

Wanderer

The only life worth living is a life full of vitality.

At the end of my day, after eating, the sun begins to set, and I can feel my body slowly shut down. For our bodies are like batteries, full of electric currents, firing throughout our body, giving energy to our brain, our heart, our muscles, and all of our vital organs. By leading a day full of power, standing upright, walking with a strong gait, embracing the elements, the sunlight, and chaos, I give the day all I've got. When it comes to vitality, we must consider sleep more critically and how we can maximize our energy by recharging our battery.

I wake up before the sun starts to show some light beyond the horizon. I enjoy slamming down espresso I pre-prepared the night before in the fridge so that I can drink it with speed, entering my Dionysian state of frenzy. I do some simple stretching, strap on my 40-pound plate carrier, throw on a pair of barefoot shoes, with a big hole in the bottom exposing one of my toes, and hit the nature trail along the Schuylkill River. I wake up with Spartan rigor and embrace the discipline of the early hours. These daily rituals enhance my lust for life itself, as I wake up, eager to practice my photography, throwing my camera in my front right pocket, and hitting the streets as early as possible. I'm just so eager and excited for the day, cheerful for the morning time, excited for the sun to rise, and find joy in the journey ahead each day.

Detach

Don't be bound to anything.

In terms of photography, forget about the pictures, the results, and the outcome. Simply make photographs for the sake of making photographs, finding joy and meaning in the process. Use photography as a way for you to affirm life, giving meaning to the mundane.

Order and Chaos

In the context of everyday life, recognize the chaos within you and the world around you. While there is order and structure to the streets, because of the infrastructure, the grid system, the traffic signals, stop signs, and streetlights, the humans who dance upon the streets are full of chaos and unpredictability.

*“One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star.”
— Friedrich Nietzsche*

As a street photographer, we enter the unknown, embracing spontaneity, and put order to chaos, placing four corners around life, and saying yes, following our instinct, our gut. Perhaps it is our instinct that we ultimately must become more in tune with, as this is where our most vital and alive selves can be born, where our chaos is born, giving birth to that bright light within us.

Every morning, I march to the highest elevated place near me, behind the Philadelphia Museum of Art, standing on top of the cliff. I seek a high vantage point, somewhere to place my beacon down, like a lighthouse, shining in the darkness. I need to look out beyond the horizon, for it is my instinct to look out and gaze into the unknown. My gut tells me to stand at the precipice each day, to move onward into the unknown. When I look out at the horizon, I remind myself that I could live until I'm 120 years old and still not experience everything in this life. When I have a Panopticon view of my surroundings, have a view of 360° around me, I feel on top of the world, transcending beauty and experiencing the sublime.

Light and Shadow

As I gaze out towards the horizon, eager to see the sun pierce above, I'm reminded of light, and its impact on my life, as my medium of choice within the realm of photography. We must not forget that photography is merely drawing with light.

The word photography comes from the Greek words “phōs” (φῶς), meaning “light,” and “graphê” (γραφή), meaning “drawing” or “writing.”

By embracing black and white, light and shadow, we return to the essence of the medium, creating an instant sketch of light, an instant sketch of life.

The more I contemplate light, the more I realize why I hate the night. In the nighttime, there are no shadows cast. In the nighttime, there is no sunlight. In the nighttime, there is nothing but artificial light. Artificial light is not something that intrigues me; it's boring, and I'd rather sleep, waking up the next day, eager to catch the rays of the sun instead.

When I think of light and shadow, I'm reminded of the allegory of the cave by Plato, and notions of self-perception. Like the prisoners shackled to the cave, viewing the shadows cast from the fire in the cave upon the wall, those shadows tell a story about the world around them, and are the only perception they have of reality. When I walk around the city, I find playful ways to photograph my shadow, I sometimes even wave at it, and question the nature of things, and what makes something true or false. When I consider photography, light, and shadow, perhaps there is no ultimate truth, when it comes to making a photograph. A photograph lies, a photograph is merely a reflection of our perception of reality, and not the true reality. But what is true reality? Is true reality another world, a heaven, a metaphysical area that we haven't yet discovered? Maybe reality is within our bodies, our biology, our physiology, and the physical world itself. When I walk with my feet firmly on the ground, I'm reminded that I'm bound by gravity. We are people of this earth, and physics is real. Photography allows the individual to experience the surreal, and to create a new world, a new reality.

Become a God

God is dead and we've replaced him with bureaucracy.

The order and structure that bureaucracy provides a city is frankly amusing. We are born into this world, and immediately assigned a Social Security number. We go through the public school education system, trained to sit down, listen to a bell ring, obey, and take orders. Eventually, we go to the DMV, get a driver's license, after waiting for our number to be called, to then have another number assigned to our license. When I enter the workforce, I'm given a payroll number, a bank account number, a debit card number, a phone number, and if I want to join a union, I'm just

a number on a list. We were born slaves to a system that we involuntarily agreed upon. We're dependent on the systems to provide us with our basic needs, such as food and shelter. The main problem with the system is that I believe we are currently facing a hamster wheel, where we are indebted to the systems, just getting by, providing us with the right amount of money in a bank account to provide us with food and shelter, just enough to keep us treading above water. Because of this, the individual within the system has no time, quite literally time itself, to even think for themselves, do things for themselves, ask questions about the universe, the world, life, and make deeper relationships, founded upon common beliefs of spirituality that give life a deeper meaning. Our new spirituality has become this consumer culture that we've all adopted, replacing these deeper questions with the pursuit of power, pleasure, and material goods. We chase social status, instead of making an effort to go deeper within our personal and immediate communities. We have become atomized, scattered, spread out from each other, and no longer are one tribe. Think of the modern workplace, how we are confined to an office building, a cubicle, boxing ourselves in upon boxes and boxes, caged like zoo animals. We are living in a post-noble world, a slave world, and have been trained since a young age to be the perfect candidate for this slave factory.

Let's rise above these modern spaces, these artificial environments that atomize us, that separate us, and become our own God.

Our Body is the Vehicle

Let's return to the basics, to the foundation of what makes us human. We have two legs, stand upright, with a tall spine, and a head that sits on top, providing us with the ability to look at our surroundings, with our clear vision, our eyes, and our intuition that alerts us of danger, or any potential predators that come our way.

Our body is the vehicle, and we are driven through curiosity and courage.

In this modern world, our cars are the vehicle, and we spend most days sitting on our butts, being driven around by a big metal chariot like a toddler in a baby stroller, pacified.

By recognizing the connection between your mind and your body, and the body as the ultimate vehicle, we can return to nature. We must align with the highest version of ourselves, by practicing daily physical exertion, by making an effort to use our bodies. With the pursuit of pleasure, comfort, and power, comes the decline of the physical form, the human body. By sitting down each day, taking orders, and staying in that cubicle in the workplace, we are denying our true and authentic selves from coming out of us. Let's return to nature, through physical exercise, and make an effort, each and every day, to stand upright, and use our vehicles.

When I'm full of power and energy, you cannot get me to sit still. You cannot tell me to do this or do that, if it requires me toiling at a computer like a monkey. My theory about the city is that nothing is really happening, that we are merely here as players, actors, pretending, making this game so boring, so tedious, so degrading and dehumanizing, to the point where we are becoming actual robots in the flesh. But let us return to flesh, as the ultimate technology, aligning with nature, and what it means to truly be human, to play a vital role within this cosmic drama.

When the individual returns to nature, we recognize our role within the animal kingdom. For the human being is the apex predator, not the lion, not the bear, for those animals have no conscience, no wit, no ingenuity. But the human being, with our hands, and our opposable thumbs, have been given the ability to craft tools, to make arrows, to craft guns and bullets, to hunt prey, to kill animals, and to feast on the flesh.

Feast on the Flesh

I will never forget when I arrived at my village in Zambia, Africa, as a Peace Corps volunteer, presented with a goat, hanging from a tree, and a knife to slaughter it. For the next week, we feasted together, my initiation as a surrogate member of the Bemba tribe. During my time spent in Jericho, during Eid al-Adha, the day of sacrifice, hundreds of sheep were slaughtered throughout the streets, and the community fasted all throughout the day, waiting for the evening, the sun to set, to feast as a community.

These experiences remind me of the importance of fasting, sacrifice, and eating real animal-based protein. My new idea is that the only real food is flesh. We must eat the flesh of animals, fueling our physical bodies with the energy it needs to sustain us throughout the day. When I eat meat, I am no longer dependent on food throughout the day; I no longer have cravings or an insatiable appetite. I am fully satiated, full of vigor, power, and can move onward each day with strength and vigor without the need of snacking like a squirrel or a zoo animal in a cage, waddling to a vending machine within an artificial space to purchase a granola bar or a soda pop.

Be a Fool

I may be right, or I may be wrong, but who cares. I am a fool, I am an amateur, and I know nothing. I am merely a vessel, a vehicle, moving through this world, open and eager to learn each day. Through the medium of photography, I embrace the spirit of play, treating the world around me as a playground or canvas.

I don't take myself so seriously, and find this to be the best place to be, as I can endlessly evolve, through the process of photography, getting closer and closer to life itself. By remaining in this amateur mindset, that of a fool, I experiment endlessly, with the ability to find meaning in the mundane. By photographing with a snapshot approach, letting my instincts carry me, I return to that childlike spirit of play that carries me throughout the day.

No Destination

I have no destination in mind. There is no goal. There is only process.

There is only walking, thinking, photographing, asking questions, and then doing it again. I never had a goal. I never really cared. I only enjoy making the work, moving onward endlessly. I don't want to stop. I have no plan.

Wander

I don't need to go anywhere new, for I can dive inside my mind.

There are endless streets to wander in this city, so don't get left behind.

Find yourself in a curious state, a childlike state of mind.

Don't be afraid to enter chaos, and step out of line.

Live dangerously. Wander.

DANTE