

Tokyo Street Photography Breakthrough: Shooting 71mm Crop on the Ricoh GR IIIx

For the first time in my life, I feel like I experienced a true creative breakthrough on the streets. It happened in Tokyo, Japan—completely by accident, completely instinct-driven, and completely rooted in the flow of light, chaos, and movement. I want to break down the process, the technique, and the exact settings I used so you can understand how these photographs came into being and how you can adapt this approach in your own work.

Following the Instinct

Everything began at Shinjuku Station. It's one of the most chaotic places in the world—waves of people moving in every direction, nonstop. I wasn't overthinking anything. I wasn't trying to "make" a great photograph. I was simply responding to the energy in front of me.

And then it happened.

I accidentally hit the crop mode button on the Ricoh GR IIIx, looked at the screen, and realized I could use **71mm crop mode** intentionally. It felt like a door cracking open. I followed the obsession. I followed the instinct. And that instinct carried me through the rest of my trip.

The Technique I Discovered

What I found most interesting was how **light and shadow carve shape into the faces** of the people I photographed. By placing myself in golden light—sun to my back, or slightly to the side—I could isolate faces against deep shadow and

eliminate the chaos of the street.

Everything became about:

- **Faces emerging from shadow**
- **Slivers of light revealing eyes, noses, mouths**
- **Negative space crushing into black**
- **Simple gestures elevated by light alone**
- **Ambiguity—photographs that could be made anywhere**

The street no longer had a location.

It became pure form, pure shape, pure energy.

Exact Settings

Here is everything baked into the camera:

- **Ricoh GR IIIx**
- **71mm crop mode** (double-tap the side “video” button)
- **Snap focus at 1 meter**
- **Manual mode**
- **1/2000s, f/16**
- **Auto ISO**
- **Highlight-weighted metering**
- **High-contrast black and white JPEGs** (cranked to the max)

These settings gave me:

- Speed
- Precision
- Deep shadows
- High-contrast etched shapes
- A way to freeze people as they walked into the light

Every frame came straight out of camera.

Positioning the Body in Chaos

When photographing in places like Shibuya Crossing, the environment is overwhelming. Thousands of people moving in unpredictable ways. But that's exactly why this technique worked.

You're only in control of two things:

1. **Where you place your body**
2. **When you press the shutter**

Everything else—the light, the chaos, the movement—is out of your control. And that's the beauty of it.

By positioning myself at the edge of the crossing, with golden light ripping through the environment, I could watch faces enter the beam of light. The moment their face appeared, I lifted the camera, got close, and shot.

The foreground.

The background.

The overlap.

The compression.

All of it came together in ways my naked eye couldn't fully see. That's the magic—the camera reveals what you didn't consciously notice.

Ambiguity Over Documentation

For years I focused on traditional documentary-style street photography. But this technique pulled me into a different world. A more abstract world. A world where:

- The place doesn't matter
- The background doesn't matter
- Even the "scene" doesn't matter

All that matters is **light**, **shadow**, and **human gesture**.

Some of these photos have no location.

They're just faces floating in darkness.

Anonymous.

Ambiguous.

Mundane elevated into something more.

That ambiguity is powerful.

Why It Worked

I didn't intellectualize any of this. There was no theory. No plan. No expectation.

What happened was simple:

- I was obsessed with the crowd.
- I was obsessed with the light.
- My body kept pulling me back to Shibuya and Shinjuku.
- I kept following that instinct.
- I shot every day, with intensity, without caring about the outcome.

That instinctual repetition is what created the breakthrough.

One frame in particular—an eye revealed in the background, a mouth revealed in the foreground, light forming shapes through the overlap—became the photograph I had been chasing without even knowing it.

Dual-Wielding the GR System

For this trip I wore both cameras at once:

- **Ricoh GR IIIx on my neck** (71mm crop mode)
- **Ricoh GR III on my wrist** (28mm traditional documentary)

When I wanted to switch from abstract compression to wide documentary, I just swapped cameras instantly. No lens changes. No fumbling. Pure flow.

This was the first time in my life I found true value in using two cameras simultaneously. It opened up a new way of working.

Bringing It Home

The most beautiful part of this technique is that it doesn't require Tokyo. It doesn't require Shibuya. It doesn't require chaos.

All you need is:

- Light
- Shadow
- Curiosity
- A willingness to get close

This approach is coming back with me to Philadelphia.
I want to keep pushing it, keep experimenting, keep finding new ways to see.

The Lesson

Follow the obsession.
Follow the instinct.
Follow the thing that increases your curiosity by 1% each day.

This technique wasn't planned.
It wasn't conceptual.
It wasn't rational.

It was discovered through **mistake, movement, repetition**, and **curiosity**.

And that's the whole point of photography.

If you want my exact camera setup, philosophy, JPEG recipe, and workflow, you can download my **Ultimate Ricoh GR Street Photography Guide** on my website:

👉 <http://dantesisofo.com>

Peace.