

The Metaphysics of Photography

What's poppin people? It's Dante. I'm walking through Philly right now, fasting, following light, thinking about God. I'm headed towards the Schuylkill River Trail, the Hidden Creek, the Hidden River.

I grew up like five miles up the river, in the Wesikin Forest, on my own. I'd build teepees with sticks, bridges with stones, carry a spear trying to hunt deer, climb trees, swing from vines. And part of me misses that. I'm 29 now, living in the city, but I still feel that part of me. Like yeah, I love people, I love the city, but I *thrive* in nature. Especially rivers. Especially the Schuylkill.

Looking Beyond the Veil

So today I was thinking about the metaphysics of photography. Been thinking about this for a while now, especially since I started shooting differently. For like three years now I've been going hard with this new process: high contrast black and white JPEGs, straight out of the Ricoh GR. No editing. Just raw.

And when I raise the camera up, and I'm looking at the LCD screen, it's almost like I'm looking *beyond* what I can see with just my eye. Beyond the veil.

What is Photography, Really?

So here's the thing. What is the essence of a photograph? What is the essence of photography?

Light on surface. That's what it is.

When you look at the word *photography*, it's for meaning *light* and *graphe* meaning *writing* or *drawing*. We're literally drawing with light. So when I make a photograph, I'm creating an *instant sketch of light*.

But what brings the form to that photograph is me—positioning my physical body in a particular way, with a specific relationship to the subject and the background. I press the shutter at a specific moment. Boom. Four corners around life.

Is a Photograph Truth or a Lie?

Sometimes I think: is a photograph the truth? Or is it a lie? And really, I think it's neither. It's just an *interpretation* of what the camera saw.

Like yeah, the photographer presses the shutter, but the image is based on the optics of the lens and the sensor's rendering of light. That's what determines the output. That's what fascinates me.

Especially now that I'm going deeper down the black and white rabbit hole. Black and white is already an abstraction of reality. And I think in this AI world, where we're generating images through mimesis, imitation, from billions of photos, it's getting wild.

The AI stuff can look *so real* it becomes *beyond real*. But I don't think that's the point of making pictures.

Photography is not about showing reality—it's about showing what could be.

On the Hunt

Right now I got the Ricoh GR III. Set to AV mode. Snap focus at infinity. Aperture f/8. Overexposing by one stop.

I photograph reflected light. Off skyscrapers. Off windows. That glass—wow. That light bouncing back at me? It's otherworldly.

That's what I'm trying to do with my images now. Go beyond reality. Make something that hits you in your chest. Make something *sublime*.

What is the Sublime?

The sublime goes past beauty. Like yeah, I can frame a flower and say, "this is beautiful." But to make a *sublime* image?

That taps into pathos. Into feeling. Into something deeper. When I see light reflecting off a building, when it cuts through the smog, when it *enters my eyes*—I feel something. I feel charged. I feel courageous. I feel bliss. That's when I press the shutter.

Pressing the shutter is me saying yes to life.

It's Overwhelming

Sometimes life is so beautiful it's overwhelming. That's what flows through me when I photograph. It's not rational. It's not planned. It's just raw energy. And I channel that.

I have an insane, insatiable love for life.

That's what I try to show in my pictures. That's what I'm capturing.

The Light by the River

I walk to this cliff by the water and look out at the river. The Schuylkill. I think we're naturally drawn to water. We're mostly made of it. I just *feel* better by water.

When I stand there, and I see the water reflecting the light? It's not just beautiful—it's *sublime*. It overwhelms me. And I follow that feeling.

Photography has nothing to do with photography.

What I mean is... the photograph is just a reflection of how the photographer engages with life. The way I walk. The way I observe. The way I see.

The Three Traits

If you ask me, the best photographers got three traits:

- **Intuition**
- **Curiosity**
- **Courage**

Intuition is that gut response. That animal instinct. You don't think. You just *feel* it and press. That's where the best shots come from. That's where truth lives.

Yeah, I could think about the rule of thirds. I could look for leading lines. But when I follow my gut, when I *don't overthink*, that's when the most authentic stuff happens.

Seeing = Thinking

The word *idea* comes from the root that means *to see*. So to have an idea is to see *clearly*.

And for me, my camera is a way to *manifest ideas into form*. I make pictures to understand the world. To write. To draw. To sketch.

Aristotle's Four Causes (Applied to Photography)

I read Aristotle's *Metaphysics*—super dense, but I got something from it.

- **Material Cause:** the camera, the optics, the sensor
- **Formal Cause:** the frame, the composition
- **Efficient Cause:** the photographer
- **Final Cause (Telos):** the why behind it all

A photo is just light touching a sensor. But when I frame something, I give it *form*. That's putting order to the chaos of life. Because life is in constant *flux*. Everything is moving. The light is always changing. So when I press the shutter, I say, "*This* is what I want to preserve."

Autotelic Photography

Some photographers have intentions. Stories to tell. Protests to document. People to represent. And that's beautiful.

But for me?

I'm into the autotelic approach. The photograph is the goal. It exists for itself.

I'm not chasing a project or a style. I photograph because I can. Because I have the tool. Because I'm here in 2025 with a compact camera in my hand and the light is hitting right.

I'm making images for the sake of beauty.

Reveal Your Soul

When I shoot with no expectations, when I stay detached from outcome—that's when I feel like I reveal my *soul* in the photo.

You might not live forever. But at least you can make a photograph.

A photo becomes a way to *remember*. A way to preserve perception. A way to store soul.

Light Is Everything

I'm obsessed with light. I follow light. I photograph how it touches everything—walls, people, trees, the sidewalk.

You can never make the same photo twice because the light is never the same.

That's why I'm always excited to shoot. Because even if life feels the same, the light never is. That means there's always something new to see. Something sacred to notice.

If light is what created the cosmos, then maybe when I follow light—I'm following God.

Knowing God

If philosophy means “love of wisdom,” then the highest wisdom is *knowing God*.

And God breathed life into us. That's inspiration. *Inspirare*.

When I walk in nature, I breathe deep. I'm exchanging air with the trees. That air nourishes my lungs and my spirit.

When I photograph, I feel outside of time.

I'm not worried about the past or the future. I just wake up curious. I wake up grateful. I walk. I move. I see.

I Am a Vessel

Each night is a mini death. Each morning, a mini birth. I wake up thankful. I've got air in my lungs, water to drink, coffee, meat in the fridge. I'm good.

I fast all day. No food digesting in me. That makes me sharper. Cleaner. My gut connects to my mind and to my eyes.

My body is the temple. I empty myself. I become a vessel.

That instinct I get in my gut—that's what raises the camera. That's what presses the shutter. Not my brain. My *gut*.

Photography is Hunting

Think of a lion. It doesn't eat first and then go hunt. It's fasted. It stalks. It waits. It kills. Then it feasts and chills in the sun.

That's me.

I'm a hunter. A street photographer. Fasted. Focused. Primal.

And then when night comes, I break my fast. I eat. I rest. Just like the lion.

The Street is the Arena

Photography takes courage. You gotta go out into the open world. The street is chaos. But that's the game.

My camera is my sword. I slice through the noise. I reflect the soul of the street.

This practice gives my life *meaning*. Doesn't matter where I am—I can find joy.

And isn't that the whole point?

Vitality and Curiosity

What is the good life?

To me, it's a life full of vitality and curiosity.

So I walk. I look. I photograph. I feel grateful.

You don't need a reason. You don't need a cause.

Just photograph for the *sake* of photographing. That's how you find joy.

Final Thoughts

I remember picking up the camera in high school. Wandering the woods. Shooting flowers, trees, light. Everything was fascinating.

We forget that. We get older and feel like we've seen it all.

But yo, stop limiting yourself. There's *infinite novelty* out here.

The telos of a flower is to bloom. The telos of a photo is to just be.

I'm standing on a cliff now. The river flowing. The Fairmount Waterworks. Philly behind me.

What's my goal? Just follow the light.

Beautiful. Beautiful.