

How I Built an Automatic Street Photography Zine System

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

Just wanted to share some stuff that I'm working on right now.

Currently, I'm printing small thumbnails of my work. As I was putting these thumbnails on the wall and looking through the black-and-white photographs I've been making, I started thinking about how I could effectively go through the work physically.

So I created a contact sheet system.

Each 8.5x11 sheet contains six small thumbnails. Every thumbnail has a barcode that can be scanned to instantly access the original digital file online. This is the beauty of the SmallJPEG workflow. Everything is seamless, easy, and fast.

Each thumbnail contains:

- The date and time the photograph was made
- The sequence number within the Flux issue
- A barcode linking directly to the original file

Right now I have 198 sheets printed.

I can browse through them as contact sheets or cut them apart and place them on the wall as individual thumbnails.

It's a pretty interesting concept, and I highly recommend making something similar.

The Flux Issues

The Flux Issues are chronological sequences of my work from November 2022 through June 2026.

At the moment there are 33 Flux Issues.

They're stored in manila folders. On the front of each folder is:

- The issue number
- The date
- My name
- A barcode linking to the project page

When you open an issue, the first page contains the protocol and artist statement. It explains how the zines are generated automatically and gives readers a way to participate themselves.

By scanning the barcode, anybody can create their own issue.

Every photograph is captioned with:

- Date
- Time
- Photographer name

These are some of the first photographs I made using this workflow in black and white.

Printing Like Bureaucracy

The output is intentionally simple.

I'm printing on cheap office paper using a monochrome laser printer:

Brother MFC-L2820DW

I'm deliberately adopting the aesthetics of bureaucracy:

- Manila folders

- Office paper
- Administrative design language
- Archival and ephemeral materials

I enjoy the imperfections.

The streaks. The softness. The mechanical look.

Printing on office paper creates a different feeling than traditional photo paper, and that's exactly what I'm after.

Every book contains 36 photographs.

At the back is a contact sheet showing all 36 images along with a manifest document containing metadata such as sequence number and capture time.

There's also a barcode linking directly to the online project page.

Open Sourcing the Work

The barcode opens a page where anyone can download:

- The original JPEG files
- The PDF zine
- Contact sheets
- Manifest documents

Anyone can print the exact same book at home.

I'm basically open sourcing the work.

The archive itself is organized chronologically and can be browsed by year, month, and day.

When you click on a photograph, you can:

- View the issue it belongs to
- See the contact sheet
- Download files
- Review metadata
- Access camera settings
- Open geotagged locations in Google Maps

If GPS data exists, you can literally stand where the photograph was made.

That's pretty exciting.

Build Your Own Flux Issue

One feature I recently added is called **Add to Zine**.

You can browse the archive and add photographs into a cart.

Once 36 photographs have been selected, you can click **Build Zine**.

The system automatically generates a PDF.

Instantly.

The format is identical to my own physical Flux Issues, but the sequencing is chosen by the participant.

Anybody can create their own book using my photographs.

The cool thing is I'm giving up control.

The reader becomes an active participant in the work.

Flux Generator

If you want to create your own issue, you can use the Flux Generator.

Simply:

1. Enter a title
2. Enter your name
3. Drag and drop 36 photographs
4. Generate the PDF

The system creates the same zine format automatically.

My recommendation is black-and-white photography.

High-contrast black-and-white images look especially good when printed on standard office printers.

After creating an issue, you can even submit it to the catalog.

Community Submissions

People have already started submitting work.

Recently I reviewed a submission from Brad.

The process is simple:

- Create a zine
- Submit it
- I review it
- It gets added to the public catalog

There's also a miniature zine generator that uses six photographs instead of thirty-six.

These smaller publications can also be submitted and showcased.

Geotagged Photography Projects

Another feature is the geotag submission portal.

If your photographs contain GPS metadata, you can create a project that maps the photographer's movement through space.

You can see:

- Where photographs were made
- Walking routes
- Visual journeys through cities

This connects directly to a project I'm currently building:

Philly in Flux

I'm systematically documenting Philadelphia.

So far:

- Nearly 100 miles photographed
- Around 50 hours of walking
- Entire streets being archived individually

Each street becomes its own project.

Open a street and you can see every photograph geotagged across the entire route.

I'm finding a lot of joy in this project, so I decided to create tools that allow other people to participate as well.

Automatic Publishing

My personal publications are generated automatically.

Every time I upload 36 new photographs:

- The system creates the issue
- Generates the PDF
- Creates the project page
- Updates the archive

Everything happens automatically.

The goal is simple:

Relinquish as much control over the backend as possible so I can focus on shooting and producing.

That's what excites me.

Making photographs.

Then instantly having physical artifacts available for review.

The Wiki

I also created a complete wiki documenting the system.

The documentation can be downloaded as:

- Markdown
- PDF

You can read through the ideas or even feed the documentation into Claude Code to help build similar tools.

Eventually I'd like this entire approach to become a genuinely open-source method of archiving photographic work.

There's even a starter kit available for the geotagging project.

I haven't fully tested it yet, but the goal is simple:

Download the starter kit. Connect Claude Code. Build your own system.

Building With Claude Code

The entire architecture is surprisingly simple.

I'm essentially using:

- Amazon S3
- A folder system on my computer
- Claude Code
- Static websites

Claude Code automatically updates the website.

That means ideas can move from concept to implementation extremely quickly.

Any idea you have right now can probably be manifested with modern digital tools.

You just have to build it.

And that's what I've been doing.

Building systems that remove friction from my personal practice.

Final Thoughts

One thing I'm especially excited about is this new contact sheet system.

Being able to thumb through physical thumbnails and instantly access the original file through a barcode feels incredibly powerful.

The mini-zines are working. The archive is growing. The maps are expanding. The automation is functioning.

And now the contact sheet system is complete.