

Street Photography Breakdown: Part Two

What's poppin', people? It's Dante.

Today we're going to be dissecting some of my street photographs here in this *Street Photography Breakdown: Part Two*. In these videos, I hope to give you the information that I wish I had when I first started practicing street photography.

I want you to not only come home with an understanding of how I form a composition and think about the visual elements of street photography, but I also want you to understand the philosophy and the way in which I engage with the world — and the behind-the-scenes of how the photographs were made — as a way for you to then apply some of these ideas to your own practice.

That's the goal with these videos.
Hopefully, you'll learn something today.
I'm sure you will.

Without further ado, stay tuned as we go through five of my photographs from traveling the world and making street photographs.

Example 1: The Barber in Zambia

As I arrived as a Peace Corps volunteer in Lusaka, Zambia, I was immediately drawn to a nearby chaotic market.

Right off the bat, I noticed a barber.

In these chaotic environments, it's difficult to create a photograph that **puts order to the chaos** — but that's ultimately our goal:

"To articulate the unknown, to go forward into these spontaneous, unknown experiences, and then put order within the frames."

At this particular moment at the barbershop:

- I approached the scene.
- A man randomly walked by, looking back at me at the fraction of a second I pressed the shutter.
- His **gaze** added emotional impact to the frame.

Elements of the frame:

- **Foreground:** Strong gesture and gaze from the man.
- **Background:** The barber holding the head of the man getting his haircut.
- **Middle:** Pole dividing the frame, with beautiful light and deep shadow.

A strong photograph synthesizes:

- **Content** (emotion, gesture, gaze)
 - **Form** (composition, light, shadow)
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Example 2: Zambian Boys at the Marketplace

In my village of Mpanta, Zambia, I spent about a year getting to know the people intimately.

Speaking the local language allowed me to connect with these boys deeply.

I found the market at sunset to be a perfect place for photography.

At this scene:

- The boys' shirts matched the background colors.

- The light was elegant.
- I needed to simply *be present*.

Compositional decisions:

- Cropped out the boy's mouth to only reveal his **eyes looking back** at me.
- Eyes of the boys carried you through the frame:
- Boy on the left looks at the boy in the middle.
- Boy in the middle looks at you.
- Boy on the right looks to the right.

The magic:

- Playfulness between me and the boys.
 - **Light and shadow** also acted as another layer.
 - A spiral composition of gazes carried your eye naturally through the frame.
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Example 3: Toy Gun in Mumbai

At Dharavi, the world's largest slum, I followed my curiosity down new alleys.

"Don't be afraid to explore the world and go down your own path."

By following intuition, I stumbled upon a playground filled with kids.

Key moves:

- Dropped low to separate the chaos against the blue sky.
- Captured a boy shooting a toy gun in a decisive moment.

Little cherries on top:

- Girl with a bandaid on the right, smiling.

- Boy underneath the toy gun, eyes looking up with seriousness.

Lessons:

- **Foreground and background matter equally.**
- Dropping low gave subjects a clear stage against the blue sky.

Street photography is about:

"Embracing the chaos and spontaneity, and then having all that haphazardness come together naturally through positioning your body."

Example 4: Zambian Women on the Dirt Path

During my Peace Corps service, I admired the hardworking women of Zambia.

One morning, I noticed some women passing by and decided to step out of my hut. I grabbed water, snacks, and chatted with them for 20 minutes.

"How you engage with the world is what will reflect back in the photographs you make."

Photographic decisions:

- Dropped to a low angle to be at the woman's level.
- Captured the woman's gaze back at the viewer.
- Included light and shadow play across the subjects.

Composition layers:

- Woman in foreground gazing at you.
- Woman in middle-ground crossing her arms.
- Woman bending over in background.

The blue sky acted as a stage tying it all together.

Moral of the photo:

"The goal of a street photographer is to uplift humanity, to champion humanity and elevate them to a new height."

Example 5: The Rooster on Market Street (Philadelphia)

In my hometown, I kept seeing this peculiar man with his rooster.

One day, I decided to talk to him. A week later, I came back and made this frame.

Following curiosity:

- Dropped to a low angle again.
- Included the rooster's eye looking back at you.
- Caught the man's quick, spontaneous gesture of looking up.

Tiny details:

- Reflection of a girl in the mirror behind them.
- Leading lines of the sidewalk and blue sky to frame the scene.

Because I returned to the same location repeatedly, and built some familiarity, this photo became possible.

Final Thoughts

Hopefully, you learned something today.

I could talk about these photos for hours, but I just wanted to give you a *brief introduction* to how I make photographs, and how I *philosophize* about street photography.

Remember:

"Life is outside of the four corners of the frame. Life is outside of your door. Life is outside of the window. You just gotta pick up your camera and go."

Photography is the *excuse* to live a richer life.

Take a bus, take a train, walk — go down a new street.

One thing I'll repeat over and over again:

"Photography has nothing to do with photography. Photography has everything to do with how you engage with humanity out there on the front lines of life."

Allow photography to enrich your everyday life.

Over my 10-year journey photographing in the streets, that's where the joy has come from — the experiences themselves.

The photographs are the *byproduct* of your life experience.

Additional Resources

- Visit my website: dantesisofo.com
- Grab my free PDF of contact sheets.
- Check out my YouTube playlist for *POV behind-the-scenes videos from Mumbai*.

Thanks for watching – and see you in the next video. Peace. 🙌