

Treat Photography Like a Video Game

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

Today's thought is about treating photography like a video game.

I've been working on a project called **Philly in Flux**, where I document different streets in Philadelphia, geotag the work, and create a living map of the city.

If you've ever played open-world games like Skyrim or Fallout, you know how satisfying it is to uncover new locations, unlock fast travel points, and slowly reveal the map. That's exactly how I've started thinking about photography.

As I walk the streets, I'm not thinking about photography first.

I'm thinking about exploration.

The maps on my website let me retrace the steps I've walked and revisit the exact places where I made particular photographs. Every walk becomes a quest. Every street becomes unexplored territory.

Photography Is Exploration

The idea is simple:

Think less about the outcome of the photographs.

Think more about the act of exploration.

There is always new terrain to discover.

There are always new people to meet.

There are always new stories unfolding right outside your door.

Photography has far more to do with how you engage with humanity than it does with technical perfection.

Most of the photographs I've made over the years didn't come from my ability to frame things.

They came from curiosity.

They came from courage.

They came from following that adventurous spirit into places I hadn't been before.

The best photographs often come from curiosity rather than composition.

Simplicity Creates Impact

When it comes to framing a photograph, I think it's mostly about subtraction.

Removing things.

Simplifying.

The more you remove from the frame, the more impact the photograph can have.

So when you're out photographing, ask yourself:

How can I remove more?

How can I simplify?

That's always been my approach to making photographs in the street.

The Archive Becomes the Artwork

These days I'm thinking about photography as a way to map space and time.

The archive itself is becoming the artwork.

Every day I update a digital map with new walks.

Every day I create a physical book from the photographs.

Yesterday's walk became an issue called *Walnut Street in Flux*.

Seeing the map update and flipping through a physical book at the end of the day feels incredibly rewarding.

It's like completing a side quest.

The work doesn't need to be extraordinary.

It simply needs to document the changing city.

Become the Archivist of Your Town

When you're out photographing, think about becoming the archivist of your town.

Preserve space.

Preserve time.

Preserve change.

I've been approaching this very systematically.

I pick a start point.

I pick an end point.

Then I walk one street and photograph whatever I find.

That's it.

The system removes almost every decision from the process.

The only goal becomes movement.

And once you start moving, flow state arrives naturally.

Photograph Everything

When I'm walking, I'm not looking for one great frame.

I'm photographing everything.

- Architecture
- Infrastructure
- Textures
- Sidewalks
- Buildings
- Small details
- People when they appear

Even though many of the final photographs don't contain people, I'm always open to interaction.

Recently while walking Ridge Avenue, I met the owner of the oldest house on the street.

He invited me inside.

I made photographs.

I learned something.

Those unexpected moments are often the most rewarding part of the process.

Lighting Up the Map

Treating photography like a video game creates a sense of progression.

At the end of the day you can see:

- New territory explored
- New photographs made
- Miles walked
- Time invested
- Stories collected

The map lights up.

The archive grows.

The project advances.

And that feeling is deeply fulfilling.

The Impossible Goal

One thing that excites me is how impossible the project feels.

If I wanted to archive every street in Philadelphia, it could take years.

Hundreds of days.

Thousands of miles.

Maybe even longer.

And that's exactly why it's exciting.

Working toward something that feels almost impossible gives purpose to the process.

Every day becomes one step closer.

One more quest completed.

One more section of the map uncovered.

Eventually, maybe you'll beat the final boss.

You Don't Need to Travel Far

One of the biggest misconceptions in photography is that you need to travel somewhere special.

You don't.

You simply need to walk.

Step outside.

Take a train.

Take a bus.

Visit a neighborhood you've never explored.

Novelty is often much closer than we think.

The whole project is designed to remove as many decisions as possible:

- One camera
- One workflow
- One street
- One walk

That's it.

Everything else disappears.

Structure Creates Freedom

The more structure I create, the more photographs I make.

Having a clear endpoint changes everything.

I know where I'm walking.

I know when the walk ends.

I know the photographs will become both a physical and digital artifact.

That clarity gives me a heightened awareness of the present moment.

I'm not hunting for something specific.

I'm simply responding to whatever appears in front of me.

Building Systems Instead of Projects

Lately I've been building tools around this process.

I created:

- A geotag catalog

- A walk submission system
- A Flux Wiki
- A City in Flux starter kit

The goal is to remove technical friction.

I want anyone to be able to launch their own archive project.

You download the starter kit.

You open it with Claude Code.

You answer a few questions.

And the system helps you build your own city archive.

I'm still testing everything, but the philosophy remains the same:

Remove friction. Increase participation. Simplify the process.

The Beauty of Imperfection

One thing I've fallen in love with is printing photographs on cheap computer paper.

Nothing fancy.

Just a LaserJet printer and ordinary paper.

The photographs are soft.

Imperfect.

Sometimes the pages rip.

Sometimes the staples show.

And somehow that feels right.

The imperfections feel honest because life itself is imperfect.

The physical objects exist in flux just like the city does.

They're temporary.

Fragile.

Disposable.

Yet meaningful.

Everything Is in Flux

The deeper idea behind all of this is simple.

Everything changes.

Every street.

Every building.

Every photograph.

Every person.

Including you.

Photography allows us to preserve those moments before they disappear.

Every image becomes a timestamp.

A record of what existed in a particular place at a particular moment.

Five years from now, those streets will look different.

The photographs you make will look different.

You will be different.

That's why documenting change feels so important.

Photography as Life Affirmation

Ultimately, I use photography as a form of life affirmation.

It's my way of saying yes to life.

Every photograph is an acknowledgment that I was here.

That this moment mattered.

That this place existed.

That this person existed.

We're all moving toward the same inevitable ending.

Photography doesn't stop that.

But it allows us to engage more deeply with the time we have.

It encourages us to notice.

To appreciate.

To participate.

To explore.

To preserve.

And that's what I find most fulfilling about photography right now.

Not making masterpieces.

Not chasing perfection.

Simply creating an archive of the city and honoring the fleeting nature of life.

Everything is in flux.

And that's exactly what makes it beautiful.

Thanks for watching.

Peace.