

Why Think?

In a world that is so connected through social media, phones, computers, TV, etc., information is delivered to us faster than ever. The instantaneous nature of information being shared to the masses—whether it’s entertainment or news—maybe prevents people from thinking for themselves. The problem is, the more we stay connected to everything going on in the world, the less we can think for ourselves and form our own opinions about everything.

When to Think?

I like to think while I’m walking in nature. I go on these walks toward the art museum here in Philadelphia along the River Trail, where I can enjoy nature, trees, fresh air, and look out toward the river. There’s an elevated space at the end of the walk, where I can gaze out towards beautiful architecture and admire the natural beauty of my city.

When I’m walking, I think more clearly, especially when I’m outside. Indoors isn’t as conducive to creative thoughts—the small space and ceiling almost trap them. Outside, it’s as if my thoughts can *touch the sky* and come back down with a better signal than WiFi. I think it’s also important to find time without thinking at all. When I’m photographing, I stop thinking and just exist in the now. It’s important to have this balance between thinking and *not thinking*.

The Angel of Death

I was born and raised Roman Catholic, went to Catholic school from pre-K to grade 8. I actually enjoyed Catholic school as a kid and found it provided a space for creativity and imagination. Every Friday, we’d have arts and crafts, always have time to go outside and play, pray, and learn about the mysteries of Jesus and theology. Every month, I remember sitting in the chapel in silence for a few hours, just pondering and imagining life in a *carte blanche* way. Life was pure and simple then; all I knew was Jesus and the stories we learned in class.

Maybe being more like a child and having imagination is the goal as an artist. But I'll never forget the time I learned about the *angel of death*. That night, I went home, fell asleep, and woke up from a nightmare. I ran to my mom's room, scared, wondering if the angel of death was coming and if we were going to die. I realized, at a young age, that the fate of every human being is eventual death.

Now, every morning, I wake up grateful to simply be alive, to have fresh air and the sun above. I also think it's important to be critical of religious teachings and consider Jesus as a philosopher. Forget him dying on the cross for sins—just think of him as a guy with good ideas who shared wise thoughts with his disciples. The problem with religion is people get caught up in it and take it literally. Maybe I'm starting to see *the sun as God*. The sun is real and gives me the energy to speak my thoughts!

I've Only Just Started Thinking

Thinking about my past, I see how I lived on autopilot—constantly exploring, photographing, creating new work. I didn't put much thought into the work I was creating or life in general. I became deeply invested in my craft, focused only on becoming a better photographer, which I guess benefited me in the long run. But stepping back from social media and disconnecting from contemporary culture allows me to think for myself and *start to carve my own path*.

What's the Point of Thinking?

I believe critical thinkers will run the future. It's easy to become divided in today's world because of the mass amount of information and fear-mongering online. As soon as the news hits everyone's iPhones, young college students are out on the streets with cardboard signs, blocking traffic without even giving it a second thought.

Honestly, I don't trust anyone using social media. I just assume anyone leaving comments is an AI bot, not a real person. A lot of online info could be fabricated by some loser in his mom's basement, trolling. A lot of online users become dark, emo

types, enjoying the demise of others from behind a screen. Look at comedy today on TikTok and other platforms—it's all about watching people in pain and suffering, and just laughing at it. It's *foolish at best* and not funny.

NPCs Everywhere

A non-playable character (NPC) in a game like *Skyrim* has a limited set of responses when you interact with them. They repeat the same few phrases. Nowadays, people act like NPCs. I see it in the elevator: people turn the other way, glued to their phones, avoiding interaction. It's like anti-social behavior is normal now.

We should face each other in the elevator. Be personal—tell people a random story from your life instead of “Have a nice day.”

Phones Are Generally Bad

The problem with phone use is that it lacks the human behaviors needed for real-life conversation. I only use my phone to FaceTime my brother and for blogging. Other than that? Just delete social media and embrace *digital minimalism*. I don't trust anyone constantly watching YouTube, listening to podcasts, or staying connected online like that.

Flesh is the Future

Flesh, physical life—this is the future. Sure, we live in a digital world now, with virtual reality and tech innovations, but true value lies in being in the *flesh*. People who wear AirPods in public drown out reality, listening to music or garbage podcasts as they walk. You can't think for yourself if you're constantly plugged in.

When I hold the door open for people, they can't even make eye contact because they're buried in AirPods, disconnected from real life. Going forward, stay in touch with your local town and what's happening around you. Everything else is a

distraction and not worth it. Disconnect from the digital world and connect with *real life in the physical flesh*.

Why Does This All Matter?

We're alive in the most insane and incredible time to be alive. We have Amazon, unlimited resources, yummy food, hyper-realistic video games, simulations. Think of *WALL-E*—the humans in hover chairs, fed information on screens, eating junk food, their ship hijacked by a robot while they can't even steer it themselves. Could this be our future?

Maybe all we can do is laugh in the face of chaos and embrace it.

Merge with the machine, use the tools we have to our advantage, but *remain grounded in the flesh*. Enhance your thoughts with ChatGPT, study etymology, learn whatever you want, but remember to stay social. *Human beings in the flesh will run the future*. Those who think critically, without excess media influence, will be the innovators and movers. As artists and photographers, we need to move forward with skepticism and optimism. The future may be bright, but we also need to recognize the physical and mental decline happening around us.

We can either become super-soldiers or end up like the people on *WALL-E's* ship.