

Morning Practice: Photography as Discipline, Curiosity, and Play

5:02 a.m., 72°F, Philadelphia. *What's popping, people?* This is Dante, getting my morning started along the Schuylkill River Trail. Today, I'm rocking the Rogue 40 lb plate carrier, 20 lbs in the front, 20 lbs in the back. It's bright and early, my favorite time to practice photography. There's something about practicing—about truly embracing the discipline of photography—that doesn't get talked about enough.

When I say *practice*, I mean the kind of practice you see in sports. Think of a basketball player hitting the court each day, honing their free throw or dribbling to increase their shot-making odds. It's a daily, repetitive action. I see the street as my court, my arena, and my canvas. The more we practice, the sharper our eye becomes, the more likely we are to make shots worth remembering.

Strong Photographers, Strong Photographs

In photography, I believe physical and mental strength go hand in hand. *The stronger the photographer, the stronger the photograph.* Photography is physical—it's about moving through the world, positioning yourself, and capturing moments. I'm out here with a weighted vest, and I feel every muscle firing. The more I lift, the more I walk, the stronger my body gets.

I think about hypertrophy—a growth and strengthening of muscles through repeated use. The opposite is atrophy, the loss of strength when we stop moving. Photography works the same way. The less we use our camera, the less we challenge our vision, the more our skills fade. Consistency and repetition are critical; practice keeps us sharp, in that *flow state* where we're fully engaged.

“When you think of strength and photography, remember that motivation quite literally derives from your legs, from the movement of your body.”

Embracing the Edge of Chaos

Street photography demands courage and fearlessness. Every morning, as I walk along the river, I do a little parkour along the railing. One wrong step and I'm in the river—it's exhilarating. Courage is essential to photography, to getting closer to life itself, physically and emotionally.

"The street photographer is on the front lines of life. Physically and emotionally close to life, and that requires courage. Core, meaning heart—you have to go out there with heart."

In the street, the only guarantee is unpredictability. Just this morning, a biker passed by, and I tried a panning shot as he sped through the darkness. Moments later, he confronted me, asking to delete the photo. I simply smiled, deleted it, and moved on. *The key to defusing confrontation is to stay calm and polite.* Philadelphia's got its grit, and encounters like this happen, but they're part of the practice.

Discipline and the Movement of Motivation

Photographing daily—no excuses, no matter the weather or mood—is essential to growth. Think of weightlifting: the more you use your muscles, the stronger they get. Similarly, the more you shoot, the stronger your eye becomes.

"Motivation is simple; it's the movement of your physical body. The more you move, the more you see. And the more you see, the more you shoot. Get out there, keep moving, keep photographing."

The street photographer belongs in the world, *on the front lines of life*, not sitting inside. Life's too short to spend indoors.

Composition as Visual Problem-Solving

Each morning, I approach a sculpture along my walk. To some, it's just an inanimate object, but in my eyes, photography is about *creating something from nothing*, uplifting the mundane. Photography is a form of visual problem-solving, like piecing together a puzzle in real-time:

"Where must I position myself to make a coherent and compelling composition?"

From eye level, the sculpture often blends into the background. So, I drop to a low angle, elevating the sculpture against the sky, isolating it from distractions. This approach makes the composition clearer, with the sculpture framed cleanly against the open sky. Every day, I refine these techniques.

On my recent trip to Coney Island, the packed boardwalk made composition challenging. The beach, however, offered a simpler backdrop of sand and ocean, letting me capture the scene without clutter. When photographing dancers on the boardwalk, I dropped to a low angle, using the sky and amusement rides as my background. Sometimes, simplicity is key.

Training the Eye: See with Clarity and Curiosity

In the end, we must train our eyes to see the world as a canvas of shapes, forms, and lines. Light changes constantly, transforming scenes depending on the time of day or weather. Even if I walk the same path each morning, I never take the same photograph twice. This idea of constant novelty fuels my curiosity to keep practicing daily.

"I feel a sensation of abundance through recognizing the endless potential of the mundane, photographing the same place over and over and finding joy in it."

Practicing Photography as Play

I consider my morning walk like a video game tutorial, returning to it each day to practice, learn, and adapt. Today, I'm using my Ricoh GRIIIx with a 40mm lens—a focal length I rarely shoot with. Practice is everything. Each day, I aim to increase my curiosity by one percent. This spirit of play, of experimenting with shots and settings, frees me from overthinking and helps me reach a flow state.

“Detach yourself from the results, the photographs themselves. Embrace the spirit of play and just shoot.”

Key Takeaways

- **Curiosity** is the ultimate goal and measure of growth in photography. Increase it daily.
- *Think of photography like a sport.* Just as an athlete practices to improve, a photographer must shoot every day.
- **Embrace the unknown** and approach confrontation calmly and politely.
- **Discipline and movement** are critical. The more you move, the more you see, and the more you shoot.
- **Simplify composition.** Position yourself to minimize distractions and highlight your subject.
- **Train your eye** to recognize shapes, forms, and light, finding endless possibilities in the mundane.
- *Photograph with a spirit of play,* returning to the same places and finding new ways to capture them each day.

Through daily practice, I find new perspectives, fresh compositions, and infinite potential in the familiar. Photography is about more than images; it's about living on the front lines of life and discovering the beauty in the journey.

“Increase your curiosity by one percent each day. Don't think, just shoot.”