



Publishing as a Way of Creating
Wirklichkeit

My working mode was to give an open invitation to an author, and then I'd print anything so long as their submission/piece fit in the 5 x 8" format, and the back covers were consistent. Kathy asked for photos to be included. She described how she wanted the images to *challenge the text*. I shot in black and white in New York for the issue, which was not my way of working at the time.

CK: NYC in 1979 came out in 1981, and it's N° 9 in the Top Stories series. How many issues did you publish in all? When did you start? Who were some of the earlier writers?

AT: There were 29 "issues" of *Top Stories* (1978–1991) but three were double

issues, so we made 26 books. The double issues were perfect bound, not stapled.

CK: *Top Stories was a huge influence when I moved to New York. Definitely I was thinking about Top Stories when I began the Native Agents series for Semiotexte in 1990. I'm surprised no one has made the connection! The Top Stories books are so intimate. I can still remember lines from some of them, like Gail Vachon, "Disco music makes you want to buy ..." Acker made a good choice, including the photos. Your images amplify the text. They lift it off the page and make the story even more readable.*

I notice you chose the most "urban" looking images to include in the book. The outtakes are surprisingly unsexy, old-fashioned—it felt almost like looking at Vivian Maier's pictures of mid-20th century Chicago. Did you take pictures often? Was photography part of your work at the time? What was it like, going around NYC, image-grabbing for Kathy?

AT: I certainly saw a connection between *Native Agents* and *Top Stories* and there are overlaps between the two series. Ann Rower was someone on my "possibilities" list for some time.

I most identify as a photographer. Most of my creative work has been in photography. But at the time, I was mostly shooting color, and studio and/or set up work, often using text. I was very attuned to literature. I studied writing with Walter Abish and Ray Federman, and finished the coursework for a Linguistics PhD.

Between the late '70s and mid '90s I felt disconnected and disinterested in street photography. But when Kathy wanted images for NYC in 1979, it made sense to go out and shoot.

It was 1981. I shot from 57th Street down to Chelsea and felt like my relationship to the city was changed. I was looking at big buildings and corporate New York and looking at people differently than I would have otherwise. I was thinking of Kathy's (or Janey's) Nana.

I spent most of my life downtown, working in Tribeca and Soho, although I also had a job in Times Square at night. Several of the outtakes are taken around Port Authority or on 42nd Street. I'm somewhat sorry I didn't document the

peepshow storefronts. Although, in some of the outtake photos you can see the marquees. On the other hand, I purposely did not want an illustrative relationship to the text.

CK: Did Kathy give you the story, or did you select it? She rarely wrote short, so it seems as if it was written to be a pamphlet.

AT: Kathy had been a visitor to Hallwalls. At some point in 1980 or 1981 I saw Kathy read at the "Poetry Project" and invited her to do an issue. She didn't take me up on it immediately, but she wrote me from San Francisco asking if the offer was still good. She sent *New York City in 1979*. I had been giving open invitations, not asking for anything specific. *New York City in 1979* had been published in the San Diego 'zine *Crawl Out Your Window* and had won a Pushcart Prize. She asked that photos be added. My first inclination was to ask several photographers to submit individual images. Friends encouraged me to do the photos myself.

Here's what Kathy wrote:

What I really like, as far as books go, collaborating with an artist, not just using pictures to illustrate (subordinate role) but having another mind (desire) to destroy my egotism & multiply the energy. However since you're the publisher, it's finally your decision. But it is hard for me to say—oh, just a picture on the cover, or a picture of this & this—when what I desire is a whole—a whole visual-language object. How about a sort of Russian constructivist (like) object? Do you have any ideas? I know people in NYC who would help and I am sure you do too. Why not make it AMAZING as long as we're making it?

Love,
Kathy



Wirklichkeit Books, founded in 2019 in Berlin, publishes books to find words, images and actions for a new actuality. The program includes titles by artists and writers side by side with historic positions relating to poetry, play, language and art. Publishing is understood as an experimental and joyful act that engages with the travel of ideas and is seen as a way of creating *Wirklichkeit*.

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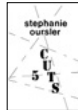
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