens when I'm teaching is that I hope there are some students out there in the class who will ask questions. Teaching is only interesting because you struggle with trying to talk about photographs, photographs that work, you see. Teaching doesn't relate to photographing, at least not for me. But now and then I'll get a student who asks a question that puts me up against the wall and maybe by the end of the semester I can begin to deal with the question. You know what I mean. It's not easy.

D: Several years ago a student did ask you which qualities in a picture make it interesting instead of dead. And you replied with a telling statement describing what photography is all about. You said you didn't know what something would look like in a photograph until it had been photographed. A rather simple sentence that you used has been widely identified with you, and that sentence is: "I photograph to find out what something will look like photographed." That was about five or six years ago. And I know there are few things that displease you more than being bored. So I would hope that you have since amended or extended that idea. How would you express it now?

W: Well, I don't think it was that simple then, either. There are things I photograph because I'm interested in those things. But in the end, you know what I'm saying there. Earlier tonight, I said the photograph isn't what was photographed, it's something else. It's about transformation. And that's what it is. That hasn't changed, largely. But it's not that simple. Let's put it this way — I photograph what interests me all the time. I live with the pictures to see what that thing looks like photographed. I'm saying the same thing; I'm not changing it. I photograph what interests me. I'm not saying anything different, you see.

D: Well, what is it about a photograph that makes it alive or dead?

W: How problematic it is! It's got to do with the contention between content and form. Invariably that's what's responsible for its energies, its tensions, its being interesting or not. There are photographs that function just to give you information. I never saw a pyramid, but I've seen photographs; I know what a pyramid or a sphinx looks like. There are pictures that do that, but they satisfy a different kind of interest. Most photographs are of life, what goes on in the world. And that's boring, generally. Life is banal, you know. Let's say that an artist deals with banality. I don't care what the discipline is.

D: And how do you find the mystery in the banal?

W: Well, that's what's interesting. There is a transformation, you see, when you just put four edges around it. That changes it. A new world is created.

D: Does that discreet context make it more descriptive, and by transforming it give it a whole new layer of meaning?

W: You're asking me why that happens. Aside from the fact of just taking things out of context, I don't know why. That's part of a mystery. In a way, a transformation is a mystery to me. But there is a transformation, and that's fascinating. Just think how minimal somebody's family album is. But you start looking at one of them, and the word everybody will use is "charming." Something just happened. It's automatic, just operating a camera intelligently. You've got a lot going for you, you see. By just describing well with it, something happens.

D: There are a number of photographers who have things happen in their work that you have responded to over an extended period of time. Whose work have you found was of importance to, or influenced, yours?

W: Well, we could talk about hope, that's all. I hope I learned something from Evans and Frank and... I could make a big list...

D: In what way did they inform your work, your vision, or your life?

W: I'll just talk about Evans' and Frank's work. I don't know how to say easily what I learned. One thing I can say I learned is how amazing photography could be. I think it was the first time I was really moved by photographs.

D: Did you know Walker Evans?

W: No, not really. We weren't friends.

D: Cartier-Bresson and Kertesz?

W: I met Bresson once in Paris. Kertesz I probably know a little better. But I'm not friends with those people. I'm not friends with Robert. I've known Robert for a long time.

D: But you are closely associated with a number of contemporary photographers, your contemporaries.

W: Oh sure. Lee Friedlander, Tod Papageorge.

D: Tod Papageorge, a first rate photographer in his own right, was the curator of an exhibition of yours called "Public Relations." How did that come about, that one photographer not only is the curator of another's exhibition, but also writes the introduction to his work?

W: Ask John Szarkowski. It wasn't my idea. I mean, he did ask me if it was okay with me, and I was delighted.

D: Did you all stalk the streets together?

W: No, we don't work together. We might meet for lunch or something, and maybe happen to saunter around a bit in the process. But we don't do expeditions.

D: Just exhibitions. In 1967 your work was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, with Lee Friedlander's and Diane Arbus'. Do you feel that the three of you were a likely combination? Or were there important differences? Were you part of the same school?

W: Oh, we're all radically different. John gave the show a title "New Documents", and there was a little bit of written explanation. I would go by that. I don't remember what was written, though.

D: Has the Museum of Modern Art been very influential in your own career?

W: I don't know. I mean, it doesn't have anything to do with what I do. Probably has made some differences in my sales, I wouldn't be surprised. Again, you have to ask other people, because I don't have a measuring device. There are photographers whose shows I try to make it my business to see, if I'm in the city. There are photographers I have no interest in at all.

D: Tell me about the ones that interest you.

W: Tod or Hank Wessel, Bill Dane, Paul McConough, Steve Shore. Robert Adams, for sure. I'm ready to see what they do. Nicholas Nixon, also, I would make it my business to see. There's a lot of people working reasonably intelligently.

D: How important is that much criticized aspect of photography — the mechanical, duplicatable printing aspect — to the quality of the work? How much time do you spend in your darkroom? Do you develop your own work?

W: I develop my own film. And I work in spurts. I pile it up.

D: How far behind are you?

W: There's two ways I'm behind, in developing and in printing. It's not easily measurable. I'm a joke. That's the way I am; I mean, that's just the way I work. I've never felt overwhelmed. I know it gets done.

D: Do you have any assistants who work with you?

W: Well, I have a good friend who's a very good printer. And he does a certain amount of printing for me. I do all the developing. If somebody's going to goof my film, I'd better do it. I don't want to get that mad at anybody else.

D: How often does the unexpected or the goof happen when you work? And how often does it turn out to be a happy surprise?

W: I'm talking about technical goofs. I'm pretty much on top of it. The kind of picture you're referring to would have to be more about the effects of technical things, technical phenomena, and I'm just not interested in that kind of work at all. I've goofed, and there's been something interesting, but I haven't made use of it. It just doesn't interest me.

D: Are there any of your photographs that you would describe as being key in the development and evolution of your work?

W: No, I don't deal with them that way either.

D: How do you deal with them?

W: I don't know. I don't go around looking at my pictures. I sometimes think I'm a mechanic. I just take pictures. When the time comes, for whatever reason, I get involved in editing and getting some prints made and stuff. There are things that interest me. But I don't really mull over them a lot.

D: Well, what interests you the most? What's the most important thing to know about your work?

W: I think there's some stuff that's at least photographically interesting. There are things I back off from trying to talk about, you know. Particularly my own work. Also, there may be things better left unsaid. At times I'd much rather talk about other work.

D: Your work, particularly in Public Relations, has often been compared to the work of that master press photographer, Weegee. Do you see any comparisons or similarities?

W: No, I think we're different. First of all, he dealt with very different things. I don't know who makes that comparison. It doesn't make sense to me at all.

D: Tell us about your new book.

W: It's called Stock Photographs. It was done at the Fort Worth livestock show and rodeo. I was commissioned to shoot there by the Fort Worth Art Museum for a show. You shoot one year and the show is the next year, when the rodeo is in town. It was a big group show. I was the only photographer. There was a videotape guy and some sculptors: Red Grooms, Rauschenberg, Terry Allen. I think I hung some, I forget, sixty or so pictures in the show. And at the opening, somebody asked me if I was going to make a book out of it. And I knew I wouldn't. I mean, if I was going to make a book, I'd want to shoot more. You know, you do a book, and you want it to be a crackerjack of a book. Anyway, this person gave me the idea, the next year I went and did some shooting, and then the following year I did some more. And that was it. I probably shot a total of fourteen days, give or take.

D: You were teaching in Texas then, so you had some familiarity with cowboys and the West. It's been said that those rodeo pictures don't tell very pleasant truths. The image of the cowboy hero is somewhat deflated. Was that your intent?

W: My intention is to make interesting photographs. That's it, in the end. I don't make it up. Let's say it's a world I never made. That's what was there to deal with.

D: But one does select what one photographs, and what one doesn't...

W: Well, if you take a good look at the book, it's largely a portrait gallery of faces — faces that I found dramatic. And some of those turned out to be reasonably dramatic photographs. But that's all it is, I think. They're in action; there's people dancing. Plus some actual rodeo action and some other animal pictures, livestock stuff. That's the way we're living. It's one world in this world. But it's not coverage; it's a record of my subjective interests.

D: There is another record that you made of one of your interests, at least at the time! I'm referring to the book on women. How did you assemble that collection?

W: It's the same thing, you know. I'm still compulsively interested in women. It's funny, I've always compulsively photographed women. I still do. I may very well do "Son of Women are Beautiful." I certainly have the work. I mean, I have the pictures if I wanted to try to get something like that published. It would be a joke.

D: Do you intend to?

W: No. That's all we need, another book like that! The thing that was interesting about doing that book was my difficulty in dealing with the pictures. When the woman is attractive, is it an interesting picture, or is it the woman? I had a lot of headaches with that, which was why it was interesting. I don't think I always got it straight. I don't think it was that straight, either. I think it's an interesting book, but I don't think it's as good as the other books I've done.

D: Which book did you enjoy most? Are there any projects that were more satisfying to you, while you were putting them together or when they became public, in books or exhibitions?

W: No. I enjoy photographing. It's always interesting, so I can't say one thing is more fun than another. Everything has its own difficulties.

D: When Tod Papageorge was the curator of one of your exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, he observed that you do not create pictures of significant form, but rather of signifying form. What does that phrase mean?

W: I think that's what photographic description is about. That's how a camera describes things.

D: Throughout your work, there is a narrative voice, and an active one at that. Do you agree?

W: I generally deal with something happening. So let's say that what's out there is a narrative. Often enough, the picture plays with the question of what actually is happening. Almost the way puns function. They call the meaning of things into question. You know, why do you laugh at a pun? Language is basic to all of our existences in this world. We depend on it. So a pun calls the meaning of a word into question, and it upsets us tremendously. We laugh because suddenly we find out we're not going to get killed. I think a lot of things work that way with photographs.

D: In much of your work you've described contemporary America. Do you find any recurring themes, or any iconography that either engages your attention or should engage ours?

W: Well, you said it before, women in pictures. Aside from women, I don't know. My work doesn't function the way Robert Frank's did.

D: What are you working on now?

W: I've been living in Los Angeles and photographing there. That's it.

D: Any particular subject matter?

W: No. I'm all over the place. Literally.

D: And then you're going to look at those contact sheets and realize once again that the work comes together — as a book, or something else...

W: I really try to divorce myself from any thought of possible use of this stuff. That's part of the discipline. My only purpose while I'm working is to try to make interesting photographs, and what to do with them is another act — a later consideration. Certainly while I'm working, I want them to be as useless as possible.

D: What made you move to Los Angeles?

W: I wanted to photograph there. But I'll come back to New York. I think I'll start focusing in more on the entertainment business. I have been doing some of that already, all kinds of monkey business. But I'm all over the place, literally.

D: When you say the entertainment business, do you mean things that relate to movies?

W: Yes, movies. You know, the lots, et cetera.

D: Rather than the "stars"?

W: Whatever. I may very well move in. I just don't know. I can't sit here and know what pictures I'm going to take.

D: Is environment — location — a very important influence on your photographs?

W: Well, Los Angeles has interested me for a long time. I was in Texas for five years, for the same reason. I wanted to photograph there. And the only way you can do it is to live there. So I'm living in Los Angeles for a couple of years. I've been a gypsy for quite a while. It'll come to an end. I'm going to come back to New York. I'm a New Yorker. Matter of fact, the more I'm in places like Texas and California, the more I know I'm a New Yorker. I have no confusions. About that.

D: We've talked about the influence of people like Walker Evans and Cartier-Bresson and Robert Frank, of course, on your work. How would you contrast your work to theirs?

W: I wouldn't. We're different, I think. With Evans, if nothing else, it's just in terms of the time we photograph. And my attitude to a lot of things is different from Evans'. Let's say I have a different kind of respect for the things in the world than he does. I have a different kind of seriousness. This might be misunderstood, but I certainly think that my attitude is different. And generally the cameras I use, and how I use them, are different. The things that he photographs describe a certain kind of exquisite taste. And let's say the things I photograph may describe a lack of that. You know what I mean? He was like a very good shopper.

D: And you?

W: I think the problem is different. I was thinking about him and Atget. The things they photographed were often beautiful, and that's a hell of a problem, to photograph something that's beautiful to start with, you see. The photograph should be more interesting or more beautiful than what was photographed. I deal with much more mundane objects, at least. I don't really; actually, I deal with it all. I can't keep away from the other things, but I don't avoid garbage.

D: Do you think that some of those mundane objects are a holdover from your early commercial work?

W: No, no, I don't.

D: You worked in advertising for a long while. Did that influence your work?

W: I doubt it. I mean, I was able to work with two heads. If anything, doing ads and other commercial work were at least exercises in discipline.

D: Would you advise a young photographer who had to earn a living to turn to teaching or to commercial work like advertising?

W: You'd have to deal with a specific person. There's all kinds of people teaching who don't do anything worth a nickel. Likewise in advertising. Then there are some people who do get it together, so I wouldn't make any generalizations. You know if a specific person was asking me such questions, I might think I could tell well enough to say. Or I might say nothing. I don't know.

D: What general advice would you give to young photographers? What should they be doing?

W: The primary problem is to learn to be your own toughest critic. You have to pay attention to intelligent work, and to work at the same time. You see. I mean, you've got to bounce off better work. It's a matter of working.

D: Do you photograph every day?

W: Just about, yes..

D: But you don't develop every day?

W: Hell no! No way.

D: John Szarkowski called you the central photographer of your generation. That's very high praise.

W: Right. It is.

D: But it's also an enormous burden.

W: No, no problem at all. What has it got to do with working? When I'm photographing, I don't have that kind of nonsense running around in my head. I'm photographing. It's irrelevant in the end, so it doesn't mean a thing. It's not going to make me do better work or worse work as I can see it now.

D: Did you ever expect your life to unfold the way it has?

W: No, of course not. I mean, it's ridiculous. I had no idea. How can you know?

D: What did you have in mind?

W: Surviving, that's all. That's all I have in mind right now.

D: Flourishing, too?

W: That's unexpected. But I'm surviving. I'm a survivor. That's the way I understand it.

D: What are you going to do next? Do you have any exhibitions or books planned?

W: No, nothing cooking, not at the moment. Just shooting, that's enough. It's a lot of work organizing something, whether it's a show or a book, and I don't want to do it every day.

D: You have enormous curiosity that propels you from one project to the other.

W: I don't think of them as projects. All I'm doing is photographing. When I was working on The Animals, I was working on a lot of other things too. I kept going to the zoo because things were going on in certain pictures. It wasn't a project.

D: Do you think that's the way most photographers work?

W: I don't know. I know what happens. I have boxes of pictures that nothing is ever going to happen to. Even Public Relations. I mean, I was going to events long before, and I still am.

D: Have you ever had any particularly difficult assignments or photographic moments?

W: No, the only thing that's difficult is reloading when things are happening. Can you get it done fast enough?

D: You obviously have some secret because you are known as the fastest camera around...

W: Well, I don't know if I'm really the fastest. It doesn't matter. I don't think of it as difficult. It would be difficult if I were carrying something heavy, but I carry Leicas. You can't talk about it that way. I'm not operating a shovel and getting tired.

D: You said earlier that you sometimes think of yourself as a mechanic. Do you also think of yourself as an artist?

W: I probably am. I don't think about it, either. But, if I have to think, yeah, I guess so.