

## How to Find Meaning in the Mundane Through Street Photography

Yo, what's poppin', lads? It's Dante.

Today I want to share some thoughts on how I'm finding meaning in the mundane through photography.

For the past two weeks, I've been surveying the streets of Philadelphia. Ever since June 19th, I've walked almost 100 miles throughout the city. Right now we're at **97.5 miles, 50 hours, and 17 streets explored.**

I'm mapping out the entirety of Philadelphia through a GPS-coordinated archive, documenting every route, every neighborhood, and every walk.

One of the most recent streets I explored was Woodland Avenue.

During that walk, I stumbled across an incredible story—a man who had been shot in the eye and survived. He allowed me to photograph him, which I'm extremely grateful for.

It's not every day that you meet the *Philly Polyphemus*.

But when I'm out there photographing, I'm not looking for moments like that.

I'm not searching for something emotional, visceral, or impactful.

Those moments come rarely.

And when they do arrive, they're delivered through **dedication, repetition, and consistent photographing.**

What I'm actually seeking is much simpler.

I'm documenting what Philadelphia looks like today.

## Preserving Space and Time

This photograph was made on June 16th.

I'm photographing houses.

I'm photographing homes.

I'm photographing neighborhoods.

I'm not looking for something special.

Because what I've realized is that there is **infinite meaning in the mundane.**

I photographed a beauty supply store with a modern car parked in front of it.

At first glance, the image might seem meaningless.

But I find enormous significance in scenes like this because over time, the photograph will begin to resonate.

It will have something to say.

Simply because everything is in flux.

Everything changes.

The typography on a deli sign.

The architecture.

The storefronts.

The infrastructure.

Eventually, all of it disappears.

Photography allows us to preserve these fleeting moments in space and time.

Even something as ordinary as the sign for Woodland Deli becomes meaningful because one day it will no longer exist.

## **Beyond the Single Image**

I'm increasingly treating photography as pure documentary material.

Beyond the poetry of the single image.

Beyond the contemporary idea that every street photograph needs to be impactful.

Instead, I'm using photography as a way to survey my city.

To record what I find.

It's not about making one great frame.

Those moments come naturally through time spent doing the work.

What I've discovered is that by committing to a consistent process, I dramatically increase the chances of making something meaningful.

I start at one end of a street.

I walk to the other.

I don't turn left.

I don't turn right.

I don't debate whether to shoot color or black and white.

I give myself **extreme creative constraints**.

And those constraints liberate me creatively.

## **Become an Archivist of Your Town**

Whether you live in a bustling city like Philadelphia or a small rural town, there are photographs waiting to be made.

There is potential everywhere.

You simply have to stop hesitating.

Start making.

Look at the world around you as if you are the archivist of your town.

Treat photography as a method of surveying.

As a way of documenting what space looks like today.

Your photographs do not need to resonate with someone in 2026.

They do not need to validate you.

You can still bring your aesthetic instincts and your compositional sensitivities into the work.

But for me personally, viewing photography as documentary material has allowed me to find far more meaning in everyday life.

## **Detaching From the Audience**

I'm completely detached from the outcome.

Detached from audience approval.

Detached from validation.

I am the number one audience member of my own work.

I genuinely love flipping through these photographs.

Yesterday, while walking down Torresdale Avenue—a completely random neighborhood in Philadelphia—I unexpectedly ran into another local photographer.

His mother saw me walking down the street and shouted:

*"Yo, Eli, your friend's out there."*

Eli came outside completely baffled.

He said:

*"If there's any photographer in Philly that's going to be walking around here making pictures, it's going to be you."*

And honestly, he wasn't wrong.

I'm crazy dedicated to this thing.

Later, I made a portrait of him sitting inside his home.

Moments like that are impossible to plan.

### **Photography as an Odyssey**

Exploring new parts of the city has started to feel like my own personal odyssey.

Almost like I'm Odysseus on his journey home.

Every walk becomes an adventure.

Even when there are very few people around, eventually something happens.

You meet someone.

You discover a place you've never seen.

You stumble across a story.

And all of it enriches life.

Photography makes wandering meaningful.

By remaining engaged with reality—walking, observing, and responding with the camera—you naturally begin to experience more joy.

## **Everything Is Photographable**

One of the biggest lessons I've learned is this:

**Everything is photographable.**

Look up.

Use macro mode.

Look down beneath your feet.

Scan the world around you with possibility.

When you begin to see infinite potential in everyday life, you'll simply start photographing.

And then you'll slowly chip away at the work.

## **Always Make the Zine**

At the end of every day, my goal is simple:

I make a zine.

I create a physical object from the work.

Flipping through my own photographs brings me enormous fulfillment because I'm genuinely interested in these streets.

I'm genuinely interested in surveying the land this way.

Recently, I photographed outside Holmesburg Prison—a panopticon prison in Northeast Philadelphia.

These are photographs I truly enjoy making.

And if you're finding meaning in what you're doing, I believe you should continue pursuing it.

Because you never know what the world might deliver through the simple act of following your curiosity.

## **The Archive as a Game**

Ever since I shifted away from chasing the poetic single image and toward creating documentary material, I've discovered infinite possibility.

Photography has become almost like a game.

Each day:

- The archive updates.
- The mileage increases.

- The hours increase.
- New routes unlock.
- New project pages appear.

I can revisit yesterday's walk.

Open the photographs.

See the exact GPS location.

View the camera settings.

Open the location in Google Street View.

And watch the archive slowly grow.

By treating daily photography as an act of preservation rather than performance,  
I've found far more meaning in the mundane.

And that's my thought of the day.

How I'm finding meaning in the mundane through a particular creative constraint.

Keep walking.

Keep observing.

And keep making photographs.