

Mobility is Freedom

As a biped human being, who has two feet, two legs, a tall spine, and a head on a swivel that allows me to stand upright and move my physical body throughout the day, I find walking to be the ultimate freedom in life.

The Flâneur

For the past two years straight, I've been walking in the morning. Come around 5 AM, along the river trail, I listen to the birds singing, look at the new buildings that are being constructed, and watch the sun rise above the horizon at dawn as I stand on top of the cliff, looking out towards the horizon. Every single morning, I've reminded myself how grateful I am to simply have the ability to walk and to wander, to observe life. This, to me, is the ultimate luxury—the ultimate privilege in life—to be in the great outdoors. I just consider myself the ultimate flâneur in my hometown. This, to me, is an identity that I can get behind. Because honestly, is this not the ultimate way of life? To have no destination, no plans, no burdens—but just the leisure and the free time to enjoy the day?

It's fascinating—I've watched this new high-rise apartment building rise from the ashes. When it was a mere empty lot, now it's standing tall, the lights are on, and they're doing the finishing touches. It looks like the New Yorkers are continuously moving to Philadelphia, as the prices to live there are outrageous, and now these new apartments are conveniently located next to the 30th Street Station so that they can live in Philadelphia and commute to New York for work. If you're a street photographer, it seems like Philadelphia is the future—the best place in the world for street photography—and you should get here fast before it's too late!

Why Philadelphia?

Firstly, this is the most walkable city in the United States of America. You literally don't need to own a car, and hardly even need to use public transportation. It's so easy to get around—you just hop out your door and move your body. The streets are

laid out on a grid, it's very easy to navigate, and we have so many green spaces and public parks that make the city so much more aesthetically beautiful than others. Not to mention, our grand architecture, history, and two riversides that are very accessible, that I like to call the Philly beach. Our new trail just opened up that extends outwards towards Grays Ferry, with a new bridge that was built, which now makes the trail even longer for me to walk on—and it's such a pleasure, honestly.

We have a real forest—the Wissahickon Forest—that you can get lost in during the summertime, and watch as the trees change colors over the course of the seasons into the fall. Is Philadelphia paradise? I definitely think so... Honestly, I could live here for the rest of my life and never leave, and live the same exact day on an eternal loop and be completely exuberant for life each day. But how?

Paradise

When you think of paradise in the context of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc., think of it more so as a metaphor. Paradise is waking up in the morning with vitality in your body after a night of deep sleep, simply feeling physically, mentally, and spiritually ready for the day. Paradise is waking up in the morning feeling grateful for the simple pleasures in life—for the sunlight, the ability to move, the clean water in your cup, and all of the beautiful things that you can see, do, and explore throughout your day.

I essentially like to think of life as a 24-hour timeline. I don't think about the past or the future, but consider each and every day as a lifetime. When you frame each day as a lifetime, would you rather live in paradise or hell? Would you rather be watching the news, keeping up with social media, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, watching YouTube videos, Netflix, eating junk food, and staying indoors all day? Or, if this was your last day, would you go out in the morning just to catch the sunrise, walk, listen to the birds sing, pray, think, read, write, create art, and continuously move, explore, with vitality in your step?

To me, the only life worth living is a life full of vitality. A life in hell is a life of weakness, self-denial, pleasure-seeking, hedonism—a sedentary life. A life in paradise is a life of strength, life affirmation, fasting, having good gut health and a

clear mind, eating satiating food, and a life of maximum mobility, free in the great outdoors.

The Problem with Modern Street Photography

So what I've noticed are these current trends in street photography that we have to crush and move beyond. The first one that I've realized, many years ago honestly—maybe like 5 to 7 years ago—I started to really think about this: the trend towards the illusion. Think of the juxtaposition—the illusion photograph—where you try to line something up with the advertisement in the background, whether it's a gesture, matching colors, or any sort of quirk or illusion photograph that makes it so that the viewer has this trick in their head, like it's playing with the perspective of the person or the subject or whatever.

Think of a lot of those photos that are made from the eastern photographers in the world, particularly in places like India, Bangladesh, Bangkok, etc. Definitely stay away from this kind of photography. It's like the junk food of street photography.

Now, on the other hand, we have the American street photographers, who are heavily inspired by those like Robert Frank, Bruce Gilden, or Garry Winogrand. Is it just me, or am I the only one noticing this—that everyone is just trying to be the next Winogrand or something? Leica, 28mm, sloppy compositions, looking to photograph a beautiful woman, a character, etc. It's boring. It's been done. Now the new thing is: just shoot film, but shoot pictures of random trash, found objects, or anything quirky that looks like it could be posted on Tumblr in 2012, and call it a good shot.

Where's the innovation in street photography?

An Idea for You

Buy the new Ricoh GR IV when it comes out, and try using small JPEGs only, with high-contrast black and white baked into the camera, with all of the contrast and settings cranked to the absolute maximum. Why? It's not an aesthetic choice, a

style, or a trend. It's a way to simplify the process from the ground up. It's a way to return to the essence of the medium of photography—light itself.

Just check my blog for the post on my ultimate guide to the Ricoh for street photography.

Light is Our Subject

We gotta start a new school of street photography—one that returns to the essence of the medium: light itself. Seriously, when you look at the word *photography*, it literally derives from *phos*—light—and *graphe*—writing/drawing.

I think the problem with a lot of street photographers these days is that they're looking for a theme, project, or something very specific to photograph. But once you return to the essence of the medium being light itself, light becomes your subject—not only as the medium but as the thing itself that casts upon the surfaces around you, the people, places, things, and moments.

And when you embrace light and simply observe the way that it's cast upon the world—our canvas—you have infinite ways to draw upon the world. This, to me, is the challenge: creating something from nothing. However, by embracing the way in which light changes throughout the day and the change of seasons, you can find infinite novelty and infinite ways to innovate within the realm of photography.

For photography is endless when you embrace light, for light is always changing, always in flux. And when you recognize this, you recognize this one simple and very fundamental philosophy that I've adopted in my photography:

You cannot make the same photograph twice.

I can return to the same cliff, at the same vantage point, like I do every single morning, and make a photograph of the same scene of the same thing every single day for the rest of my life, but the photograph I make will never be the same.

Is this not the most abundant and most beautiful thought for a photographer? Because think about it—so many people get burnt out because they feel as though they've seen it all, done it all, shot it all, and there's nowhere left to innovate or create in the realm of photography. People limit themselves, give themselves checklists, themes, and projects—but once you embrace this endless stream of evolution, transformation, and flux in your photographic practice, by simply following the light and drawing with the light, you unlock the infinite potential of photography.

And I believe, truly, this only comes through stripping down to the bare bones and necessity of light and shadow, black and white, and cranking it to its maximum. This is the only way forward, in my opinion, to innovate in photography. It's to really push the limits of not only the medium and what it's capable of technically and aesthetically, but also in terms of the **philosophy** that the photographer adopts.

The Eternal Loop

If you had to live the same day over and over again for the rest of your life, could you thrive? This becomes an existential question that I ask myself each and every morning. Why? Because it's very relatable. You wake up in the morning, you have a cup of coffee, your water, you grab your camera, and you go out for your day. You go to work, you come home, maybe go to the gym, go to sleep, and repeat.

We're all living this life simultaneously, together—this eternal loop—and I think it's important to recognize this very fact. That we all eternally return to the same morning with a blank slate each and every day. However, will you affirm this? Thrive in this fact—that you will eternally return to the morning each day? Or will you deny this fact?

To me, photography becomes life affirmation—of affirming this eternal loop of life each day. With each click of the shutter, I'm just saying *yes* to life itself. I'm very detached from the results of the photographs I make, but very much immersed in the process of making the photograph.

Trust the Process

Almost 3 years now, making photos in this newfound process of black and white, and I still haven't stopped going. I still don't look back and dwell on the photos I made yesterday, but I affirm and I know that my next photograph is my best photograph.

With this mindset, you simply trust the process and let go. No longer are we dwelling on the photos that we've made yesterday, or trying to make a series and arrangements of photos for books and scenes and gallery shows. We just simply become vessels for the medium. This, to me, is my ideal photographer—one who simply embraces the process, trusts the process, affirms the process, and lets go of the outcome of the process itself.

You become a vessel for the medium of photography. You're simply there and prepared with your camera, ready to press the shutter. For it is always in your pocket, and you just simply live your everyday life and bring the camera for the ride. And then, whatever you photograph—through authenticity and your raw and visceral approach of snapshotting your way through the day—becomes an outward reflection of your internal soul.

Internal Versus External

There's a lot of noise in the modern world. There's a lot of chatter. However, in silence and solitude, you'll find eternal peace and lush.

Honestly, the most I talk in the day is just in the morning. I'll listen to the birds singing, do this little essay, make a video or two, and then my lips are shut throughout the entirety of the day. Why? I think it's important to only speak when you have something important to say. There's just so much chatter and noise in the world, and I feel like by keeping my lips sealed, I'm doing my part of making the world a better place.

I'm not trying to say that you should be antisocial—because I still love society, I'll chat with my bus drivers, my coworker, and have small talk here and there—but there really is power in limiting the words you use and tapping into the internal—the

dialogue that you have between you and your conscience.

And then, through following your conscience and living within your internal world, the photographs you make of the external world become an outward reflection of your internal world.

The Goal?

Create a new world.

So once you have all this vitality in your body, you have deep sleep, you're lifting weights each day, you're eating the right foods, you're fasted, you have a clear connection to your brain, your gut health is on point, and you just have all this enthusiasm and joy and eagerness for the day in your heart and soul and body—it's inevitable that there's going to be this abundance of overflowing energy in you to pour out into the world.

And my way of pouring out that creative energy is through photography. And so that's why I wake up at dawn to shoot photos—simply because I *have to*. I essentially have to transmute the energy from my physical body into a creative act of photography. Otherwise, life just doesn't feel like it's worth living. Because if you let all the energy lay dormant inside of you and don't do anything with it, well then what's the point?

The point, the purpose, the meaning in life, is found through creation. The creation of beautiful thoughts, even simple exchanges, like smiling or waving at people. The creation of videos, photos, etc. We can find meaning in life.

And so my thought is—what better way to give life meaning than to immerse yourself in your own world and to simply create your own world through the medium of photography? This is why black and white photography makes sense to me—it's a much easier way, a much more tangible way, an accessible way to abstract the world around you, to create a new world in a fraction of a second.

This, to me, is the superpower of photography—it gives the photographer the ability to not only have a voice, to have something to say or create, but to literally create a new world and immerse yourself in that new world throughout the entirety of your day, week, month, and lifetime.

Detachment?

The more I use this term *detachment*, I realize it may sound like it has a negative connotation. However, maybe a better way to think about it is simply not being attached. When you're not attached—to the world, to the result of your photos, to the outcome of your situation, relationship, etc.—I think then you can finally be free.

Think of a bird—untethered, unbounded, with no chains, but two wings that allow it to fly upward and onward into the world. This is where we should be: flying, moving, endlessly. For when you're detached from the outcome—or even the world generally—you become lighter and loftier and float upwards.

Jesus said to be in the world, but not of it.

And honestly, this is something I heavily relate to. I don't feel like I'm here for no reason. I know that I'm here for a purpose. Even if it's to wake up one other person, to bring joy to their life, in whatever way that could be—whether it's through something I say, a photo I make, a meaningful conversation, etc.—this is what it means to me to be a fisher of men.

When Jesus approached Simon and Andrew as they were fishing, and told them to follow Him and that He would make them fishers of men, it's an invitation to paradise. Wouldn't you want to take other people with you—to join you in paradise?

Love is Paradise

So when I contemplate the life, morals, and teachings of Jesus—it's the purest form of love that any teacher, philosopher, or human being has ever embodied walking on planet Earth. And so what I realized is, through following His teachings and

embodying them in my everyday life to the maximum potential that I can possibly achieve, I feel this abundance of love flowing through me.

It's the kind of love that you just want to share with others—because it's overflowing within you, and you just can't help but feel this overwhelming sensation from within, which to me is paradise.

So where there is hate, bring love.
Where there is sadness, bring joy.
Where there is greed, bring gratitude.

And by simply shifting the energy in the room—especially when you're around other people—you can change the world, like a small ripple in the ocean, creating a wave that can eventually turn into a tsunami of love.

Motivation

For the past two months, I've been boxing and find it to be some of the most invigorating training I've ever done in my life. During the heavy bag training, it's just so intense. There's so much going on and so much energy that you're exerting with sheer physical force. I've never sweat this much from exercise before.

Because of it, I've been drinking raw milk with raw honey—kind of like a natural Gatorade—giving me the electrolytes my body needs. I can tell you, this has been a game changer in my diet, and is definitely helping me with recovery, sleep, and I just feel a thousand times better the next day. No need for rest days or breaks.

I'm also doing Ashtanga yoga, which is so insanely difficult and hard, but I'm advancing pretty quickly. You have to do insane poses that are like upside down on your neck—basically like the lotus pose on your neck upside down, backflipping from your neck, putting your toes and your legs all the way over your body in such crazy ways—but it's pretty rewarding to feel the slight progress that you make each week.

Isn't this the ultimate feeling in life? To feel like you're actually moving forward, making progress? If I can extend my body further, reaching for my wrists as I wrap them around my foot, doing a backbend forward, I feel like I'm breaking through, making new strides—not only physically, but mentally, and honestly, spiritually.

When I was laying on my back in this Shiva pose, I could feel the sensation of energy from my back, at the base of my spine, travel all the way up to my freaking head or something. I don't know what's going on, but there's definitely some crazy transfer of energy that occurs during yoga. It's not some wackadoo weird stuff, but I genuinely think when you master breathwork combined with the yoga practice—the physicality, the mobility of it all—it's like paradise.

And then when I'm doing these crazy boxing classes, and you have to move around the bag and move your feet, I feel like I'm one of those freaking video game characters from *Street Fighter*, sweeping my legs around the bag and making punches from the head to the body and shifting my body weight from left to right, moving up and down, moving my feet, moving my hips, my core, twisting my shoulders—it's all so physical and so invigorating and so blissful.

When you come out of a class like that, you just can't help but feel the **peak human experience** of being alive.

*This, to me, is what being alive is all about: transformation—slowly evolving.
But over time, you can reach your final form.*

But What If You Never Reach the Peak?

What if all throughout life, you're constantly returning to the same day—this eternal loop—trying to evolve, pushing yourself forward, stretching your limbs outward, literally and metaphorically, but you never reach the peak? You never reach your final form? You never fully evolve?

Honestly, this is perfection. For me, I never want to evolve to the fullest potential. I want to always be an amateur, returning to day one each day, like I know nothing. Because honestly—we know nothing.

When you feel like you've known it all, done it all, seen it all—whatever—then there's nowhere left to go. There's nothing more worth striving for. At that point, you might as well just plug yourself into the metaverse, strap your brain into a robot, and just be some vegetable who sits there and consumes and has pleasure and is just a brain without a body.

This, to me, is where the trend of life is heading. Just look around you—there's clearly a health epidemic, and this is not good. It seems that we're plugging ourselves into this matrix world—this digital world—but neglecting the physical world.

But the irony is, the more that you embrace the physical world and neglect the digital world, the more that life becomes beautiful.

It's so weird because everything is gearing us toward this mind-over-body experience, but in order to actually become the greatest human that you can be, you have to put your **body over your mind**, and embrace mobility.

Would you rather be strapped into a virtual experience—like a big couch potato—have unlimited pleasure, unlimited intelligence, entertainment, but not have the ability to listen to the birds singing, or feel the sun kiss your skin, or simply walk and move your body?

Or would you rather be outside all day, under the sun, walking, listening to the birds sing, interacting with other human beings, thinking, creating, and just simply being?

Maybe you don't have that maximum entertainment, novelty, or even the intelligence—but at least you're free.

Like honestly, at this point, it's very difficult for me to have any incentive to live otherwise. Like—you couldn't pay me one million, two million, ten million dollars a year, but have me plugged in all day with zero ability to move my physical body. I don't care if I had all this money, and I could buy anything—entertainment, yummy foods, etc.—I would literally deny the million dollars a year if it meant I had to sit down and deny my life for a year.

I would rather be homeless, just roaming the street as a nomad, but have maximum mobility, maximum freedom of my mind, my body, and my spirit.

This is what **true freedom** looks like.

It's being so unattached to this bullshit system that has you chasing this illusion of freedom—which is the apparent freedom of choice that we have—where we have unlimited choices, we have unlimited pleasure. But the irony is that **true freedom comes through eliminating all these decisions.**

The real freedom is in **mobility.**

Just think—if you don't have the ability to move freely throughout your day, are you truly free?

This is the real path of freedom.

Are you somebody who is a moving person, or a sedentary person?

I actually think that this is going to be one of those crazy existential questions or interesting philosophical ideas to think about going forward in the next 5 to 10 years. There's going to be the class of people that just sit in cars all day, and have their bodies moved to a chair, and then there's going to be the people that have the freedom to move and to simply be outside.

So, with that being said—if **real freedom is maximum mobility**, where you were never permitted to sit down until the end of your day, to go to sleep and lay down on your bed—how would you design your life?

Or—is this freedom too much of a challenge for you? Too difficult to choose this path?

Then maybe slavery—and comfort—is a better option for you.