

Driven by Courage

My body is the vehicle and I am driven by courage

The human body is the ultimate vehicle, driven by the courage to move, adapt, and evolve, whether through nature or technology.

Motivation

At the core is the Latin root “motus,” which means “motion” or “movement.”

When I consider motivation, movement, it derives from the ground, from your two legs, moving, through the world. When thinking of motivation, think internally, about your body, and how we can frame this notion without relying on the external world. In this modern world we use vehicles, such as bikes, cars, busses, trains, or even planes, to transport our bodies. However, what if your physical body, is the *ultimate* vehicle?

In the context of photography, movement and motivation is critical to consider. The more that you move, the more that you see, and the more that you see, the more that you photograph. Is this not the ultimate goal of a photographer, to make more photographs? So perhaps we must consider walking more, and the photographs will follow.

Consider our physical body, movement, and the human being. We are bipedal, stand upright, have a tall spine, and the capability of walking long distances as we were once hunter gatherers, millions of years ago. Our posture allows us to have a clear, panopticon view of our surroundings, so that we can spot potential prey and danger. Perhaps the most critical body part of the human being are the muscles in our legs as they are what move us first and foremost, to get food. However, to move, you must be *driven* by courage, or your heart.

Courage

This Old French word is derived from the Latin word "cor," which means "heart."

When you think of a photograph, perhaps you imagine a print, light on surface, a moment, memory, a story. However, when I consider the photographs that I make, I believe that they are merely a reflection of my courage, or my heart.

Why?

A photographer is required to position themselves on the front lines of life, on the arena, or the street, both physically and emotionally, with courage and curiosity at the forefront. The photographs I make become a reflection of my lust for life itself.

The first thing that I learned about practicing photography and new locations is that you must set your body in motion without preconceived notions of what you will find. What this means is, do no prior research, and simply move your body, into the unknown.

While I studied in Jerusalem, I wanted to photograph the wall that separates Israel and Palestine. Initially, I googled the news and researched about Camp Shu'fat in East Jerusalem. Everything I learned was negative, setting fear in my body and soul. I was hesitant to enter this location, however, through mustering up some courage, I moved onward, through the checkpoint, and walked around this looming wall. Photographing the wall, a rock flew from the hillside, and smacked me on the back of my leg. A young boy threw it at me, and that actually hurt quite a lot. Despite this pain, and fear of confrontation or physical harm, it was resilient and I kept going back day after day. I began to become more playful, beatboxing in the streets, arm wrestling with strangers, eating food and drinking coffee, entering homes, praying in mosques, and even boxing with a young Palestinian man.

By putting my heart on my sleeve, with courage at the forefront, and fear set aside, a beautiful and spontaneous moment occurred at the wall. A young Palestinian boy threw a baby stroller at the wall, creating a looming shadow, and a peculiar image that asks questions, something greater than I could've ever imagined. I believe

that this photograph, this moment, is merely a reflection of my courage, positioning myself on the front lines of life. I was only able to make this photograph through courage, moving my physical body closer to life itself. I even climbed on top of the wall, and conquered this location.

Perhaps there is no more land left for man to conquer, but we can dominate within the realm of art and photography through the digital world.

The evolution of man was an act of courage?

Around 2.5 million years ago, during the Stone Age, when human beings first began making tools, crafting bows, and arrows, perhaps was when the human spark of courage was born. We mustered up the courage to experiment and innovate. The creation of tools help us cut and chop, providing us with an innovative solution to food security. Learning to manage a fire was perhaps the most courageous leap in our evolutionary history. Fire provides humans warmth and protection to survive the cold nights. Fire also provides heat, allowing us to cook food, nourishing our bodies after hunting our prey.

Mythos

During one of my trips to Israel, I visited the Valleh Elah, where the famous battle between David and Goliath took place. I spent time exploring some ancient caves, discovering pieces of clay pots scattered throughout the dirt from around the time of the Bronze Age. The story of David, a small shepherd boy, overcoming the giant, goliath, in a battle, was the ultimate act of courage. While this small boy is seemingly weaker than his opponent, the use of a slingshot with a small rock was enough for him to win the battle. By armoring himself with God, courage, heart, and moving onward into the chaos, the unknown, with the precision of a headshot, defeated Goliath, and used his sword behead him. By armoring himself with courage, David went from being a mere shepard to the king of Israel.

Last summer, in 2023, when I visited Florence, I enjoyed looking at the sculpture of David, Hercules, and Achilles. The stories of these heroes become an archetype that man can use for inspiration to strive to be like and become greater than themselves. When I consider David, I recognize the importance of faith and bravery.

While Achilles is an inspirational hero, it reminds us that despite being a debit card, we all have tragic flaws, his being uncontrollable wrath. When I view the sculpture in Florence of the death of Achilles in the arms of Ajax, it reminds me of the transient nature of life, and that death can be a beautiful part of our human nature.

Logos

Perhaps to overcome the fear of death is the zenith of what it means to be courageous. By overcoming this fear, humans can transcend that of a mere mortal, and become a demigod, similar to Achilles, through the legacy they leave behind. These stories remind me that death is a natural part of life, and that by accepting our mortality, we can live life more virtuously.

As a photographer, maybe you cannot live forever, but you can make a photograph.

Transcendence

The word “transcendence” comes from the Latin verb “transcendere”, which means “to climb over” or “to surpass.” It is a combination of the prefix “trans-”, meaning “across” or “beyond,” and the verb “scandere”, meaning “to climb.”

Everyday I enjoy listening to the Wanamaker Organ in Philadelphia as it is the largest playing pipe organ in the world and sounds twice per day at 12 -!: 5:30 for a free show. I believe that this is one of mankind’s greatest artistic achievements and am very grateful to have a place to appreciate beautiful art. When I consider art, and beauty, perhaps its ultimate goal is to go beyond this world, to an uplift the human spirit to a new height. When I look up at the Wanamaker Oregon, positioned

at a high elevation, standing in front of a tall, eagle sculpture, built of bronze, and every feather rot by hand, underneath a high and elevated ceiling, my soul is uplifted and fueled with vitality. I believe that architecture, sculpture, and music, are the Apex of beauty and art, and the experience of listening to the Wanamaker Oregon is transcendental.

While walking around the beauty department in the Wanamaker building, I was admiring the columns, lamps, and details of the ceiling. I noticed a series of plaques that describe the motto of the 13 colonies of the United States of America. New York's motto read, "Excelsior" which means "to strive for greatness."

The word "excelsior" comes from the Latin adjective "excelsus", which means "high," "lofty," or "elevated."

This notion, to strive for greatness, is perhaps what motivates an artist. This idea, resonates with me deeply, as I seek to go beyond myself, striving for the lofty, the elevated, or even the transcendental within the photographs that I make. *Is this possible through the medium of photography?*

Pathos

The word "pathos" (πάθος) in ancient Greek means "suffering," "experience," "emotion," or "feeling."

While listening to the Organ, I'm reminded of my grandmother, who worked in the beauty department within the Wanamaker building. I think to myself, perhaps she listened to this organ when she was around on earth, and pay homage to her by listening to this organ every day. She was a very devout Catholic who attended church every single day. By her bedside, where I currently reside now, she kept a table, filled with pictures of all of her friends that she lost along her lifetime. She would always describe to me how her friends were in heaven now, and were guardian angels watching over her.

Soul

My brother used to play the piano song, “Heart and Soul” composed by Hoagy Carmichae, and my grandmother would sing along.

*Heart and soul, I fell in love with you, Heart and soul, the way a fool would do,
Madly!*

While the song is primarily about romantic love, it has me contemplate what a soul is.

The term “soul” is derived from the Old English word “sawol” or “sawel,” which referred to the spiritual and emotional part of a person, as distinct from the physical body.

I think, therefore I am?

When I contemplate what “soul” is, I come to the conclusion that it must be the connection between your mind and your physical body. However, are these two entities separate? Without the mind, how can we perceive the physical world around us? When I think about a soul, I mostly think about a physical body. Also, the physical body becomes a reflection of the connection between your mind and your body, or your soul.

A thought experiment:

Person A: Smokes, vapes, drinks alcohol, soda, eats artificial flavored foods, fake sweeteners, processed food, and eats McDonald’s

Person B: Eats animal based protein, grass fed beef, organ meat, cage free eggs, and organic foods

Why does this matter?

The things that we consume, become a reflection of our soul. The more junk you consume, it is inevitable that your physical body will become weaker, or even uglier.

A beautiful body is a beautiful soul. An ugly soul, is an ugly body.

Think of a smoker, and the physiological effects this has on your body. Firstly, there is lung damage, and the risk of lung cancer. There are risks of heart, disease, cardiovascular problems, and a weakened immune system. Not to mention, the effects on your reproductive health and fertility.

I do therefore, I am.

So what if what we do, is who we become, and what our soul truly is. How can we create a stronger and more beautiful soul?

Nourish your body. Nourish your mind. Nourish your soul.

Does the soul live on after death?

I think so, therefore it will. If I didn't think so, would it even matter? After all, I suppose it is our convictions that ultimately shape our perception of reality.

Evolution

To move is to be human.

A human being, without the capability of moving their physical body, becomes something else?

Consider the first human to receive the advanced brain-machine, neuralink, by Elon Musk, that allows users to directly connect the human brain to computers. Because the chip is directly implanted into the physical body, the physical brain of the patient, should we now consider this person a cyborg?

I suppose you could even consider the use of a phone, a car, or a vehicle, as a way for us to evolve, to become an *augmented human*. Perhaps we are already augmented humans, even considering the way that I am writing this essay right

now, simply clicking a microphone on a touchscreen, an iPhone, and speaking directly to it. I no longer need a pen or paper.

I suppose evolution is the ultimate goal of humanity after all. We have gone from the horse and buggy, to an automated, self driving, cyber truck. From bows and arrows to drones and robots. Perhaps the fatal flaw of evolving with technology is the inevitable denial of the human body. The more we sit down, compress our spines, and spend time inside, operating computers, or driving vehicles, the weaker we will become overtime. Not to mention the ethical concerns of how we utilize the technology, for instance, in warfare. A young boy, sitting behind the comfort of a computer, can operate a drone, and kill a massive amount of people, without even being physically or emotionally connected to the place itself.

However, I consider the use of a camera, and how it augments my life, my body, in a positive way. The use of a camera allows me the ability to augment life itself, to create an instant sketch of life. The world becomes my canvas to create upon through the use of technology.

So, in a world that is rapidly changing, and humans evolving, where should we focus our attention?

Physical

“Physical” originates from the Greek word “physis” (φύσις), which means “nature” or “natural.” In ancient Greek philosophy, “physis” referred to the fundamental nature or essence of things, contrasting with the artificial or constructed. We should remind ourselves of the natural state of a human being, and the world itself, being that of matter, energy, and force.

For instance, let’s say I spent the evening on my phone, texting, listening to music, and blasting my eyeballs with artificial lights. This inhibits my sleeping patterns, as I sleep less, and wake up feeling fatigued, with less energy and power. When I go to perform my daily tasks, I am sluggish, not performing at my peak capability. I have brain fog, and cannot even think clearly. To be honest with you, this is one of the first days in a while that I’ve had bad sleep, and as I write this essay, I feel all

over the place, fatigued, constantly having to lay down on my back, under a tree, think, and then go walk again. on days where I go to bed early, get 8 to 10 hours of sleep, I wake up with an insane amount of energy and power. I believe that this is where we should be as human beings, with an insatiable lust for life, zest, and physical power.

Through walking long distances, now with my new rogue, 40 pound weighted vest, I can strengthen my spine, my body, by allowing the force of steel and gravity, to increase my longevity. The more that I walk with this vest, the stronger I will become. The stronger I become, the more energy I will have to walk, and ultimately create more art, and photographs. I believe in the realm of photography we get way too caught up with what makes or breaks a “good or bad” photograph. Instead of this basic notion, let us consider strength, physical strength.

A strong photographer, will create strong photographs.

This is an inevitability. This is truth. Photography, while being this visual game, of putting order to chaos through the mundane, is first and foremost, a physical pleasure of moving your body. It’s just a matter of time.

Telos

The word "telos" (τέλος) is an ancient Greek term that means "end," "goal," or "purpose."

When I consider the purpose of life, photography, and art, I ask myself, what if there is no end goal, or purpose? What if you never reach the top, the peak, the finish line? Perhaps then, the goal, should be to remain in the state of production. Detaching yourself from the outcome, or any external reward, or validation, you find meaning in the process itself. Just think, would you still make photographs if you could not see the results of the photographs themselves? Or, would you still make photographs, if you never made a book, a print, or had a gallery show? The more that I photograph, the more that I realize I simply enjoy the process of making photographs. I make photographs for the sake of making photographs.

Ethos

The ethos of street photography is rooted in courage, curiosity, and the candid nature of capturing spontaneous moments. A street photographer must position themselves on the front lines of life, engaging both physically and emotionally with their surroundings. The photographs produced are a reflection of the photographer's lust for life, driven by the courage to explore the world and the curiosity to see and capture the beauty and stories in everyday scenes. The ethos of street photography requires movement, presence, and a genuine connection to the environment and the people within it.

Time

Humans are designed to be outside, in the physical world. Anytime that I'm inside, under fluorescent lights, confined to a box, I feel as though my soul slowly dies. Also, when I am stagnant, not moving my physical body, I feel as though time just passes by. However, when I'm walking, moving my body through the world, experiencing novelty through the chaos of every day life, I exist outside the passage of time. Through movement and the creation of new photographs, you possess a superpower.

You can create a new world in a fraction of a second

The mundane and fleeting moments of every day life becomes something transcendental, something other worldly, or the mundane is not what it seems, and it becomes a dream. The clouds, peering beyond the horizon during the sunrise become a sublime vista that goes beyond beauty, through the creation of a photograph.

The Latin word "sublimis" means "uplifted, high, exalted." It combines "sub-" (up to, under) and "limen" (threshold, lintel), literally meaning "up to the lintel" or "uplifted to a high place."

Think of the paintings of Caravaggio, with strong contrast, lighting, chiaroscuro, such as the painting “Saint Jerome Writing.” In the painting, you see Saint Jerome, hunched over inside, writing, with a skull on his table. While this symbolizes mortality and the contemplation of death, perhaps we should view the sublime works of Caravaggio for inspiration.

Inspiration

The Latin word “inspirare” means “to breathe into” or “to inspire.” It combines “in” (into) and “spirare” (to breathe).

When viewing this painting of Saint Jerome, or any of Caravaggio’s work, we should allow the imagery to breathe into us a new life. While there is beauty in the decay, through the transient nature of life and the passage of time, let’s elevate our human bodies to a new height. Let us champion this physical world.

From physical movement to artistic creation, humanity is fueled by courage and motivation to transcend our limitations. By embracing our bodies as vehicles and harnessing the power of courage, we can navigate the world with purpose, leaving behind a legacy of strength and beauty through our art. Ultimately, courage is not just a trait but a fundamental force that propels us forward, enabling us to conquer new frontiers in both life and art.

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