

Photography as Unlearning: How to Never Miss Another Sunrise

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

Today I'm thinking about **photography as a way of unlearning** — what that means, and why I'm thinking about this.

Essentially, the ultimate challenge for a photographer is to find *new ways to play the game* every single day.

And my ultimate aim is to **never miss another sunrise ever again** in my life.

The reason I say this immediately is because the **orientation of a photographer** — and the way you feel about life generally — is what influences what you put within your frames and how you play this game. And that game lies in the **mundane**.

Whether or not you have enthusiasm for the day, for the mundane, will ultimately reflect back in your photography.

If you're waking up eager — marching through the snow... *look at all these freaking snow tracks I left, this is crazy* — I think that is the ultimate place to be.

So essentially: by unlearning photography, by unlearning what you think about life generally, you'll wake up with this **insatiable curiosity** for engaging with life and engaging with humanity. And that will propel you out there onto the front lines of life to practice daily — and to infinitely find yourself returning to the sunrise.

Streamlining the practice so photography doesn't get in the way

Some simple, practical ways I'm achieving this goal of eternally returning to photography every single day — despite how mundane things may seem — is by embracing a very streamlined process:

- using a **compact camera**
- **snapshotting loosely** with compositional decisions
- using a **JPEG file** that requires no processing
- having everything technically set in an **automatic** way

Photography shouldn't get in the way.

And stripping away color — using **high-contrast black and white** — has been providing me a solution to the mundane nature of life. For me, that looks like returning to the essence of the medium:

light.

Finding joy in simple things — the way light casts upon surfaces, people, places, and things — and photographing in a way where I'm curious about how light will render in an image through the lens of my camera.

Experimentation, openness, and letting the photograph surprise you

What I'm doing with my practice these days is endlessly exploring experimentation — tinkering, exploring — with this sense of openness to what will reveal itself when I look at the images.

A lot of times what I *think* I see when I make a photograph isn't necessarily what I get back.

What I get back in the photograph is often **what I didn't see**.

So I'm using **abstraction** as a solution to the mundane nature of practicing daily.

I can return to the same park every morning. I can return to the sunrise at the same location every day.

But the way the light casts upon that place will never be the same.

You cannot make the same photograph twice.

Everything is in flux. Everything is changing. The light is out of our control. The spontaneous nature of life is out of our control.

What you control (and what you don't)

We're not in control of the light. We're not in control of the conditions. We're not in control of whether we see something interesting. We're not in control of whether we create a great photograph.

But what we *are* in control of is:

- how often we go out there and see the world
- how often we bring our camera
- how often we walk

We're simply in control of marching endlessly into the unknown — waking up with that empty blank slate, that childlike state of curiosity.

Curiosity requires vitality

I think it's quite impossible to cultivate curiosity without **physical vitality**.

Another practical way I'm returning to photography every single day is by never missing the sunrise — always catching the rays — and aligning my physical body, primally, with the light.

Setting my circadian rhythm. Getting deep sleep. Waking up every morning with energy that overflows out of me into the streets when I'm practicing.

I believe that in order to cultivate curiosity, one must possess vitality in their physical body, and it stems from aligning with sunlight.

And yeah — if you're falling asleep within like five minutes when you go to bed... consider yourself blessed.

When you wake up in the morning, it's like you're born again, and everything can become fresh.

But it requires you to destroy all of your preconceived notions of what life is generally.

Unlearning through non-consumption

There's a lot of noise in the world. A lot of consumption of information.

For the past many years now — around four years — I've completely disconnected from the news, from the media. I really don't consume anything.

I read old books.

I try to make sure I'm in this perpetual flow state — effortlessly living everyday life — and not consuming anything. And through that lack of consumption, I can cultivate my natural and authentic expression with the things I create — with my photography.

So think more about how you can unlearn everything you think you know about everything.

Through that unlearning, you'll discover who you are.

And if you want to give birth to that dancing star — you kind of have to embrace the unknown.

You kind of have to embrace the chaos, the spontaneity — headfirst — with your practice.

Fail daily with consistency. Show up without expectations of what you will see.

And over time — compounding with consistency — you will find your style, you will find your voice, and you will find your place on this giant floating rock orbiting around this ball of fire that I seek to catch every single day.

That's pretty much it.

Thanks for watching, and I'll see you in the next one.