Street Photography at 15th and Market: Embracing Light and Shadow

Standing at the corner of **15th and Market Street** in Philadelphia, right outside City Hall, I've got my Ricoh GR IIIx in hand, and today, I want to share some insights on street photography. When photographing on a bustling corner like this, there's a lot happening—different people, contrasting lights, and dynamic shadows. So, here are some thoughts on capturing compelling images in this environment.

Positioning and Light: The Basics

One of the first things to understand when shooting on the street is how to work with **light** and **positioning**.

> *"Eventually, you want to have the sun at your back if you're aiming to get light on the faces of your subjects."*

Tips for Positioning:

- **Keep the Sun at Your Back**: This helps illuminate your subjects while creating a balanced exposure.
- **Background Matters**: Look at the background—anticipate how it will appear in your frame. When you understand the way people move through the space, you can position yourself to capture the best angle.

For example, with the **sun at my back**, City Hall's tower and surrounding structures fall into shadow, allowing me to highlight subjects against a darker background. This **chiaroscuro effect**—the dramatic contrast of light and shadow—can make subjects stand out powerfully in the frame.

Adjusting Exposure for Light Variations

Another essential skill is **using exposure compensation** when shooting directly into the light.

> *"If you're shooting toward the sun, just crank the exposure comp up by +2 stops."*

How to Adjust:

- **Exposure Compensation**: On the Ricoh GR IIIx, or any camera, increase exposure by two stops when facing toward the sun. This technique keeps subjects from becoming silhouettes and preserves more detail in their faces and clothing.

While I often prefer shooting with the sun at my back, there are moments where shooting into the light adds a unique touch—especially when managing the **exposure compensation** effectively.

Blending In and Working Corners

Corners are great for street photography because they let you blend in effortlessly.

> *"You can shoot around quickly, positioning yourself at different parts of the street without drawing much attention."*

With a **bus stop nearby**, I can blend in as though I'm waiting for the bus. This stealthy approach makes people feel at ease, creating more candid, natural moments in the frame. Here are a few ways to make the most of corners:

- **Stand Back and Wait**: Position yourself at the corner and wait for people to step into the light patches.
- **Anticipate Movement**: Watch for those moments when people step up onto the curb or walk into the spotlight, with light hitting their faces perfectly.

Playing with Shadows

Light and shadow become key tools on a corner like this, especially in winter when light is **dramatic** and creates intriguing visual effects.

"There's a magic that happens when people pass through shadow areas like this."

Techniques with Shadows:
1. **Use Shadows as Dividers**: Elements like poles or building shadows can divide the frame or cast patterns on the subjects' faces.
2. **Light as the Subject**: Light itself can become the focal point, transforming a simple street shot into something **visually striking**.

For instance, if a **pole divides the frame**, it not only splits the image but can create shadows that cut across a person's face or body, highlighting certain features while concealing others. These interactions add depth and emotion to an otherwise straightforward shot.

Wrapping Up: Finding Your Light and Enjoying the Process

To make the most out of a street corner:

1. **Find a Patch of Light**: Set your back to the sun and look for light patches.
2. **Try Different Angles**: Don't be afraid to change positions, experiment with exposure, and see what the environment has to offer.
3. **Enjoy the Process**: Street photography is about *exploration* and *patience*— there's no single "right" way to capture a moment.

Every corner, every shadow, every change of light brings something unique to the image. Street photography isn't just about capturing a scene; it's about embracing the light, waiting for the right moment, and finding joy in every frame.