



THE ESSENTIALS OF STREET PHOTOGRAPHY

A 21ST CENTURY GUIDE TO
PHOTOGRAPHICALLY CAPTURING
THE STREETS

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To Sara,

the best friend and editor anyone could have.

(And for putting up with me taking my camera everywhere).



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Forward: by Dave Beckerman



Crossing the Brooklyn Bridge by Dave Beckerman.

Most types of photography can be easily defined by their subjects. A wedding photographer takes pictures of weddings. A portrait photographer poses someone and takes their picture. The nature photographer covers a wide area, but it is easy to categorize.

Street photography is difficult to define because it can encompass just about any subject.

If I were to ask you to name a few famous street photographers, you might pick Garry Winogrand, Henri Cartier-Bresson, or maybe Robert Frank. But if I asked you to define street photography – that would be more difficult.

You might say that street photography is candid pictures of strangers on the street. That might be a good start, but it doesn't really describe street photography.

To start with, street photography does not need to be done on 'the street,' and it does not need to be pictures of strangers. In fact, it does not even need to be pictures of people, though it usually is. Although there are common subjects for street photography, it is not so much about the subject as it is about the style of the photograph. I can easily imagine an astronaut orbiting the earth, using a street photography style.

Just as any object or scene can be painted in a cubist style, just about any subject can be photographed in a street photography style. I say almost any subject because the one thing that all street photos have in common are human beings, or human artifacts: things that were made by human beings.

If street photography were a musical form – it might be jazz. It might be rock and roll. The style of music would have a measure of improvisation. The moment is not enough. To play by the rules, the shot really does need to be unplanned. It also needs to allow the eye to wander around and make its own conclusions about the meaning of the photograph.

The street photographer is a perpetual tourist. They may never leave their own town, but as they walk around, they can see things that the rest of the world is oblivious to.

The street photographer can best be identified not by what they shoot, but why they shoot. If their purpose is to make a discovery, to find a surprise, to give expression to their own curiosity about people and the things that people construct, then there is a good chance you have run into a street photographer. The best ones are like Zen hunters. I say Zen hunter because you cannot force the unexpected. You can only be open to it.

Looking for that moment is as useless as casting a fishing line and saying, "Now I will catch a fish." It does not work that way. You cannot force it,

but you can put yourself in a place where there are enough people milling about to increase your odds.

I knew a street photographer who became fascinated by the different ways that people hailed cabs in New York City. For two years, whenever he saw someone hail a cab, he tried to find a new angle, a new way of shooting this most ordinary of urban moments. One day, after years of keeping an eye out for people hailing cabs, he glimpsed a young girl with crutches waiting to get into the cab. This might have been just another shot, but as he got closer to take the shot, he saw an old man with crutches getting out of the cab. You look at the image and think – what a stroke of luck to find this coincidence, but he took years of maintaining this obsession to make something from the idea. And other times you just walk out of the house and are greeted with this sort of coincidental image.

The street photographer is the mirror image of the commercial photographer. The commercial photographer sets up the product to be photographed, arranges the lighting, controls as much of the image as he can, and takes the picture. The wedding photographer urges the various families to stand and smile at the camera. The idea of posing subjects is anathema for the street photographer.

The street photographer is often an unwanted guest. They need to develop ninja-like techniques so that they remain unseen in the middle of a crowded street. They may even dress in camouflage. Rather than using a high-powered rifle to pick off wild beasts at a distance, most street photographers prefer to capture strangers at close range. This can be scary for the beginner.

I am sure that many a street photographers dream of a cloak of invisibility. One photographer I knew would dress like a typical tourist in New York and bring a tourist map with him. He might stand near the Empire State building and gawk up at it, all the time taking pictures of the people around him. So here he is, a New York City native for fifty years, play-acting the tourist so that he can blend in with the strangers around him.

There are the formal elements that can be used to define the street photograph: the mysterious decisive moment that is shown in context; the use of juxtaposed elements to form a new synthesis that is unusual, although the juxtaposed elements may be ordinary; the desire to let the scene play without disturbing it; and most of all, the desire to experience and communicate the surprise that the photographer feels in the frame, which is pointed at the world of human beings and their creations.

But as you can see, it is much easier to talk about techniques that street photographers use to achieve their ends than it is to define the style.

About the Author:



Growing up with Attention Deficit Disorder, I was constantly lost in the world around me. As I grew older and my attention problems subsided, my curiosity towards my surroundings and other people only got stronger. Street photography became an outlet for this and I grew a particular fondness for New Yorkers, with their endless energy, passion, diversity, fashion, and collective neuroses.

In addition to being a street photographer, I also work as a studio photographer in the city, as well as for the NY Daily News, where I have a regular feature describing neighborhoods through street portraits and interviews with locals. My work has been featured in numerous magazines and my prints are sold to collectors, interior designers, and companies around the world.

You can view my work at <http://www.jamesmaherphotography.com>.

Introduction

Street photography is a broad subject with many different opinions, styles, and techniques involved. Telephoto lenses, wide-angle lenses, manual focusing or auto, some people swear by certain techniques while others disavow them.

The goal of this book is to take a well rounded approach to the study of street photography, focusing on both the technical and conceptual issues that are involved in the craft along with the issues in editing our work.

Part of this book will address the way I approach the street and the way that I shoot. That is inevitable in a 'how-to' book, but please do not take everything that is written here as how you should approach your street photography. That is not the point. Instead, you should approach this book with a critical eye, take in everything that is said, and then form your own opinions. Use what is said here to aid you in formulating your own theories about street photography and your own strategies for approaching the street.

The beauty of street photography is that we all bring something unique to the table. We each have different ideas, interests, personalities, strengths, and weaknesses. Two people standing in the same place at the same moment will always take a different photograph, because they each see and react to the world in a different way.

There is no correct way to shoot street photography. There is only the way that works best for each of us. For some of you, it may be with a small rangefinder camera and prime lens at close distances. For others, it may be with an SLR and zoom lens. For many, it can be both. When you are learning about street photography you should try out many different techniques to see what fits best. Part of the impetus to writing this book was to create a work that moves away from the narrow and the specific and opens us up to a broad range of street photography ideas and techniques.

Most of my ideas have been picked up by learning from other street photographers over the years. Studying other street photographers and learning how they work is an important step towards learning the genre and eventually finding your own voice. The collection of conversations in the Street Photography Conversations section, highlight the varied personalities of seasoned street photographers. It also reflects the unique styles and ways of shooting that each have developed for themselves.

The book begins by covering the content of street photography and is followed by reviewing technical strategies for capturing this content. You can read the technical chapters first if you prefer, but as with any form of art, the conceptual is the most important aspect. I would prefer a blurry, badly framed photograph of an amazing concept any day over a technically perfect photo that is lacking in concept. Ideally though, we want to strive to capture both in a beautiful harmony.

Many times, the technical issues can become so overwhelming that we forget to think about what we are doing. We lose site of the concept, the idea, or the inspiration and only focus on trying to get our shots sharp and our compositions correct. Try to avoid this. That is why we must practice the technical. As street photographers, we need to master the way we use our camera so that we can forget it is there and focus on what is going on around us.

The third section of the book will address editing. Developing strong editing skills is just as important as developing meaningful concepts and mastering shooting techniques. As a result, you will notice that editing has a constant presence throughout the book, since a major aspect of becoming a strong street photographer is based on our ability to edit our work, to organize and select our best shots, and to review our work with a critical eye. In addition to studying the works of others, it is critical that you continue to study your own work and progress.

I hope you enjoy the book!

Part 1: Concepts of Street Photography



Waiting in Grand Central Station, 2003.

While it may seem like we are just taking snapshots of the world around us, that is not the case. We press the shutter deliberately; we had something in mind; we were searching for something that presented itself in the frame. As moments unfold before us, something about them resonates within us, which drives us to take the shot. Street photography is an inherently subjective form of art, which communicates how the photographer sees the world.

Chapter 1: How to Get Over Your Fear of Street Photography



St. Marks, 2012.

A rare few of you will pick up your camera for the first time and be fearless on the street. The rest of you will be apprehensive at first like I used to be. I have always loved people and loved to interact with them, but being comfortable around strangers was never my strong suit. If someone told me when I was a teenager that one of my passions would be to take photographs of strangers on the streets of New York City, I would have told them that they were crazy.

It takes time to get comfortable shooting on the streets. It is a skill that needs to be developed through years of practice. As Joel Meyerowitz once said, "You have to pay your dues to the streets." It takes time, practice, and patience. Your goal should be to improve incrementally every single day.

To be honest, I still get somewhat nervous when shooting, but I fight through it. Nerves are something that you will have to slowly conquer in order to get closer to your subjects. The fear may never fully go away, but over time you will start to notice yourself ignoring it.

There was a famous comedian that once said that the best experience of his professional life was the first time that he bombed on stage. It was then that he realized that bombing on stage was not as bad as he had anticipated, and from that moment on he was not afraid of it and his routines improved. On this note, getting caught photographing everyday people on the streets is not as bad as you might think. It might be if you are photographing drug dealers or gang members, but 99% of everyday people will not care or may even be flattered.

If you get caught, then smile, shake their hand, tell them you are a street photographer, and say that you found them to be extremely interesting and had to capture them. This will diffuse most uncomfortable situations instantly.

If you are a beginner and petrified of shooting strangers on the street, then I suggest starting with street portraits. A street portrait refers to when a photographer interacts with their subject and asks for permission before taking a portrait of a stranger on the street. There is no candidness to these shots like in traditional street photography, but it is a good way to help you become more comfortable with photographing strangers. Most people will be excited when you ask to take their portrait.

If shooting on the street is new to you, you are going to be unsuccessful at first. We all were. You will be timid, scared, and hesitant. As a result, your photos could be blurry, probably too far away, and many of them will be boring. You will have days where you will take 400 photos and they will all be disappointing. However, do not get discouraged and give up.

Like anything, if this is something that you are really passionate about learning, then you need to keep going and keep progressing. The learning

curve is the steepest at first and time, practice, and constantly pushing yourself out of your comfort zone are the keys to success.

I go months sometimes without taking a great street photo and I will think that I am the worst street photographer in the world. Then I will suddenly capture that epic shot and the world will feel right again.

If creating great street photographs is something that you want to do, then be prepared to work hard, be prepared to push yourself out of your comfort zone, and be prepared for some tough times and lots of frustration, not only at first. You must fight through it, because once you do, that is when the real fun begins. Once you get that timeless capture, then it will all be worth it.

Tip

It is much easier to capture strangers candidly if you pick a spot and wait in it, rather than trying to shoot while walking around. Wait for people to come to you and it will be much easier to photograph them.

Also, this may sound obvious, but the more crowded the area, the easier it will be to capture strangers candidly. In crowded areas, especially at times such as rush hour, most people will be too busy to notice and so this will give you a great chance to practice. But do not only shoot in crowded areas as this will limit the type of image that you are able to capture.

Finally, it can help at first to use a light prime lens or small camera. Big zoom lenses are noticeable and cumbersome, and will make you much more self-conscious.

Chapter 2: The Meaning of Street Photography

The term 'street photography' is tough to define because it means something slightly different to all of us. In general terms, street photography is a pictorial study of the human condition that surrounds us all. This is why street photography can take place anywhere. All that needs to be present is something related to humans or human nature, presented in a natural way.



Human Zoo, Zuccotti Park, Occupy Wall Street, 2011, was taken the morning after I had interviewed many of the protestors in Zuccotti Park during the Occupy Wall Street Protests.

When interviewing these protestors, one of their constant gripes was that they felt like 'zoo animals,' constantly intruded upon by the onlookers and tourists.

However, that is exactly what they were and what their purpose was. They were creating an experiment that the world was watching. The shadowy figures in the scene are these onlookers staring at the sleeping protestors and waiting for something interesting to happen, just like in a zoo. This photo is about the relationship between the protestor and the onlooker.

The beauty of street photography is that we each bring something unique to it. We each bring a different viewpoint and a different focus. Some street photographers focus on people and expressions, some on beauty and form, some on the dark side of life, some on the surreal, and some on the random, existential moments that occur all around us. Their photographs are an expression of how they see the world.

Street photographs, when viewed alone, may seem like singular moments frozen in time. However, almost always, when looking at the body of work of any street photographer who has been shooting for long enough, strong themes will emerge from a collection of these singular moments. These themes tend to go hand in hand with the personality of the photographer. Street photography is our representation of how we see and think about the world. It is a movie of specific and independent moments in our lives that have interested and influenced us. It is also an adventure of sorts with unplanned moments around every corner.

Street photography is a very personal pursuit. We are capturing our own lives and our own feelings one shot at a time. We are capturing the meaning of what life is like at this point in time in our neighborhoods and cities. We are documenting the beautiful, the ugly, the unique, the existential, the surreal, the special, and even the mundane aspects of life in our time.

The idea is not to focus on what street photography means in the broader sense, or what it means to society as a whole; it is much more personal. Ask yourself, what do you want to capture? Why do you want to capture it? What ideas do you want to convey to others through your photos?

The real question is, what does street photography mean to you?



Reflection, 2012.

Chapter 3: What Makes a Great Street Photograph?

There is no specific definition of a great street photograph, nor is there a formula. Street photographs can be great for so many different reasons. But is a street photograph great because it is beautiful or because it is technically perfect? I would argue that possessing both of these characteristics would define a decent street photograph, but not a great one.

The key to creating a powerful street photograph is the content within the photograph. Photos with content are ones that portray ideas or feelings. There is a story or an idea hidden within the visual context of the photo.



Three Men, Burberry & Gucci, 2003, confronts the issue of conformity, with the three identical and perfectly retouched faces in the Gucci advertisement mimicked by the businessmen positioned in front of it, with matching Burberry coats, identical poses, collared shirts, dark pants, and boots.

This photo has a message to it, a story, and a foundation under its visual appeal. You could also have a your own interpretation of this photo. That is the beauty of street photography.

Creating a beautiful photograph never hurts and this should be an important aspect of your photography; however, without meaning, a street photo becomes your everyday, run-of-the-mill landscape. A great street photograph is one that makes a person think or one that stirs up a specific emotion or feeling.

However, just because a photo possesses strong content does not diminish the importance of technique. It is very rare that a photograph has enough power to overcome technical or aesthetic deficiencies. The relationship and balance between the two is something that street photographers must contend with on a daily basis.

So how can we take more street photographs with meaning? Unfortunately, there are no clear answers to this question. We can try to plan our street photos by thinking of ideas ahead of time, finding the correct context and then waiting for the desired characters to walk in. Street photography is not solely limited to being purely reactionary and spontaneous. However, a majority of street photography is about quick reactions to the world around us, and it begs the question of how can we create photos that are thoughtful, poignant, and intentional, while we are at the mercy of our spontaneous surroundings and our reflexes.

I think this is where we need to focus on what is most important to us. Go back to the question about what street photography means to you. What do you know best and what do you want to capture most with this genre?



Death of a Salesman, 2012.

Knowing what interests you will aid in filtering the plethora of activity and content on the street. It will allow you to more effectively notice particular ideas, feelings, and aspects of your surroundings. As a result, it will be easier to quickly see and catch these moments.

When we take that immediate shot of a changing moment there is some driving, instinctive force in us that pushes us to do it. We can visualize the moment happening before it does. We may not know exactly how the moment will come out until we view it, but we know that it is happening. We may not know it at the time, but over time, these instinctive

photographs will band together into themes that describe how we see the world.

The more time we spend on the streets and the more that we “pay our dues,” the better we will get at this. The more time we spend thinking about street photography, reading about it, and looking over our own work for themes, the better we will become at this. Most importantly, the more time we spend away from photography, reading and learning about life, and improving ourselves, the better we will become at finding these moments. The more interesting we are as human beings, the more interesting we will become as photographers.

Just pay attention, study, think, and be ready to react and you will be able to create meaningful photographs. Think about ideas that you would like to capture ahead of time and your mind will be more in tune on the streets when those moments appear.

However, not every street photograph has to have a message behind it. A lot of street photography can be strictly based on the visual, the play of light, or the interesting and unique view. Not every street photo needs an explanation.

A stunningly beautiful street photo is still a stunningly beautiful street photo, but a significant street photo is one that has greater meaning behind it.



Couple in Sheep Meadow, 2010.

Beauty

Think of street photography like any other form of art. You are allowed to express yourself in any way, shape, or form through the medium.

You can go with a straight, 'raw' photographic look and be as realistic to the true scene as possible, or you can get creative with the negative. You can colorize, crop, add contrast, burn and dodge, or anything that your heart desires as long as it does not change the true meaning of the original scene.

Street photography is an art form and, fundamentally speaking, art is meant to be beautiful, whether through being thought provoking or visually. A strong concept is only made stronger when it is photographed in a graphically pleasing way. Strong colors, graphic lines, and powerful compositions are not reserved for the realm of landscape photographers. Having these elements in your photos will only make them stronger. Beauty

is an emotion as well, one of the most powerful emotions, and while it may be a bit more elusive in street photography versus landscape photography, it still is there and all around us.



Shades of Red, 2011, celebrates the confident woman. The subject in the photo not only embraces her unique features, but has selected bold clothing and accessories that work to enhance them. Even the shape of the flowers on her shirt matches the swirl of her hair.

In a world where the definition of physical beauty is perpetuated by portraits that have been tweaked in post production to reflect homogeneous characteristics, this print highlights the inherent beauty of human individuality.

Do things that traditional landscape photographers do to make their photos beautiful. If you want quick and easy ways to add more beauty to your photographs, then go out in the snow, fog, rain, or at the golden hours. Photograph bright colors or make stunning black and whites. There is a reason that they do it.

Seek out the beauty.

Ineffective Street Photography

There is a lot of bad street photography out there. I have personally taken a LOT of bad street photographs. Perhaps a better term for bad is ineffective. So what makes an ineffective street photograph?

Ineffective street photographs are ones that do not convey any emotion or stir any thought, nor do they have any special visual impact. They lack meaning, beauty, and are a dime-a-dozen. They are scenes captured on the street, often with people present and reflecting strong technique; however, they show nothing.

We all take bad street photographs; they far outnumber the good ones. It is impossible to be a street photographer and not take a significant number of bad street photographs. Often we shoot because we think there is potential, or we shoot to see how a scene will turn out; however, the finished product is nothing like we had envisioned. A camera cannot always capture an image exactly in the way that we see it with our eyes. At times we will take a photograph when we instinctively know that it will be a throwaway. This is a bad habit that I continue to struggle with.

Being a good street photographer is not about never taking bad street photographs, since that is impossible. It is about being able to differentiate between your good and your bad work. Editing yourself is one of the most important skills that you can learn as a street photographer. Great street photographers are usually the best at hiding their bad work. You need to be critical of your work and of yourself. A couple of bad or mediocre street

photographs mixed in with your best work will dilute the effect of your portfolio significantly.

I often encounter street photographers that seemingly show every single photograph that is well composed or close-up. Some of the photos do not even meet these standards. Fuzzy photo after fuzzy photo, both in meaning and in technical quality.

You should not get overly attached to a photo just because it is great technically, because you got closer to a person than you ever had without them noticing, because the moment was there but you did not quite get it technically, or because you thought it was going to be good when you shot it. The first two are feats that you should be proud of, but try to look at your photos through the eyes of someone who has no vested interest in their outcome, the moments that actually happened, or how hard they were to capture.

Here is a test. Take a street photograph and write a caption for it. How does it make you feel? What does it mean? If you cannot think of anything to write, do not get discouraged. It does not necessarily mean that what you have captured is an ineffective scene; however, if you are not moved to say anything about it, then it will be likely that your viewers will not be either.

Chapter 4: Shooting What You Know

When shooting on the street, it is important to focus on areas that you know well and things that you enjoy. This is why you are photographing in the first place, isn't it? The best photographers are the ones that have a passion for their subjects. Their work is a reflection of their passion. If you are knowledgeable about and interested in your subjects then you will be better able to portray them.



Layers of the City, 2011, contemplates the constant growth and change in New York City, from the gritty underbelly to the polished skyline. It also represents the rapid redevelopment of many New York City neighborhoods, where the old and often worn urban fabric is replaced with the sleek, the shiny, and the new.

This is an example of how a street photo can represent much more than just a fleeting moment. A narrow, telephoto view can sometimes describe an entire neighborhood or city, or provide commentary on a much larger issue.

If you have a passion for people, photograph people. If you love architecture, photograph architecture. If you are romantic, humorous, angry, or sentimental, then try to search out these feelings for your photographs. If you have deep, existential thoughts, then try to notice scenes that will portray these thoughts. You will be much better at noticing these sentiments than people who do not share these ideas. If you have a passion for fashion, then photograph in areas with fashionable people. For instance, Scott Schuman of the website Sartorialist has made a name for himself photographing what he loves, fashion on the street. His photos may be more often posed, but it is still street photography. His images capture a segment of the population that he relates to and through these images he is sharing these people and his thoughts about these people with the world.

Style

There is often a misconception when talking about style and photography. Many people attribute style to a particular way of shooting or a particular look. I prefer to think of it in a different way. A style is primarily about the content that you photograph and how you choose to edit. It is how you see the world and so you should think about what is important to you and then go out and photograph it.

For instance, when you read the conversations with Matt Weber and Dave Beckerman in the Street Photography Conversations section, pay attention to the differences in their work. Both photographers shoot on the streets of New York City, often in black and white and with wide-angle lenses, but their work could not be more different—Matt's work is gritty, sentimental, and realistic, while Dave's work is magical and enchanted. From the encounters I have had with these photographers, these adjectives are evocative of their personalities.

Developing a style is not something that can happen over night. Some themes in our work will only become apparent after years of photographing; after tens of thousands of captures, after we have tried many different techniques, and after we have given ourselves enough time to come across a range of subjects that fit into these themes.

There is nothing wrong with mimicking other people's techniques at first when learning about photography. It is part of the natural cycle of learning about something. Practice shooting street photography with a flash like Bruce Gilden, practice with a 50mm prime like Henri Cartier-Bresson, or make grainy, energetic black and whites like Daido Moriyama. Try it all. But then keep in mind the famous quote by Picasso, "Bad artists copy. Good artists steal."

Most artists practicing in a myriad of mediums (painters, photographers, and sculptors alike) were trained in the various techniques of their craft before spreading their wings and going in their own unique direction. Similarly, you should try out the techniques of different street photographers and learn from them. Practice these techniques and work to excel in them. This will aid in your personal development as a photographer. But when the time comes, take all of these techniques that you have learned and use them to create your own style.

You should experiment, especially when you are learning. Try street photography with a 200mm focal length to capture narrow angles and graphic views. Learning and developing your own unique way of shooting is all about experimentation and you cannot truly explore something and develop a style that is uniquely yours unless you try out everything. If you listen strictly to the way someone else has done it then your work will end up looking like that person's work. You do not want that.

Try different lenses and different focal lengths; I still switch up my techniques frequently. It helps to keep my mind fresh and to keep me from getting in a rut. Use a zoom. There is nothing wrong with a zoom. Use a tripod. Use flash. Test out different techniques, even if you are a street

photography veteran with a specific way of doing things. It will freshen you up and help with your creativity.

Do not photograph a certain subject or shoot in a particular way just because others are doing it. The best photographers are the ones that look in the opposite direction from everybody else. Photograph what interests you and shoot it in your own way. Take those techniques you have learned and strive to evolve them. Strive to be unique, and from this your personal style will develop.



Wishing I Could Soar Through the Streets of New York, 2010.

Chapter 5: Expression, Gesture, and Photographing People



Jerry Delakas, Astor Place Newsman (Candid), 2012.

Photographing people is at the heart of street photography, and while there is an entire world of subjects outside of this, most likely if you are a street photographer you will capture lots of people.

While the face is the strongest conveyer of emotion, there are many other aspects of the subject that can be powerful. Jay Maisel uses the term gesture. When a person is the main subject in a scene, you need that person to have a strong and unique expression or gesture, whether it is in the face, the body, or both. Posture, pose, and the position of our hands or feet can tell as much of a story as a good facial expression can. For a quick example, you shouldn't be trying to capture a face; you should be trying to capture an expression.

Strong gesture has the power to add feeling to a photo more than any other element. As viewers, we relate to other people that we see in a scene and so we feel whatever it looks like they are feeling. You can have a great scene, a great perspective, and great lighting, but if the main subject is disconnected from the surroundings, then it can ruin the moment. Accurately capturing sentiment is the bedrock of good storytelling and as street photographers we want our photos to tell stories.

Candid shooting strips away the subject's fears about being photographed and keeps them in their own world. If you want to photograph someone's raw emotion, you usually do not want them noticing you. You want to catch them in their moment, untroubled by your presence.

Occasionally, it can be necessary to sacrifice the perfect framing to be able to capture that perfect gesture. If you waste that precious second to frame correctly, then you may never get that same expression again. This is a factor to weigh when you are photographing people and it is an issue that I constantly struggle with.

Sometimes, you do not even have to see a person's face to know that they have a good expression. Often, scenes develop so quickly that you have to frame and shoot almost instantly to capture them. However, you can tell when a person's expression will be strong by their body, by the way they are walking, by the position of their head, by how their hands are moving, or by the attitude in their step. These are all things to pay attention to.



Blonde, 2010.

Furthering this idea, the face does not even need to be present to show strong emotion, but when it is hidden it amplifies the importance of the rest of the body. *t* is an example of a photo where the face is not visible, yet the expression is still there. This photo highlights the issue of female self-image. Technically, it was shot in a stream of light that highlighted parts of this woman's body and then the shadows were darkened to black in post production to further emphasize this effect. The result is that the most sensitive and seductive parts of a woman's body are highlighted. The message and feeling of the photo is created without any facial expression needed.

However, because the face is not visible, the posture makes all of the difference in the world. This photo would not be successful without the stride and particularly without the lowered, contemplative angle of the woman's head. If the head was stiff and straight, then the feeling of this portrait would change entirely. As it is, this is a contemplative moment.

Chapter 6: Themes and Projects



Screens, 2012.

When exploring the streets, you cannot plan what is going to happen. You can choose certain backgrounds and create street photographs as mentioned before, but if you go out with the sole purpose of capturing a specific thing, such as close-ups of people, then you will miss everything else that is around you. This is not to say that you should not search for themes, because you should, but you do not want to hyper-focus on a certain subject, which could distract you from the larger context.

Keep an open mind; look up, look down, look close, look far away, pay attention to the lighting and how it interacts with your surroundings, look at angles, backgrounds, signs, pay attention to people as they walk by. Look at the details. Look for moments or ideas.

Keep this in mind when reviewing your negatives. If you notice that you have been shooting a lot of close-ups of people lately, then maybe you are getting too focused on that. Grab a zoom lens and try to focus on your surroundings more.

Street photography is a balancing act; you want to be vigilant about noticing pre-determined themes and content, while at the same time opening your mind to absorb the larger context around you. The challenge is to take what comes to you, whether it is something you were looking for or an unexpected surprise that you find interesting and meaningful. Moments are never repeated and if you are overly consumed with a specific idea then you will be more susceptible to missing a lot of what is happening around you.

Keeping your mind open does not mean that you cannot actively search out scenes, content, or scenarios. You should do this. Creating groups of photographs based on an idea is an integral practice to have as a street photographer. Think about it as if you were creating a street photography book of your work. You cannot solely include a random hodgepodge of your best photos. It will not flow correctly and it will not have a uniform message. Books need a focus and a theme. Each image is strengthened when surrounded by a set of complementary work.

Occasionally, I will try to go out knowing exactly what I want to shoot, but mostly my aim is just to wander around and see what happens. I will have multiple thoughts of long term ideas in mind and I will gravitate towards areas where they might happen, but I will still try to keep my mind open to everything.

I rarely get what I am looking for when I am purposely searching it out. I will just end up with a bunch of mediocre photographs based on a theme that I tried to force and I will try to convince myself that they are good.

It is better to build up these themes or add to larger projects over time and not strictly focus on them. You should not pigeonhole your mind into

thinking about only shooting specific subjects when you go out. Instead, you should have a list of things to notice if you happen to come across them.

By shooting this way, your work will not seem forced and your ideas will have time to simmer and develop. With more time to search for these ideas on the streets, you will give yourself more of an opportunity to encounter ideal moments that fit these themes.

If you are looking for a place to start, a good starter project is to explain your neighborhood in twelve shots.

Tip

Take your time when shooting on the street; you do not need to rush to get someplace. You are already there.

Walking at a fast pace while shooting is not recommended. The faster you walk, the harder it is to pay attention, to focus, to think, and to react. Take your time, pace yourself and wait for things to come to you. Find a good spot and stand there. Your eyes should be doing the moving, not your feet, and when something catches your eye, then you can run to catch it if you need to.



The Digital World, 2012.

Chapter 7: Planning a Shot



Museum of Sex, 2011.

The majority of street photographs are spontaneous and unplanned. However, while it is impossible to plan every single aspect of a street photograph, you can still exercise a significant amount of control over a scene. Street photographs can be planned and sometimes without much difficulty.

The three elements of any scene are the stage, the lighting and the characters. You can find a background, wait for the correct lighting, and then wait for the corresponding characters to enter your scene. It is like casting for a play.

It is imperative that you pay attention to the lighting. The lighting is such an important aspect of street photography and if it is not good enough at a

particular location, make a note to come back when it has improved. On the other hand, if the lighting is perfect, then park yourself there. You never know when the lighting will be the same or if it ever will be.

The key is that you must wait. The more time you spend, the more of a chance you give yourself for that successful recipe to happen. Do not settle for pretty good if you see potential for great. Wait it out. Occasionally, the moment may never happen. But usually, if you wait long enough, it will. As Henri Cartier-Bresson wrote, “Sometimes one remains motionless, waiting for something to happen.” I have been going back to one location for over a year trying to get a single shot. The shadows that I want off a building are only good for about 20 minutes a day in the warmer months and I have yet to be able to capture the crowd in the correct way to accompany this lighting. I can see the shot in my mind but it has not happened yet. But that is not stopping me and I am not settling. I will get it.

It is a very powerful feeling once you capture an image you have been patiently waiting for. A lot of street photography is based on waiting for moments of luck to hit, but it is extra special when there is absolutely no luck involved, only you and your patience.



Couple in Snowstorm, 2003.

Chapter 8: Candid vs. Posed



Pushups, Rucker Park, 2004.

A candid photo does not necessarily mean that a person is not looking at you or does not notice you. It means that the sentiment present before you entered the scene is the same as what was captured in the photograph itself.

There are many street photos where a person is looking directly at the photographer, yet the feeling is natural and uncontrived. If you look at the work of Mike Peters, he often creates a connection by waiting for his subjects to look up towards the camera, but takes the shot before they realize that they are being photographed, so the feeling is still natural. It is my belief that this is still candid. Once a person is taken out of the moment, that is when the candid nature of a shot is lost.

There is a different quality to a photograph when a person is in their natural state. It is more authentic. People usually freeze up when they notice a

camera and all of that natural emotion disappears. It is this natural feeling that is the most important aspect of a street photograph.

If you want to be able to capture emotions on the street then you need to learn how to shoot discreetly. Otherwise, your photos will become a collection of frozen stares, quizzical glances, or looks of complete surprise, which is probably anything but the emotions your subjects originally had. Candid shooting is extremely difficult and to be successful you must practice. You have to act in a certain way, shoot in a certain way, and still have the wherewithal to get the technical settings correct.

So then why would we ever want to take posed street portraits?

A lot of people tend to believe that a true street photograph needs to be candid. I prefer this type of street photography, but at the same time I do think there is room for posed street portraits in the genre.

A completely contrived moment is one thing, such as where the person is posed, acting, or where the scene is scripted. That is not street photography. But I think when you photograph a person that you come across on the street and take a natural portrait of them, this counts.

A posed portrait is a collaboration between you and the subject and often you can capture a person more accurately by shooting this way because you get to know them first. If you stop a person and converse with them, you will be able to get a sense of who they are. As a result, you will often be able to more accurately portray them, as long as they are comfortable around a camera.

The end result may not be a shot that reflects a natural scene in the traditional sense, since it does not reflect a purely spontaneous moment. However, your shot could ultimately reflect an even truer representation of your subject.



Peacemaker, 2009.

In the case of the self-proclaimed Peacemaker, I came across this man walking down the street in the pouring rain in a garbage bag without much emotion on his face. However, when I asked to photograph him he got very excited. He was gregarious and energetic with a quick tongue and a slightly eccentric demeanor. The portrait on the previous page shows him in a visionary pose, one that he chose for himself and slipped into quite comfortably when I asked to photograph him. I think it shows a lot about how he thinks of himself and goes hand in hand with his name.

What you have is a portrait of a man on the street that shows his soul. These were emotions that would not have been present had I just took a quick, candid snap of him. Frankly, it would have been a sad looking photo. It would have shown us a natural, everyday scene, but it would have told us nothing about this man. Instead, he opened up and gave us a taste of his bright personality.

There is no rhyme or reason to which way is better. Use your own instincts and preference, but know that both candid and posed portraits have their place in the world of street photography.

Tip

Eyes can be the most important aspect of showing emotion through a street photograph. Pay attention to people's eyes when you capture them.

In some cases, waiting for eye contact can even be beneficial. In the photo Pushups, Rucker Park, I waited for the boy to look up, but his expression was still natural since I captured it before he could react. The result is an authentic and candid shot in the sense that the powerful feeling of the original moment is still there. In this case, the eye contact was necessary. The powerful stare is what makes this photograph successful.



Banana, SoHo, 2010.

Chapter 9: Street Portraits



Street portraits shot for the NY Daily News.

Let's further explore street portraiture.

Even if you prefer candid images, you should still shoot street portraits on occasion. With the amount of hours that we spend on the street, I think we are doing ourselves a disservice if we ignore this consistent opportunity in front of us.

Shooting street portraits can improve your portraiture and studio photography skills, while providing you the opportunity to meet many subjects and practice your people skills. As photographers, we need all the practice we can get and if you live in a populated area, then the amount of amazing people that will pass you every single day is simply staggering. If

you are having trouble finding that right model for one of your studio shots, then go outside and wait on a busy corner with a business card and a smile.

In addition, if you excel at these portraits, local newspapers and blogs provide a potential market for them. These outlets are often interested in interviews of people on the streets within the communities that they cover. These types of portraits can span a variety of topics and genres. If you want to show portraits on a finance blog, then you can photograph people and ask them financial questions, such as what they think about the market or how much they save each month. These interviews can be about fashion, lifestyle, neighborhood, real estate, or a myriad of other subjects. Newspapers should provide compensation for this work, while blogs will often use these portraits in exchange for links and exposure (although, larger blogs may offer compensation).

If you are interested in trying this, you should create a portfolio of street portraits to show off. You can easily complete ten portraits and interviews in a day and it will give you a significant amount of experience in a short amount of time. It will also give you confidence, which is important. If you are looking to improve your portraiture and communication skills, there is no better way to practice.

Create a portfolio of your top photos and contact someone at your local newspaper to show them to. It could be the photo editor, fashion editor, real estate editor, or financial editor. If you want to pitch a story to the fashion editor, then interview 20 fashionable people on the streets. Create a sample article exemplifying what you want to do. Do the same thing with blogs. It is worth a shot.

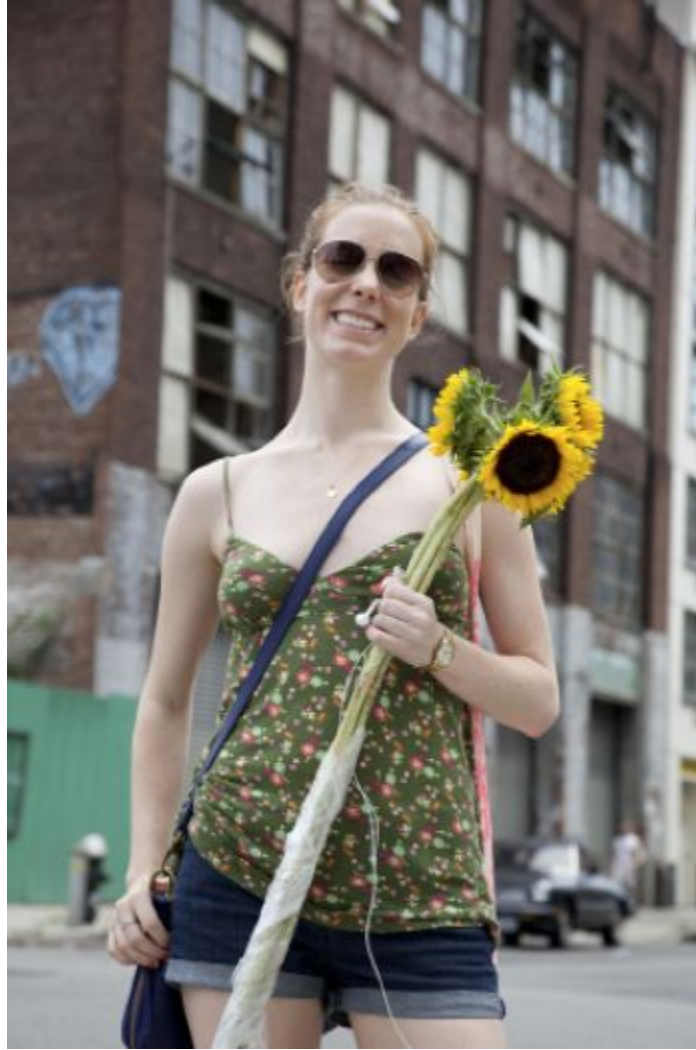
In addition to this, if you have your own photography blog, then content like this is perfect for it. Shoot street portraits with short interviews and put them on the blog. Your readers will love it.



Neighborhood piece for the NY Daily News, 2011.

The techniques of portraiture is a topic for another book, but here are a few important pointers that I have learned.

If you would like an interview to accompany a portrait, make sure to do it before taking the photo. After having a short interview and conversation with you, a person will let down their guard, get comfortable with you, and realize that you are not just some creep with a camera. Also, the process of them thinking about what to say and answering your questions will make them feel more outgoing once it comes time to take the portrait. If you try to photograph people first, they will often be surprised, a little cold, a bit uptight, and nervous. Also, use a digital recording device to capture the interview. It will be much easier to use than a pen and paper.



Long Island City, 2011.

For the Long Island City portrait, I was doing an article about the changing Queens neighborhood of Long Island City, and I found this old, run-down building. I waited until I found this young and cheerful woman wearing a floral top and carrying bright yellow sunflowers. The shot creates a contrast between the older building in the background and the young, vibrant woman in the foreground, conveying the message that this old industrial neighborhood is being infused with new life.

Engaging people is the golden rule for any street portrait, even the ones that you do not intend to enhance with interviews. As I mentioned earlier, interacting with a subject prior to photographing them will result in a much

more natural and relaxed portrait. When approaching someone, make sure to have a smile and to be confident and enthusiastic. For most of these people, you will be brightening their day. Then, if they do allow you to photograph them, do not just take a couple of quick shots and run. Take some time to capture a good portrait, not too long, but at least a minute.

You can also pick out backgrounds beforehand and wait for a person that complements that background, just like in traditional street photography!

My most important piece of advice is to just go out and do it. After a couple days of shooting like this you will find that the nerves have disappeared and you will have a wonderful portfolio of images to show for it.



Info War, 2004.

Chapter 10: Capturing Your Surroundings



Subways in Motion, 2010.

The majority of street photography involves people, but there is an entire world of street photography that goes beyond this.

Street photography can focus on changes within the fabric of a neighborhood, on buildings and architecture, on shapes and light, on abstractions, on storefronts, on objects, or on random occurrences.

The best street photographs that do not include human subjects have the same effects as those that do; they evoke emotion and make you think. You do not need a person in the frame to achieve this result.



Bow Bridge at Dusk, 2010. (An urban landscape.)

Compare *Bow Bridge at Dusk* to *Subways in Motion*. *Bow Bridge at Dusk* is straightforward and beautiful; it is, by far, one of my most popular prints. But it is not a street photograph. There is nothing more to it than what you see. It is a straight shot; typically referred to as an urban landscape photo. It is no different than a beautiful shot of rolling hills or mountains.

On the other hand, while *Subways in Motion* could also be classified as an urban landscape, it is also a street photo. There is meaning behind it. It conveys a feeling that most New Yorkers experience daily; life in the city moves at a frenetic pace, faster than we can keep up and if we do not keep moving, we are going to be left behind. Cities are a contradiction. They are densely populated and people are always present, yet amongst all these people, one can feel very alone. The absence of a human subject in the photo helps to position the viewer as if they are the main subject of the scene, standing alone as the trains full of passengers pass them by.

For reference, take a look at the work of Lee Friedlander and Stephen Shore. Both photographers captured the American landscape in completely different ways, yet their work has meaning behind it; it goes beyond the straight snapshot.

Chapter 11: Ethics and Laws



Shot for a news article on new halfway houses in Rockaway Beach, 2011.

I would like to share some of my insights regarding practicing good ethics while shooting on the streets. The most common question about street photography is, “Do I need permission?” The problem with asking permission is that it ruins the candid moment. You will not be able to take the same type of shot if you ask a person for permission beforehand.

The issue of permission is complicated since each country has its own laws regarding this, so before going out to shoot conduct your own due diligence and familiarize yourself with local laws. I live in the U.S., where there is no right to privacy in public. I can show or sell these photos as art without permission as long as it is not for advertising or commercial purposes. The ruling that allows this is [Nussenzweig v. DiCorcia](#). But the laws for each country are different and some countries are very strict about photographing

people without their knowledge or even photographing in public in general. When in doubt, please read up on your local laws.

The issue of ethics is personal and I understand that not everyone shares the same views. To some, capturing a person without their knowledge on the street and then printing it or showing it on the internet is unsavory. This is a valid opinion, yet I do not subscribe to this belief.

There are certain populations, such as the homeless, the sick or other vulnerable groups that I generally try to avoid photographing unless there is a story behind it. If I feel bad or guilty about taking a photograph of someone then I do not press the shutter. That is where I personally draw the line. It all depends on the situation. If you feel bad about photographing something, then do not photograph it.

Photograph things that are important to you, but make sure that your conduct towards other people is respectful.

I once photographed a Hasidic man walking down 5th avenue and I captured him right as a bus with an advertisement for the movie Eat, Pray, Love passed by, so it just said 'Pray' behind him. I liked the photo and put it on my blog.

About a month later, I got a call from a woman that I did not know who asked if I took the photo. I said yes and she told me that the photo was of her family member and they wanted it taken down. So I obliged. It is a decent photograph, but I did not want to cause any discomfort. In these situations, I am usually inclined to take the photo down. However, if the photograph is a show-stopper then I reserve the right to go back on that statement.

After I told the woman that I would of course take down the photo and I was sorry for making them uncomfortable she then asked if the photo was taken on 5th avenue, because that is what it said in the title. "Definitely," I said. She asked if I was sure and I said, "100 percent," to which she replied,

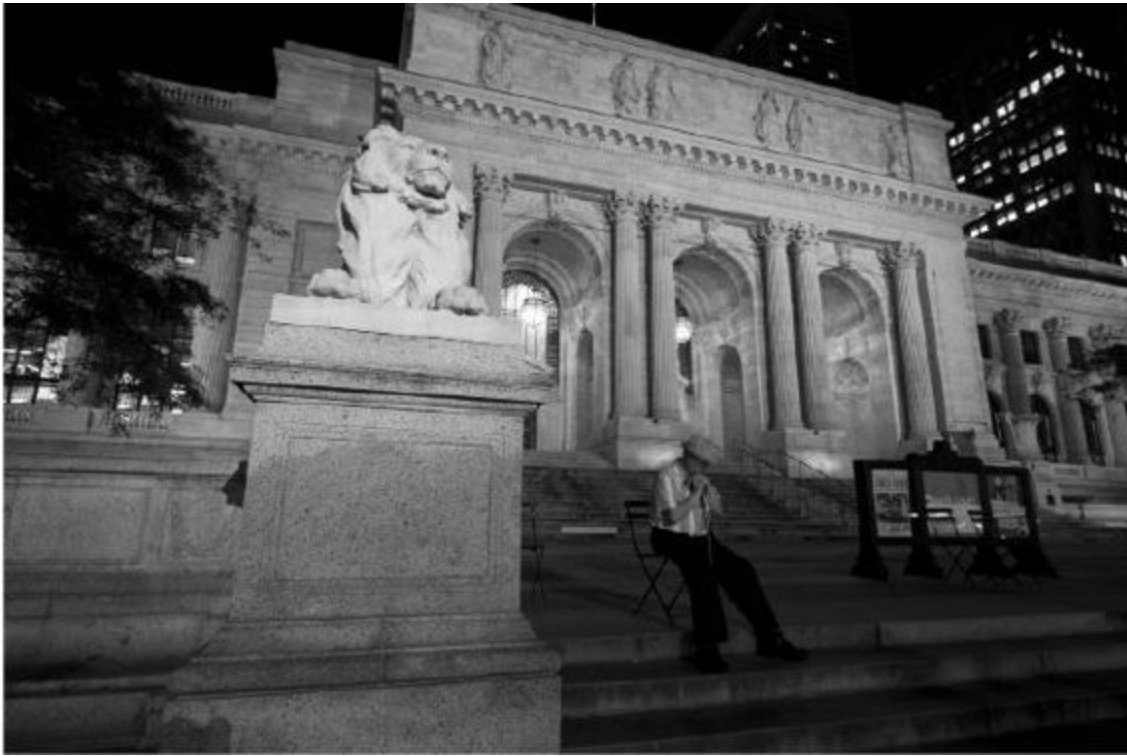
“Well he is not allowed to go into Manhattan and he promised us it was not taken there.”

I blew up his spot.

Most street photographers love people and that is why we photograph them. We may be invading people's privacy but we are not striving to create harm for others. Sometimes we will take images of people that they would not like us to take, but that is just part of what we do and it is not something that we should feel badly about.



Part 2: Technical Issues



Once a Lion, 2012.

There are many technical aspects of street photography that need to be considered in order to be successful, such as camera settings, focusing techniques, gear selection, light and perspective, and tricks for getting close-up and candid. We will not be able to focus on the conceptual ideas of street photography if we do not have proper technique. We need to be fast and instinctual with our cameras. The goal is to be technically proficient enough that we can forget that the camera is even present. If the camera becomes part of us then we can focus on our surroundings and capture those split second moments without even thinking about our tools.

Chapter 12: Gear



Dancer, Duane Reade, 2012. Captured with an iPhone.

There is a wide range of cameras and lenses that can be used for street photography and so it can be hard to choose a direction. You can use any camera for street photography; however, the camera you select will play an important role in the images that you will ultimately be able to capture and the techniques that you will be able to utilize. A perfect camera for street photography currently does not exist. Each camera has its own strengths and weaknesses, however; certain cameras will make your life as a street photographer much easier.

Using a rangefinder sized camera, such as a Leica, a Fuji X100, or a micro 4/3rds will give you a lot of flexibility in certain ways. Due to their small size, they are not as readily noticeable as larger cameras, which will make it

much easier for a photographer to remain discrete. They are also lighter, easier to maneuver quickly, and are much less cumbersome than digital SLRs. As a result, you will be more willing to take them with you everywhere, which is very important in street photography. However, rangefinder sized cameras will hamper you in other ways. Many do not have zoom lenses, some do not have autofocus, and some have less image quality and do not work as well at high ISOs when compared to larger SLRs.

A digital SLR will generally provide better auto-focus speed, more features, superior image quality, especially at higher ISOs, and a wide range of fast lenses to use. However, as I alluded to above, these cameras are much larger, heavier, and much more conspicuous, making it much tougher to capture candid photographs. If the size of your camera discourages you from taking it everywhere, then its quality is irrelevant.

The micro 4/3rd cameras can be a fantastic way to get into street photography on a budget. Both prime and zoom lenses are available for these cameras. The Fuji X100 has stunning image quality for its size, but it is a little too quirky for me to recommend as a primary street photography camera, especially to someone just learning to shoot on the street. The autofocus is slow so you have to know how to zone focus well (we will cover this later in this section). If you can afford it, a Leica is a fantastic street photography camera. Its sharp lenses and image quality are unmatched when compared to cameras of similar sizes. However, Leicas do not have autofocus or zoom lenses. Many do not mind this; in fact, some even prefer it.

If you are only able to use one camera and cannot afford a Leica, then I recommend going with an SLR or perhaps a micro 4/3rds camera, with one zoom lens and one wide-angle prime lens around 28mm or 35mm. The wide-angle prime lens will be smaller and lighter and allow you to get closer and to shoot more candidly. However, the zoom lens will allow you to be more flexible in your day-to-day shooting by allowing you to change your focal length quickly or by helping you to capture scenes that you

cannot get to quickly enough with your feet. In addition, the newer SLRs generally have fantastic light sensitivity, and so you will be able to easily shoot at ISO 1600 in darker areas without a problem. The most important aspect that you should focus on when choosing a street photography camera is that it shoots well at high ISOs. This will free you up in so many ways and we will speak about why this is later on.

For me, what is of the utmost importance is that I have a camera that I enjoy enough to take with me everywhere. As I mentioned earlier, it does not matter how good your camera is if it is not around your neck. Also, there is no street photography camera that will universally work for all photographers. For example, Jay Maisel currently shoots on the street with a Nikon SLR and a 28-300mm zoom lens. The camera complements his shooting style well and the way that he visualizes scenes on the street. However, other photographers will only shoot with a Leica and a wide-angle lens. The key is that there is no correct gear to shoot on the street with; use whatever is most comfortable for you and best complements the way that you prefer to shoot.

Most importantly, do not feel that you need a Leica to be a real street photographer. That is not the case.

My Gear

I use both the Canon 5D Mark II with a 28mm, a 24-70mm, and a 24-105mm lens and the Fuji X100.

When I began shooting on the street, I strictly used a large DSLR and out of necessity I developed many techniques for remaining unnoticed, which we will learn about.

With the advent of the Fuji X100, I was able to experience what using a smaller camera was like. The autofocus is slow, so I primarily shoot with it using manual focusing. Regardless, it is a great compliment to a larger SLR. However, I prefer to use an SLR as my primary street photography camera

due to their speed, their image quality, their high ISO ability, and their flexible zoom lenses.

Chapter 13: Camera Settings



Polka Dots and Pink Shoes, 2012.

Learning to choose the correct camera settings is one of the most integral skills in street photography. You must burn this knowledge into your brain and practice it. Light changes so quickly on the streets that we need to be prepared to constantly alter the camera settings. Depending on the lighting, I switch between shutter priority, aperture priority, and manual mode. I use shutter priority the majority of the time because I often find myself shooting in less than ideal lighting.

Shutter Speed

If your aim is to freeze a scene, the most important thing to remember is to make sure that your shutter speed is fast enough to be able to stop the motion of your subject. If you are shooting something that is not moving, then you can choose a much slower shutter speed.

For still shots, 1 over the focal length is what you need to achieve sharpness. So if you are shooting with a 35mm lens then you would need to shoot at around 1/30th of a second. Image stabilization can add a few extra stops to this.

For people or things in motion, the common thought is that 1/160th of a second is the minimum speed necessary to freeze them. That is being generous. If it is absolutely necessary, I will go that slow, but I try to shoot at least at 1/250th and preferably at 1/320th. 1/320th is my true minimum if I have that flexibility. Many photographers aim for even more, up to 1/1000th of a second. In bright light, sure, but I find that a 320th to 500th is sufficient for my needs.

People move quickly through the streets and we are often walking in the opposite direction of them, so we do not want to take any chances by using an overly slow shutter speed.

On this note, one of my biggest pet peeves is when photographers do not stop their own motion when taking a photograph. I see it all of the time, people who aim, focus, and capture without even breaking stride. If you are shooting at an insanely high shutter speed, then this might work some of the time, however, you really need to be fully stopped to correctly take a photograph, even if it is only for a split second. Taking a photo while in motion is a haphazard practice and if you feel the need to do this, then you are probably walking too fast to begin with. Slow down.

If I am trying to capture a shot and I am in motion, I often use a technique called the stutter step. I think the term was coined by Dave Beckerman unless he got it from someone else. It is basically a very quick stop in full stride, almost like you freeze for a second in mid motion. It probably looks a bit ridiculous to anyone who is actually paying attention, but it happens so fast that nobody will notice or care.

Aperture

The smaller your aperture, the more of the scene that will be in focus (small apertures are the higher numbers, such as F11, while large apertures are the smaller numbers, such as F2.8). We need to use this to our advantage. Whether using manual or automatic focusing, the fact is that focusing quickly and accurately is extremely difficult when shooting on the streets. By using a small aperture, more of the shot will be in focus and so it will give us more leeway to capture our main target in focus. As a result, we should shoot at an aperture of F8, F11 or even F16 whenever it is possible to do so.

However, the lighting conditions are often very poor and we do not always have the option to shoot at F8 or more. Some people use flash in these situations, but I prefer to shoot at lower apertures to capture the natural light, even at F2 or F2.8 in extreme low light situations. While I miss some photos shooting this way, I catch enough to make it worthwhile. But as long as we have the option, we want to make sure to shoot with a smaller aperture.



Battleship, 2012.

ISO

If we are trying to shoot at 1/320th and F8 and the light is not perfect, then something has to give. Lighting conditions are rarely ideal, especially in cities where tall buildings can block the sun. This is where our ISO comes into play. We want to raise the ISO to give ourselves the ability to shoot with these shutter and aperture settings. The 5D Mark II and the Fuji X100 both have excellent ISO capabilities, so I do not hesitate to shoot at ISO 800, 1600, or even 3200. ISO 6400 is pushing it, but in a couple of years many cameras will probably shoot at ISO 6400 or 12800 adequately enough. I shoot at ISO 1600 a significant amount of the time. These days, I never shoot at ISO 200 for moving subjects on the streets. The high ISO abilities of the Canon 5D Mark II and the Fuji X100 are so good that I would prefer the extra shutter speed and aperture, even in strong sunlight.

You should test your camera's ISO capabilities and figure out the maximum you are comfortable shooting with. If your camera does not give adequate results at ISO 800 or more, then you may have to shoot at 1/250th or 1/160th at F4 or less in certain lighting conditions, or spend your time shooting in brighter situations. It will limit you, but not debilitate you.

Also, you have to make sure to expose correctly if you are shooting at a high ISO. The absolute worst look is when you take a high ISO photo and significantly raise the exposure in post-processing. It takes this beautiful grain and destroys it with a terrible digital look. If you can avoid it, do not underexpose when shooting at high ISOs.

Remember to constantly check your ISO settings. It can be a bummer to go out and take an amazing photo in great lighting conditions and then realize that your camera is still set at ISO 3200 from the night before. This is the most common mistake that I make.

Which Mode to Use

I frequently use all three modes: Shutter Priority (TV), Aperture Priority (AV), and Manual (M). Manual is the safest mode to shoot in. By shooting in Manual, your camera does not have the opportunity to misread the strength of the light and mess up your shot. Some lighting situations, such as when pointing the camera directly at the sun, or if there are large areas of dark shadows, bright highlights, or both in a scene, can cause the camera to read the light in a different way than how you will want to capture it. These tricky situations are when I prefer to shoot in manual mode. Also, if the light is consistent, such as on a cloudy day, I will shoot in Manual because I will not have to worry much about changing the settings.

However, generally speaking, the lighting conditions will change quickly and dramatically. As a result, we will not have the time to constantly change and test our manual settings. This is where the Shutter Priority and Aperture Priority modes are needed. If the light is not very bright, then I prefer to shoot in Shutter Priority, to make sure that I do not ever shoot at a speed slower than 1/320th or 1/500th. If the light is powerful, then I shoot in aperture priority at F8 or smaller, knowing that the shutter speed will be at least 1/320th and often a lot faster.

Tip

There is an important trick that I use when shooting in daylight. I will always set the opposite mode (Shutter or Aperture Priority) that I am shooting in to expose for the shadowed areas of the street.

For instance, while shooting in daylight conditions under shutter priority, I will also set my aperture priority ahead of time to a low aperture, say F2.8. This way, if I am shooting on shutter priority mode in strong daylight and come across an unexpected scene in the shadows that needs to be shot quickly, I can flip the dial over to aperture mode instantly and still get the shot.

Chapter 14: How to Focus



Evolution, 2012.

There is nothing worse than capturing the perfect moment and ruining the focus.

Focusing well is the toughest and most important technical aspect of street photography and it is the one that you should, no pun intended, focus on the most. As a result of the unpredictable and constantly fluctuating nature of the street, getting a shot in perfect focus is extremely difficult and requires a lot of practice.



The Auto-Focus / Manual Focus switch. Get used to quickly switching back and forth.

Auto-focus is a great luxury. Our eyes may get older and fuzzier, but as long as that red or green square is highlighted over the area that we want in focus then most likely the focus will be correct. In addition, if an unexpected moment happens and you need to change your focus quickly, then auto-focus is a powerful tool.

However, auto-focus is far from perfect. You have to look through the viewfinder to use it (unless you are using live view) and you have to select the focus area, so there is a good chance that you will miss those split second moments. At times, the auto-focus will malfunction, especially in low-light. In many cameras, the auto-focus systems do not work particularly well in low levels of light.

Manual focusing, or more specifically zone focusing, is the technique that I use for about sixty or seventy percent of my street photos. Manual focusing involves turning the manual focus dial until the subject of your shot is sharp. Zone focusing involves keeping your focus distance set to a certain range, say eight feet away, and then waiting until your subject enters that range. The benefit is that this will guarantee that everything in the range that you choose will be sharp, but the trade-off is that it is extremely tough to figure out exactly how far something is away just by looking at it, particularly when shooting with an aperture of F5.6 or wider.

For instance, if you are shooting with a 35mm lens at F8 and you pre-focus your camera to 8 feet, then everything from approximately 5.5 feet to 15

feet away will be in an acceptable range of sharpness. The closer that objects get to 8 feet, the sharper they will appear.

Here is a link to figure out the depth of field depending on your focal length, aperture, and focus distance. You can see how much tougher it gets when you go below F5.6. <http://www.dofmaster.com/dofjs.html>

Zone focusing can be easy when you are shooting in strong lighting conditions and when you are able to keep your aperture in the range of F8 to F16, thus giving you a wide range of the scene that will be sharp. However, we often do not have this luxury.

Learning to zone focus with a smaller aperture is a difficult but very important skill for street photographers to master. There are few technical skills that you can master that will have a better effect on the outcome of your photos.



The manual focus meter. Get used to using this. I often walk around with my camera set to focus to 8 feet away and then adjust as necessary on the fly. Sometimes, I zone focus as close as 3-5 feet.

Pre-Focus, Lens Distance, and Aperture

The smaller your aperture and the wider your focal length, the more of your scene that will be in focus. This helps immensely with zone focusing. If more of the scene is in focus then there is more of a range for you to get that focus correct. The opposite is true of a telephoto view. Since the range of sharp focus decreases as you increase your focal distance, it is not practical to zone focus without a wide-angle view. I never zone focus over 35mm.

If you practice, then it is possible to zone focus even at F2 with a wide-angle lens. I shoot often in low light situations, particularly on the subway. I will ruin the focus on many of these shots; it is impossible not to, however, I catch more than enough to make it worthwhile.

Also, keep in mind that the closer you get to your subject, the smaller the range of acceptable focus will be. If you are shooting at F2, then it can be extremely difficult to be accurate consistently at close distances, such as 3 feet away. Trying to focus on something 8 feet away at F2 is much easier.

Above all, remember, if you have time to use auto-focus and your subject will not notice, then use it. It works much better than zone focusing.

Zone Focusing Exercise

Hopefully, your lens or camera has a manual focusing meter on it. If not, and you are serious about street photography then you should consider purchasing a camera or lens that has one.

For those of you that do, I have an assignment for you. Find a tape measure and hold it to the tip of your lens. Then measure out 3 feet, 4 feet, 5 feet, all the way to 15 feet away. Learn how far these distances are from your camera.

Then, go outside with your camera and auto-focus on objects that are different distances away. Guess their distances and then check the manual meter to see how close you are to the exact numbers. Remember that the auto-focus is not always accurate, so check each distance by auto-focusing twice on each object. Do not be discouraged if you are off at first. This is a difficult exercise. However, you should work on this until it becomes second nature.



Chapter 15: Blur



Shadowed Man, 2003.

Blur can have a spectacular look to it. Not enough street photographers use blur these days as a visual tool, and I admit that I often forget to use it. I get stuck in the frame of mind of trying to get everything tack sharp and I forget that there is an entire other world out there.

Blur can add energy, movement, beauty, abstraction, and even a painterly quality to a photograph. It is very easy to get creative when using blur.

There are two types of blur. The first type is motion blur, which is due to a slow shutter speed that causes the moving subjects in a photo to be blurred, as well as the entire scene to be blurred if our hands and body are not steady. The second type is out-of-focus blur, often due to a large aperture, a telephoto view, or not focusing directly on your subject. In general, I prefer

the look of motion blur due to a slow shutter, where the background is still sharp.

You can always capture motion blur on a tripod with very slow shutter speeds. The longer the shutter speed, the more your subjects will turn into wisps floating through the scene. However, you can also do this handheld. With a wide-angle lens and steady hands or image stabilizing, you can handhold at 1/20th or 1/30th of a second and capture the background sharp. In certain shots, it will not matter if the background is sharp; a little blur can add to the look.

I often prefer shutter speeds in this range (around 1/30th), because they add enough blur to people to add the feeling of movement and energy, yet it still freezes them enough that they have shape and you can make their features out.

In addition, an interesting look is to capture crowds with motion blur. I love the play between sharp, stationary people and the different rates of movement and motion blur with others in the crowd.

I also prefer my photos with blur to be in black and white. This is just a personal preference, but I think it looks better without color. The lack of color allows you to focus more on the shapes themselves and on the movement within the photo.

The best time to try some blur is during dusk when the light levels are low and it gets harder to capture sharp and steady street photos. If you have a camera that does not shoot well at high ISOs, then you can compensate when the light is not perfect by experimenting with blur. The effects that you can create are infinite depending on the light available, the shutter speed, and the rate of movement of your subjects.



The Cigarette, 2010.

Aesthetically, *The Cigarette* turned out beautifully, with the flowers, the two locks, the ornate grating and post, the cigarette, and even the framed eye in the background, but what I have realized over time is that all of that stuff is just a beautiful frame for that face.

This shot is all about that face; the self-reflective face of an exhausted, depressed hairdresser in a city that is not kind to workers in this sort of low-paid position. I see this same, imprisoned face many times each day.

Soft Focus

As a result of the constantly changing nature and perpetual movement associated with shooting on the street, it is not expected that every image captured is going to be perfectly in focus. Often, the lighting conditions will be poor, the scene will develop too quickly, and people will be moving too fast. This is the nature of the game.

A soft-focus shot is not always a reject. Occasionally, a photograph, no matter what you do, will be impossible to get sharp. Most likely, it will ruin these shots, but sometimes a photograph with a strong enough concept or visual look will be stunning, whether sharp or not. Sometimes it will even look better with a little blur.

In *The Cigarette*, I captured this peripheral shot in the early evening. I could not see until the moment I came upon it. I only had a split second to take the shot before she noticed and moved. As a result, there was slight motion blur because of all these factors. Luckily, the blur ended up to be pleasing and makes the cigarette look almost ethereal. I actually prefer it to a tack sharp print because it looks more like a painting than a photograph.

Strive for sharpness, if that is what you are aiming for. It is one of the most important technical skills in street photography, but also realize that occasionally a photo will be just as good (or better) with a little blur.

Chapter 16: Shooting from the Hip



Self Portrait (from the hip), Times Square, 2012.

The term ‘shooting from the hip’ refers to taking a photograph without looking through the viewfinder. The camera can be at your chest, at your knees, above your head, or anywhere where your eye is not looking through the viewfinder. The most common way to shoot from the hip is with the camera at your chest, as represented in the photo on the previous page. Do you notice how hidden the camera is this way?

The two primary purposes of shooting this way is so that your subject will not notice that they are being photographed and to capture those split-second perspectives that do not allow you time to bring the camera to your eye.

I often shoot from the hip for these reasons, but it is a very tough way to shoot and it should only be used when needed. To be able to shoot

successfully this way takes a lot of skill and practice and if you are a beginner, I do not recommend trying it until you have spent some serious hours practicing on the streets shooting through your viewfinder. For some of you this technique might be the wrong way of shooting entirely.

Many veteran street photographers prefer to never shoot from the hip. Some people have a strong aversions towards it and I do not disagree with their reasoning. They argue that you need to frame your shots perfectly and cannot do this without looking through the viewfinder. Photographers who primarily use autofocus cannot shoot from the hip because they will have no way to focus. Many photographers also believe that this technique is a sloppy way to shoot. Others dislike shooting from the hip because it is sneaky.

That being said, I do think it is necessary in many situations and even moreso with a large DSLR. Many of my best shots have been taken this way and I would not have been able to capture some of my candid shots without the technique. I think it is a skill that many of you should eventually try to add to your arsenal.

If you are in a crowded area, if the subjects of your photo are not paying attention, or if your main subjects are not very close to your lens, then there is no need to shoot from the hip. However, I use a DSLR, mostly at 28 or 35mm and I like to get close. A camera is one of the most noticeable contraptions on the planet, especially bulky DSLRs in the hands of eager photographers that look like they are going on a safari. In addition, New Yorkers are generally very aware of cameras and it can be difficult to capture candid moments of them on the streets.

A valid concern regarding shooting from the hip is that your composition may not be perfect. But after enough practice you should become proficient at guessing how the composition will appear without looking. However, when shooting from the hip you need to use a wide-angle lens. Even doing it at 50mm is extremely tough. It is hard to deal with both focusing and framing as you inch closer and closer towards a telephoto view. Regardless,

who needs to shoot from the hip when you are photographing from that far away anyway?

It helps to shoot with a prime lens when you shoot from the hip because it will allow you to get used to the perspective and field of view so that you can begin to accurately guess the frame lines when you are not looking through the viewfinder.

What I do sometimes is somewhat different. I often use a zoom lens on my DSLR but when I do, I try to treat it like a prime, only using the zoom when the view is needed. I usually alter between 28mm and 35mm and after every shot, I default the lens back to one of these standard focal lengths. That way, I am walking around with the view that I am most used to and I can easily shoot from the hip if need be, but I can still use the zoom if I need to as well. If you do not do this then it is impossible to shoot from the hip with a zoom lens.

I also do not think the relationship between shooting from the hip and speed is discussed enough. You cannot walk around with the camera stuck to your eye and sometimes things happen so fast that the moments are gone before you are able to raise the camera to your eye, particularly in very crowded areas. Holding the camera, zone focused and ready to shoot on your chest allows you to fire immediately when something happens and it also allows you to see everything that is happening around you without blocking your field of view.

However, please do not become careless with this type of shooting by clicking the shutter at random and hoping to get lucky. Shooting from the hip does not mean you should shoot haphazardly. It is a skill to refine.



A Mother's Burden, 2012.

A Mother's Burden is a representation of how you have to occasionally handle yourself to capture some moments. It wasn't just a lucky snap like a few of them are.

I came across this family at the top of the subway stairs and halfway down the corridor, with the mother pushing the heavy stroller and the father not helping out at all. Instead of taking a quick shot and moving on, I decided to jog ahead of them and down the stairs to get into a good position. This made it easier to prepare and pretend like I was just waiting around so that they wouldn't notice me taking the candid hip shot.

Live View

Live view is a camera function where a real time view of the scene is displayed on the LCD screen of a camera. Unfortunately, not all cameras have this capability. Photographing using this technique provides the photographer with the ability to be discrete while shooting, since it appears that one is just fiddling with their camera. However, the beauty that this method allows, is that you can easily see the scene, focus, and frame it in a very precise manner. It may sound like a gimmick; however, I use this trick

often with the Fuji X100, especially on the subway and it is effective. It can be good for times when people seem aware that you could be taking their photo.

If you think about the way that Vivian Maier, the famous Chicago nanny and street photographer who photographed in the mid-20th century, took her photos, it is the exact same concept. Maier used a Rolleiflex, which has a viewfinder on the top of it that aims upwards. This allowed her to look down at the camera yet still see the image and since her camera was not up to her eye and her face was not looking directly at her subjects there was much less of a chance of them noticing, or at least reacting. I think this played a large part in the natural feeling of many of her photographs.

People will still notice your camera but they will not be as conscious that you are taking their photo. It guarantees a level of candidness and it is an excellent tool to use, especially if you are not yet comfortable with zone focusing or shooting from the hip without looking.



Chapter 17: How to Hold the Camera



The primary ways that I hold the camera.

Speed is key and how you hold the camera can make all the difference in the world for getting the shot.

On the previous page I have outlined the primary ways that I hold my camera when I shoot. Positions one and two are the most important, by far, but I will break out the other moves when I need to be even more discreet.

Often, I like to wrap the camera strap around my wrist instead of around my neck. It is much quicker and easier to maneuver the camera this way and it also allows you to easily shoot from the hip if you need to. Also, it will save you from straining your neck if you are using a heavy camera for a long period of time. That being said, you will also look more like a photographer to bystanders. The big advantage to shooting from the hip with the camera

strapped to your wrist is that it becomes an extension of your arm. It gives you a little more freedom to aim in any direction.

I do carry the camera around my neck sometimes as well, which is much lighter and makes you look like a tourist instead of a photographer. I also shoot through the viewfinder a lot. But those techniques are self explanatory.

When you are extremely close, such as in the subway or indoors, a good trick is to pretend that you are fiddling with your camera or looking through your photos on the camera's LCD screen. However, when walking down the street, I usually hold my SLR in front of me horizontally (top middle photo above), high up on my chest with my finger on the trigger. Always make sure your lens cap is off and your finger is on the trigger.

Now keep in mind that you do not have to just shoot in front of you. If you have to, you can always shoot sideways. I do not recommend shooting sideways unless it is necessary, but sometimes it can be. I sometimes shoot vertical portraits sideways as it is a great way to inconspicuously capture candids and catch a person's entire body. I have been able to get some of my closest candid portraits while shooting sideways.

Also, keep in mind that all of this sneaking around does not really come into play if you are in the middle of a crowd. When there are lots of people around that are moving quickly in every direction, then you can do whatever you want and nobody will notice. But often, it is just you and a handful of people in the same area and that is when these techniques really come in handy. They are only for when there is no other option.



Chapter 18: Zoom vs. Prime



170mm (zoom lens)–Trash and Vaudeville, St. Marks, 2010.

The hardest decision you will have to make while shooting on the street is whether to use a zoom lens or a prime lens. The decision depends on your camera, your personality, what you prefer to shoot, and how skilled you are with your camera. Some of you will be more comfortable with a prime lens, while others will prefer a zoom.

If you use them the right way, then you will find that neither type of lens is better than the other; they are just different. Dave Beckerman once told me, “No matter what camera or lens I use, I will still get the same amount of keepers. They will just be different shots.”

A prime lens has many advantages. If you use it constantly then you will get used to the perspective and it will make you much faster on the streets. You will learn to see how the lens sees, which is very important. In

addition, wide-angle and normal prime lenses are usually much smaller, less obtrusive and lighter than their zoom lens counterparts and so it will help you maneuver around and shoot candidly in a much easier way. An SLR is much smaller and lighter with a smaller prime lens.

Prime lenses are also cheaper than zoom lenses, so you can get a fast lens for a fraction of the price of a fast zoom. For instance, the Canon 35mm F2 lens is \$329.95, while the Canon 24-70mm F2.8L lens is \$1,329.00. Price can be the deciding factor.

So then why would we ever want to use a zoom lens? Primarily because they are beneficial for the flexibility to change your focal length on the fly and to be able to shoot at a greater distance when needed.

I like shooting both ways. As I said before, I primarily use a zoom lens but I try to treat it like a prime, defaulting back to 28 or 35mm after every shot. But I do often go out with a 28mm prime lens. I switch it up. Each lens offers different results and I do not want to limit myself by only using one. While some people say that they hate telephoto street shots, I find there to be many shots out there that you can only capture with a telephoto view.

When you are learning, I suggest you try spending a lot of time with both a prime lens and a zoom lens before you decide to stick with one or the other, if you are ever able to make that decision.



35mm (prime lens)–Thinking of Home, Bodega, 2012.

Chapter 19: Perspective and Framing



Midtown, 35mm, 2011.

The study of perspective has been the topic upon which many fine art books have been based. This chapter will highlight the key aspects of perspective and how they relate to street photography.

Wide-Angle Versus Telephoto

A wide-angle lens refers to a lens that is 35mm or smaller (on a full-frame sensor), a telephoto lens refers to a lens that is 85mm or longer, and a normal lens comprises the middle ground.

It is widely believed that the ultimate objective when shooting on the street is to get as close to your subjects as possible with a wide-angle lens. I often strive for this when out shooting since photos have a completely different look when captured close-up with a wide-angle lens as opposed to with a

telephoto lens from a further away. Having the main subject in close proximity and subsequently consuming a lot of the frame can be very important. It is often the difference between a good and bad shot.

A wide-angle lens will widen the perspective between foreground and background, making objects that are closest to the camera much larger, while making objects further away from the camera proportionally much smaller. This is a great way to incorporate many elements together in the same scene. You can simultaneously make the larger foreground elements a focal point of the photo, while still fitting a wide area of the background in the frame, since the background elements will be proportionally smaller. The background will also be much sharper than if you were to shoot with a telephoto lens from further away.

In addition, getting close provides a certain type of intimacy. It makes the viewer feel like they are an active participant in what is happening. With a longer lens and a more compressed view, the viewer feels more removed or uninvolved, observing the scene from a far distance.

A telephoto view will compress the scene, which means that objects that are further away will appear larger and more similar in size to the foreground elements. Telephoto views can be very pleasing. They effectively capture details or a small portion of the surrounding area. You do not always need to show the entire background or multiple foreground elements for a photo to have impact. Generally, telephoto views tend to be much more graphic in nature. When you compress and reduce the amount of elements in a scene, lines, shapes, and colors become much more prominent and important. Lastly, there are the scenes where all of the elements that we want to capture will be far away from us and we will be unable to move closer to them. The only option for these cases is to use a telephoto lens.



24mm–Chinatown Tunnel, 2012.

Horizontal, Vertical and Diagonal Framing

When framing your scene, you need to determine whether shooting horizontally, vertically, or diagonally is appropriate. Horizontal framing is usually my preferred choice because it is the natural way our eyes view the world and so we feel more comfortable viewing images this way. It can also be difficult when photographing on the streets to capture a person with a vertical perspective without sacrificing a majority of the background content and it is more difficult to shoot candidly while holding the camera in this manner. If showing a lot of background is important, then horizontal framing is recommended.

Vertical framing can be an effective tool used to focus on a specific person or object while often de-emphasizing other aspects of the surrounding background. If you want to emphasize height or vertical lines or have a particular person consume the entire frame then this is a good choice. This

is why vertical framing works extremely well for fashion street photography, where the clothes, accessories, and the person wearing them are of the utmost importance and the background of the shot is not a priority.

The diagonal lines of diagonal framing provide energy, dynamism, and movement into a capture, which can complement the fast paced energy of a city well. This is one of my favorite ways to shoot. By diagonal, I do not mean that you need to shoot at a dramatic 45 degree angle. By shooting with your camera tilted in a slightly diagonal way, the entire feeling of a scene can be transformed to feel less formal, more dynamic, and more ‘part of the moment.’

If you look at Garry Winogrand’s famous street shot, Hollywood Boulevard, this photograph would have had so much less energy had it been shot straight on. Find this shot on the web, take it into Photoshop and rotate it back to a straight horizontal view to see for yourself. The shot loses all its luster when framed horizontally.

Height

Another trick that we can use as street photographers to change the feeling of a scene is to alter the height at which we shoot.

If we shoot from below, then we see the world through a child’s eyes. Everything appears larger, more prominent, and sometimes more imposing. This angle can elongate people or shift the focus to what they are wearing. We can focus in on tiny details about them. Subjects can appear more menacing, powerful or dangerous.

On the other hand, shooting from above will have the opposite effect. Everything will appear smaller and more compact. If the angle becomes extreme enough, then the context of the shot captured can appear almost toy like. When viewed from above, scenes tend to be more graphic, abstract, and removed from reality.



Chapter 20: Light



Chinatown Apocalypse, 2010.

One of the most important ways that visually striking street photographs are created is through shooting in areas with interesting lighting. When shooting, you should pay attention to the quality of light in a scene as well as to patterns created by shadows.

You can use light to highlight a primary subject, to create interesting patterns or shapes, to add contrast or softness, or to add glow or warmth. You should try to photograph in all different lighting conditions on the street, such as in the early morning, during the harsh brightness of midday, when it is foggy, in the glow of twilight, or even under lampposts and artificial light at night. When shooting in the street, there is no correct light. Each type of light has its own qualities that you will need to pay attention to and account for.

While landscape photographers generally avoid shooting during the midday, this can be a great time of day to shoot on the street. The streets are hazy and hot, the sun beats down harshly on people's skin, and the difference between the highlights and shadows is very pronounced. Even lens flare can be an interesting lighting effect if used in the right way. The light may not have the same warm and pleasing look of a late afternoon glow, but this is not bad, it is just different and should be treated accordingly.

You should make sure to pay attention to where the sun is in relationship to what you are shooting. Is it in front of you, behind you, or to the side of you? How high in the sky is it? It makes a huge difference as to how the photo will turn out. I have heard people say to try not to shoot directly into the sun, but if done correctly I enjoy this hazy look immensely. However, often times, you will have to darken the shadows down in post production.

If you have a camera that does not shoot well at high ISOs, it would be beneficial to photograph at times and areas that are bright enough to shoot at a high shutter speed, high aperture, and low ISO. The way to compensate for a less advanced camera is simply to shoot in brighter situations.

The challenge with shooting on the street is that the light changes constantly. The lighting in street photography differs greatly from shooting in a studio, where lighting is easily manipulated and remains constant. When shooting on the street, you need to constantly be aware of the light in order to identify good photographic opportunities and to make sure that your exposure is correct. Compromising a great shot with a bad exposure is never a welcomed outcome. You can only correct so much in Lightroom and Photoshop.



Partier, Lower East Side, 2011.

Photographing at night under the light of street lamps can create some wonderfully moody portraits. If you have a camera that shoots well at high ISOs, then you can shoot this handheld, but make sure to stay close to strong light sources such as street lamps or illuminated signs. If you photograph handheld in the dead of night, far from lighting sources and with no flash, then not even the highest quality cameras can help you out. Stake out some locations with acceptable lighting, such as near lit storefront signs or lampposts, which can give a painterly glow. The portrait on the next page was actually taken on a tripod and I love the way that the highlights frame the edges of the man's shadowed face.

Flash is another way that you can illuminate night scenes or even day scenes. I rarely shoot flash on the street since it is a little too intrusive for my taste; however, I do like it. In fact, I am a huge fan of the look, but as a technique it does not mesh with my personality.

There are a couple of ways to shoot on the streets with a flash. The first is to blast people with a strong flash and forget about the background. This will expose for the foreground and illuminate everything in the range of the flash; however, the background will be completely dark.



Bearded Man, 2004. 1/90th at F11, ISO 400 (notice dark background.)

The second approach is to expose for the background and then use the flash as a fill light to freeze and illuminate the foreground. You can shoot around 1/8th of a second at a high ISO to keep the background fairly well exposed, steady, and sharp and then flash your subject so that they will be sharp and well-lit. If the subject is moving quickly when shot in this manner then there will be some ghosting; however, this can provide an interesting look.

Bruce Gilden is probably the most well-known flash street photographer. If you are interested in this technique and creative use of flash, then I suggest you study his work. He uses flash in a way that adds energy and chaos into his scenes that seem to match the energy of his subjects. However, do not mistake his use of flash as the defining aspect of his photography style.

Also, Bruce Davidson is another incredible photographer to take a look at who often used flash in his work.



Bruce Gilden at Work.

Chapter 21: Capturing the Moment

Hesitation has ruined so many great street photos.

You see the moment, think for a second about whether you want to take the shot, and it is gone before you have made up your mind. You get nervous and hesitate for too long and it is gone. Or you see the moment, spring into action, and realize that your lens cap is on or your settings are off.

You can only anticipate so many moments before they happen. Many moments will spring up in front of you without any warning; you have to be ready. Your camera has to be on, lens cap off, in your hand, and set for the lighting. You have to be paying attention and looking around. Then you have to react.

It is tough to react quickly, especially if you do not have much experience shooting on the street and are apprehensive about it. I start to daydream and miss shots all the time. Reacting is a skill that takes practice. If you do not shoot regularly this is a skill that is easily lost. If you are a street photographer, then you have to be out there consistently shooting on the street to hone your instincts. There is no way around it.

However, there is a difference between seeing a moment and attacking it and shooting constantly without purpose. When shooting, you do not need to take a thousand photos of everything that moves. The digital age makes it easy for us to do this. We think we can shoot like crazy and edit it down later. We think that if we take more shots, then it will give us a better chance of capturing better photographs.

This could not be further from the truth. If you shoot frantically, then you actually give yourself less of a chance of capturing the moment. The more selective you are when shooting, the more of a chance you will have of capturing the moment. We have a wonderful luxury with the digital medium, but I think we should still treat things as if every single shot is

precious. We should be methodical and careful with our captures as if we were using film (and some of you probably still are).



For the shot *Mona, 2011*, I was walking down 5th avenue during holiday season. The streets were packed with people, to the point of being almost too crowded to shoot in. There was a man in front of me and suddenly, he veered off to the right and I saw this girl with this powerful, knowing expression, not usually seen in your typical young girl. The expression looked so familiar, but I could not put my finger on it.

Fortunately, my camera was ready, on my chest, framed correctly, pre-focused to the right distance, the settings were set, and my finger was on the trigger.

About a month later, I finally realized why that face looked so familiar. A lucky moment, but one that I was prepared for and able to see.



When you sense a moment happening, you need to think about the angle, the framing, the content, and you need to trigger the shutter at the exact moment that everything is in place. It takes very strong content to overcome horrible framing. Some moments will be spontaneous and you will not have a choice but to shoot quickly, but more often you will see a moment as it begins to come together and so you will have some time to get into position and have control over the framing. In addition, framing will become more instinctual as you gain experience.

You do not want to hold the shutter down because you are afraid of missing the shot. The photographers that take the most shots of a subject are usually the ones that miss the moment. Try to anticipate when a moment will happen and capture the photo with careful shots at the right points. Shoot with your gut. You should be able to feel when the moment is right. If the scene starts to further develop then you can continue to shoot more quickly, but make sure that the first shot counts. You will often find that the first or last shot in a sequence is the best one.

Do not be afraid to miss. You will miss sometimes, but the ones you hit will be way better than the hundreds of photos you would have otherwise taken that are almost there but not quite. You do not want your portfolio to be a collection of slightly missed moments.

This does not mean that you should only take one or two shots of a scene. You can keep shooting. It just means that when something happens you should not close your eyes and rapid fire.

After all, if we are shooting constantly then we cannot actually see what is happening.



Glance, 2012.

Chapter 22: Looking Inconspicuous



Smoke, 2011.

Sometimes you can just jump in front of a subject and take your shot, but many times you cannot, especially if you want to capture a candid moment.

As a street photographer, you can benefit a lot from acting if you are going to try to get close to a subject while being inconspicuous. You might play the part of a spaced-out tourist, engrossed in something happening across the street, or perhaps someone who is lost and has to stop for a moment to collect himself; however, you are certainly not someone who looks like he

is about to take a photo. While people are generally more perceptive of SLRs, an advantage of shooting with these cameras is that no matter what you look like, people will usually assume you are a tourist.

Never point your head directly at your subject or make eye contact until you take the shot. There is something evolutionary about eye contact that will make a person immediately notice you. Even for a split second, it will ruin your cover. Instead, try to look through the person, as if you are looking at something behind them and slightly to the side. Also, it will help to wear inconspicuous, dark clothing. I would avoid wearing bright colors, or garments that may draw attention to yourself. You want to blend in with the street and the environment around you.

I like to act like I am walking around daydreaming, just in awe of my surroundings and looking in a slightly different direction of what I want to photograph. However, I will consciously ensure that my path intersects with my subject and then I will stop as if I am gathering myself or as if I see something interesting. My body will often be slightly angled away from the subject while I get my camera into position so as not to arouse suspicion. Then I will quickly move the frame into place, take some shots, and walk away as if nothing happened.

The capture on the previous page, Smoke, is an example of a shot that was captured utilizing these techniques. I was walking down the street, perpendicular to the way the subject was facing with the camera at my side and strapped to my right wrist, at a 30 degree angle away from my body. I noticed him halfway down the block and so I tried to slow down and time my walk to reach him at the exact point after he took a drag of his cigarette, so I could capture the exhale. Then I stopped for a split second like I lost my way, took the photo of him quickly, and kept going. All of this happened in a fraction of a second and he did not notice.

I could have popped in front of his face and taken the photo, but that would have ruined the candid nature of the moment. I also like how the low

framing makes him appear larger and more menacing and includes the cigarette and his tattoos.

Only be sneaky when you need to be. There is a time and place for shooting in this fashion. Sometimes there is no way around it and you just have to be sneaky to get the right photograph. But most importantly, you should never look self conscious. Always walk around with a smile and keep an air of confidence like you belong there and there will be much less of a chance of you being noticed or of people caring if they do see you take their photo.

If you get caught, just acknowledge the subject with a friendly smile.

Chapter 23: Street Photography at Night



Noodletown, Chinatown at Night, 2012. 1/60th at F2.8, ISO 3200–Fuji X100.

As digital technology continues to develop and improve, street photographers are quickly being provided with the ability to shoot high quality photos at high ISOs. While camera companies used to compete over the amount of megapixels in their cameras, they are now competing over who can provide better image quality at high ISOs. As a result, we now have the ability to shoot on the street with ISOs of 1600, 3200, or even 6400 for certain cameras. This capability will only increase over time.

Because of this, we can now shoot handheld at night with fast enough shutter speeds to freeze motion. We still have to compromise a bit, such as shooting at F2 to F4, staying closer to artificial light sources and sometimes going under our minimum threshold to completely freeze movement. But, while it is still somewhat difficult, it works and it is only getting easier.

Take a look at the photo on the previous page. This photo was shot with a handheld, rangefinder sized Fuji X100. It has some grain, but the quality of the RAW file is fantastic. It was not brightened in post production and it is sharp. Because of this technology, we now have a new range of photos that we can capture. To say this is exciting is an understatement.

Photographing at night is more difficult, presents safety concerns, and it can alter our sleep schedules, but it is worth it. I often have to psych myself up to leave my apartment, but when I am out there at night, especially when it is rainy, I feel alive. New York has a dark, eerie, and romantic essence to it at night that cannot be replicated during the day.

The quality of light at night is gorgeous. The street lamps quietly highlight shadowed figures as they pass by. The colors and textures of the city are enhanced in such a stunning way, especially from colored, glowing signs reflected on wet pavement. Huge buildings that are stark and monotonous by day are transformed at night to look ominous and menacing. The city flat out sparkles.

When shooting in the rain, make sure to bring a good quality, lightweight umbrella and not one of those cheap ones that they sell for five dollars on street corners that break after a few uses. Make sure it is a small traveler size as well because you are going to be holding it in one hand for a long time. Also, bring multiple hand towels to wipe off your lens since it will continually get wet. Hand towels are the most important thing to bring when shooting in the rain or snow. There are camera covers that you can purchase as well, but I find that these are too cumbersome, and an umbrella and towels for the lens are all that I need.



Punk Rock, East Village, 2012. 1/250th at F2, ISO 3200–Fuji X100.

When I shoot street scenes at night and want to get people sharp, I tend to not get as close as I do during the day, unless there is a strong light source present. You cannot yet use an ISO high enough to shoot at night at 1/320th of a second to freeze a fast moving person close-up, so I generally tend to step back, so that people become smaller parts of the entire scene. In addition, I find buildings and the surrounding urban fabric to be fascinating at night and so I am usually inclined to incorporate this into my shots. I normally shoot from 1/125th all the way to 1/30th at F2 through F4.



Lower East Side, 2011. 1/8th at F4, ISO 800.

In *Lower East Side, 2011*, I wanted to capture the energy of a summer weekend evening in the Lower East Side neighborhood of Manhattan, known to many as the party hot spot in the City. I wanted a photo with depth that included late-night partiers covering every inch of the photo, from the foreground to the background. I wanted some subjects in motion and some still. I also wanted to capture the lights and signs of the bars, restaurants, and shops, as well as a taxicab in the frame that was not blocking the revelers. I found this location around 11pm and parked my tripod. It took about three hours to finally get this shot.

If you know there is potential for a great photo then wait for it. There are so few great street photographs out there that the potential for capturing one is worth waiting for.

Street Photography Using a Tripod

More street photographers should try to utilize tripods, especially when shooting at night. Tripods are not only a tool for landscape photographers. It is hard to capture that spontaneous moment with a tripod, but the objective here is to find a background and wait for the correct characters to enter and create your scene.

You can create some amazing effects on a tripod that you could not otherwise capture shooting handheld. You can capture and blur movement in such a beautiful way, while still having the background sharp. It is a fantastic tool for capturing the energy and variance of a crowd. Slowing down the shutter adds vibrance, movement, and the passage of time into a photograph. It opens up a world of opportunity from the frozen moment.

As we spoke about before, you can hand hold with a quality SLR at very high ISOs to get some grainy, but good quality pictures. But going out occasionally with a tripod, especially at night, will allow you to capture a type and quality of scene that you will be unable to capture otherwise. This is a technique I recommend experimenting with.

Part 3: Editing

Capturing great photographs is only half of the battle; it is what happens after we come in from the streets, the work we do in our homes, offices, and studios, that ultimately defines us as street photographers. The term editing comprises two main aspects: post processing and organizing and reviewing our work. Our goal as street photographers should be to create stunning prints from our negatives and to organize our work into concise portfolios of consistent ideas.

There are many factors that are involved in turning a negative into a stunning print, which we will go over in this section. Some photographers alter their images minimally in post production, while others prefer to process their images more intensively. There is no correct process. It comes down to personal preference and the final print is all that matters.



Athens Economic Protest, 2011, was taken from the empty restaurant of the luxury Hotel Grande Bretagne, located on Athen's Syntagma Square. The silhouettes are of economic protestors.

This image highlights the economic conflict between the wealthy minority and the struggling majority. There is a feeling of fear in this image in the sense that the angry masses are just outside of the window, but also a feeling of safety brought on by the curtains and shades, and the luxurious features of the hotel interior.

The tools and programs that are available to us to assist in our post production are vast and powerful. However, while they should be used to aid us in creating the finest quality prints, they should not be used as a crutch to fix shots whose errors could have been avoided by changing the camera settings at the time the image was captured. It is vitally important to create the best possible negative in the camera.

The second aspect of editing involves looking over our work on a conceptual level. It is seeing our captures for the first time outside of the moment. It is organizing them, fitting them into themes, and choosing which photos mean something to us and which are throwaways. Editing is evaluating our development, our strengths, and our weaknesses so that we can improve. It is learning about ourselves and the themes in our work and understanding what fits and what does not. It is when we have a second to slow down and think about our work.

It is often in front of the computer or in the darkroom where a personal vision is born.

Chapter 24: Organization and How to Pick Your Best Shots



Limo with Cigarette Smoke, 2003.

"Photographers mistake the emotion they feel while taking the photo as a judgment that the photograph is good" – Garry Winogrand

Whether you are working with file cabinets of film or thousands of digital files, you need to use the best tools available to organize your archive and edit your work. Being able to organize your work, pick out your best shots, and weed out your worst is one of the most important skills in street photography and it is a skill that will develop over time. There is a lot of junk out there and you do not want to add to it. As photographers, we are not only judged by our best work but by our worst work as well.

A good rule is to not edit your photographs the same day you take them. A week or a month is a good amount of time to wait. Garry Winogrand, one of

the most influential mid-20th century street photographers, would set his negatives aside for a year and forget about them before developing them, so as not to have any attachment to them. You do not want the emotions of the day to cloud your judgement on what is a good street photograph and what is not. If you were excited about capturing a specific scene and you review the photo on the same day that you took it, that excitement might influence you to believe that the photo is good, even if the reality is that it is a poor shot. You should treat editing as if you are an impartial viewer and the only way to do this is to separate yourself and to give yourself time to clear your head from the day of shooting.

I break this rule all of the time. Often, I want to see and edit photos right away. However, this is acceptable because I make sure to come back to them weeks or months later to re-edit. I will go back to the same folder of images many times over the course of a month or a year, reassessing photos, searching for diamonds in the rough, and altering already completed photos. I often tweak or undo what I had originally created. I sometimes strongly dislike images that I had been very excited about when I first saw them. It is surprising how many changes I will make when coming back to a folder at a later date.

Be organized with your files and be diligent about going through them. Do not just edit a folder and be done with it. Come back over time. You will feel different about your photographs months or years later.

If you find that you are capturing great street photographs all of the time, then you should alter your definition of what a great street photograph is. Those moments, those feelings, those thoughts, that beauty just does not come along in the right way that often while your camera is present.

As Ansel Adams once said, "Twelve significant photographs in any one year is a good crop." That might even be pushing it. Try this. Take your favorite street photographers and try to remember more than fifteen of their photos. Most of these photographers worked for decades and, odds are, you cannot remember more than fifteen of their photos.

Be critical of your own work; highly critical. Ask the advice of people who you know will give you honest answers. Most people are hesitant to be critical of an artist's work and as a result, some artists never get the critiques that they really need. The internet can be a tough forum for this as well because there is no dislike button. If you hear the comments, 'great,' 'wonderful,' and 'amazing' over and over again then maybe it is time to ask some different people about what they think. You want someone who will be tough on you. Honest answers and conversations are key to your development as an artist.

Adobe Lightroom

Using the program Adobe Lightroom to edit and organize my work has had a transformative effect on my photography. For me, there is no better photo organizing and editing program. Lightroom is an incredible tool that allows photographers to seamlessly view, organize, rate, edit, export and keyword photographs. It is a one-stop shop for your entire image archive.

Lightroom has all of this functionality but at the same time it is extremely intuitive and easy to use. I can go through a folder of images, locate the best shots, and edit them in a quarter of the time that it used to take me. My editing has exponentially improved because of the flexibility I have to test and undo visual changes to my negatives in Lightroom.

Whether you use Lightroom or not, the point is to find a program and create a system that helps you to organize and edit your photos in the way that works best for you. An unorganized archive will greatly hinder your progress as a street photographer.

In Lightroom, I have created a system that effectively allows me to locate my top photos. Lightroom provides the opportunity to rate images on a scale of one to five stars. I will first go through a folder of images and give every photo with potential three stars. Then, I will go through the three-starred images and select a group of four-starred images. I will then step back from the images for a few hours or a full day to clear my head before I

do a final edit. During the final edit is when I award five-star ratings to my images. Only those images with five-star ratings are shared and made into prints. Some photographers may have difficulty differentiating between a good image and a great image. For me, I can usually determine if I caught a fantastic image; however, sometimes I allow great shots to fall through the cracks. It is the images that I provide three or four-star ratings that I sometimes have a hard time with and so separating myself from an image and reassessing it at a later date allows me to view it in a different state of mind. Having these images starred with these ratings makes it much easier for me to come back to them.

I rarely delete any photos unless they are obviously terrible. I save the weaker shots and leave them as unrated. I usually do not look at these shots again unless I am searching for something specific. The cost of digital storage gets more affordable each year and so I do not have a problem holding onto most of my images. Ultimately, I fear that if I do not save these images then I will delete something that may have value down the road. However, employing an image rating system in Lightroom ensures that I will never have to sift through these unrated photos again unless I choose to.

In Lightroom, you can also create collections of images, which is extremely important. A collection is a group of photos taken from different folders on your hard drive. It is a way of creating projects and groupings without having to move the physical locations of the files.

You should take advantage of this. Many street photography projects are created over long periods of time. Create these collections based on your ideas, even if you do not yet have any images to put in them. This will remind you of what to look for when you are on the street so that you can add to the collections over time. It is a great way to keep track of multiple themes in your work.



Urban Tiger, 2012.

Chapter 25: Post Processing

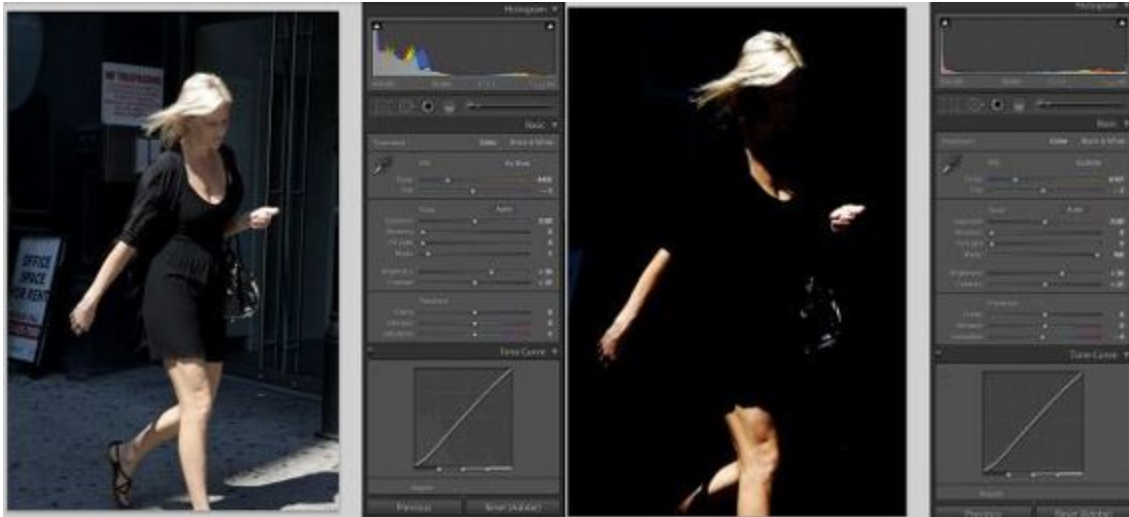


The Road to a Bright Future!, 2011.

As previously mentioned, capturing a digital negative is only half the battle. Knowing how to prepare yourself prior to taking the shot and knowing what to do with the shot after it is captured is extremely important.

Part of being a strong photographer (or a strong artist in any medium) is mastering the tools and techniques that will enable you to master your craft. Once you learn these techniques then you may choose to employ some of them but not others when creating your work. Familiarizing yourself with these post production tools will further assist in developing your personal style. To edit well means possessing the knowledge to determine when a negative needs a lot of work versus when you should hold back. Having restraint when you edit and being subtle can be key.

You should always work in the RAW format, which allows for the highest image quality possible. When working with a RAW file in a program such as Lightroom, the most important settings to concentrate on are the exposure, contrast, crop, highlight and black levels, color temperature, saturation, and vignetting.



Blonde, 2010. RAW and Retouched Versions.

The unedited negative on the left looks straightforward and mundane; however, I had a vision in mind. I was drawn to the lighting of this scene and waited as crowds of people passed through. I was envisioning a woman with noticeable features and I wanted the focal points of the image to highlight body parts that women are most self-conscious about with the rest of the frame in darkness. What I had envisioned and was subsequently able to create differed greatly from the original digital negative I had captured.

If you notice, I did not actually make many changes to the original shot. Besides minor tweaks to the color temperature, saturation, and crop, all this photo needed was to darken the shadows and midtones to black. It looks like a lot of work was done between the two versions because of the extreme difference, but the changes were simple and straight forward.

Had I not known this was possible to do in Lightroom then I would not have been looking for this scene in the first place. The original capture is an

ineffective shot until you process it. You need to know what you are capable of doing in post production even before you take the shot.

Vignetting well is very important. Vignetting is creating a dark (or light) circle around the edges of the photo, which can be done in either Lightroom or Photoshop. Many photos need it to keep a viewer's eyes from wandering off the sides of the photograph; however, you also need to exercise restraint in order to prevent this effect from being overdone.

Cropping your shots is integral as well, although you should always aim to achieve the proper crop within the camera. However, street photography is a dynamic, fast moving medium and no matter how good you are, you will not be able to capture the exact crop that you want every single time. It is especially tough to frame perfectly when using a prime lens with a split second photo. This is not landscape photography, where we can always take our time and plan the shot. Occasionally, three-quarters or a half of your negative will be the shot. If a crop will create a better composition, then that is what we must do. By never cropping, you are denying yourself a critical tool for improving your prints.

Chapter 26: Color or Black and White



Two Generations, Phone Booth and iPad, 2011.

Historically, before walking out the door, photographers had to choose whether to shoot in color or in black and white. Today, photographers have the luxury to always shoot in color and then decide in editing if a shot will be more effective in color or in black and white. This can be a tough decision because it can change the focus of an image entirely and this is why it is the first thing I consider when editing a digital negative.

There are some people who see the world more effectively in color and others that see it more effectively in black and white. These photographers have the luxury of not having to make this decision. However, for me, there is a time and a place for both.

The main rule that I live by is that if color does not add anything to a scene then I remove it from a shot. I believe that there should be a clear point that color adds to a photograph and if it is not obvious, then it probably is not contributing anything.

The foregoing sections will address both the general advantages of a photo being in black and white or in color. It is important to keep in mind that choosing one over the other is ultimately subjective and opinions vary widely on this issue.

Why Black and White?

- Photos lacking color provide an even plane for the eye. As a result, forms, shapes, lines, and contrast are much more prominent.
- It conveys a feeling of the abstract.
- Figures can appear more powerful and dramatic.
- Faces and expressions are emphasized.
- Blur and grain can appear more appealing.
- Modern moments can be portrayed with a classic, vintage, and timeless feel.
- It can convey a more thoughtful or serious feel.
- Patterns and textures can be highlighted.

Why Color?

- Color is beautiful. Sometimes you capture an image and the color is so stunning that you cannot remove it, no matter the content of the image.
- Color can enhance a humorous or playful situation.
- Color can be utilized to convey a mood. Blues can help a photo feel melancholy, reds reflect vibrancy or anger, and muted colors such as

browns can communicate grit or a dreary sentiment.

- Color can be used to convey an important message within the photo.
- Color can draw attention or focus to a particular object or subject within a photo (However, color can also draw attention to an object of less importance, which will distract viewers and take away from the focus and the impact of an image.)
- A play between two complementary colors can have a powerful effect on the dynamics of a scene.
- Patterns and textures can be highlighted.
- Colors can carry cultural significance. When I last shot in Mexico, the colors were such an interesting aspect of the culture that I felt I could not remove them. I left almost all of the photographs in color.

How to Create a Black and White from a Digital Negative

There are many techniques and programs to create black and white prints. If you are shooting digitally, the most important thing to remember when creating black and white images is to first capture the image in color. Having the color information in a RAW file allows you the most flexibility to create a black and white print.

How to create a proper digital black and white print is an issue that entire books have been written on and so I will just cover the basics. I use a combination of Lightroom and Photoshop to create them. For most of my black and white shots, I will transform the file into black and white using the RAW presets in Lightroom, primarily altering the exposure, contrast, black and highlight levels, color temperature, and sometimes the individual levels of specific colors. Sometimes this will be all that a photo will need. However, most of the time I will then bring the photo into Photoshop for some final changes to the highlight and shadow levels and to do some individual dodging and burning to specific areas of the photo.

If I need precise control, then I will bypass the Lightroom black and white settings completely and bring the color file directly into Photoshop. Photoshop allows you to use the red, green, and blue color channels (and

the 'Lightness' layer in Lab color) to turn your shot into black and white. You can either use the Channel Mixer adjustment layer to mix percentages of these channels together to get the precise black and white levels that you want, or you can work directly from one or multiple of these individual channels.

You can also utilize a popular program called Nik Silver Efex to convert your images to black and white. It is my personal opinion that neither of these methods or programs are necessarily superior than the others; they all will provide you with a similar end result. However, it is important that you familiarize yourself with at least one of these techniques.



Flashdancers, 2012.

Chapter 27: Grain and Sharpness



Textures of Italy, 2005.

Optimal sharpness is difficult to achieve since the variables while shooting on the street are constantly changing. Lighting conditions can change quickly and are rarely perfect, camera settings are not always set optimally, the ISO is often high, and there is sometimes some slight motion or out-of-focus blur. The grain and ISO levels are different in every photo. Thus, each photo must be approached differently and at times it can take a few test prints to achieve the perfect level of sharpness.

I add capture sharpening to each negative before I convert it to a TIFF. Capture sharpening offsets the inherent softness of digital negatives and you can tweak this in the Lightroom settings in the 'Detail' panel of the 'Develop' module. I use the Lightroom presets for this, which work very well. If you use Lightroom already then you may not even know that this is being applied to each of your RAW images.

The next option is to add a level of creative sharpening where you only sharpen parts of a photo and not others. This can be very important in grainy images where there are out-of-focus areas. For photos of this nature, I would recommend sharpening the main subjects that are in focus, but be careful not to sharpen the out-of-focus areas. This will only strengthen the grain in these areas, which is not recommended.

Output sharpening is the final step before printing your image. This is where you can refine the overall levels of your sharpening. Output sharpening is when you add a level of sharpening that is dependant on the size and paper type that the photo will ultimately be printed on. You need to size the file first and then figure out the optimal level of sharpening for this particular size. I prefer to use the 'High Pass' filter in Photoshop for this sharpening, where you copy your image onto a top layer, set the blend mode to 'Soft Light', select Filter->Other->High Pass, select a radius (the strength of the sharpening), and then alter the opacity of the layer until the optimal level of sharpening is achieved.

As I have gained experience printing over the years, I have become much more conservative with the extent of my sharpening. Overdoing sharpening is a common beginner mistake and it will ruin your photos.

As for grain, I love its look in street photographs. When shooting with older digital cameras at high ISOs, programs such as Noise Ninja were once necessary to reduce grain, but with newer cameras and more pleasing levels of grain, these programs are not typically needed anymore. Grain can be one of the most beautiful aspects of street photography. It feels like a layer of grit from the street applied to the top of your photo and further works to

convey the sentiment that this was a spontaneous moment that occurred on the streets. However, too much grain, especially digital grain, can also be troublesome. Strong digital grain can be much more unattractive than strong film grain, particularly from entry level cameras.

When shooting at high ISOs, the single most important thing that you want to avoid is to excessively brighten your photos in post production as long as you are planning on printing the photo. When you have high levels of digital grain in a negative, brightening the exposure will enhance this grain in a very unpleasing fashion. Occasionally, this can be unavoidable, but if you are shooting in low light conditions you must try to get the exposure correct (or as close to it as possible). Raising the exposure bar even a moderate amount with a high ISO photo will create a very strong and unpleasing digital-grain look that will ruin a photo. Color grain can often be a problem at very high ISOs with many cameras. There are tricks to mitigate this in Lightroom and Photoshop, or with programs like Noise Ninja and Noiseware, which work; however, some of the overall sharpness of the photo will be sacrificed. That being said, my favorite trick for removing excessive color noise is to convert the photo into black and white.

As you can see, the levels of sharpening and grain are unique to every single street photo and experience in printing is really your only guide here. Print out a photo and evaluate the print. Print a lot. That is the only way to truly learn.

Chapter 28: Color Correction and Printing



Proud To Be American, 2012.

When working with digital photography you need to have a system that is color correct. It is a necessity. Otherwise, you are pretty much working blind.

You need a monitor that is color calibrated and that is able to show the correct color, brightness levels, and shadows. Let's pretend that your monitor represents colors as less saturated than they really are and you are unaware of this. As a result, you will end up compensating for this by increasing the saturation of the photo. However, when you display your photos on other screens or monitors, they will appear over saturated.

Fortunately, this can be avoided by color calibrating your monitor. This is a straightforward process and all you will need is a color calibrator. I use Xrite's i1 line of calibrators. The process itself takes approximately 5-10

minutes and it is recommended to calibrate your monitor every few weeks. Also, a good quality monitor is important. I use the NEC MultiSync 2690 and highly recommend this line of monitors.

Unless you are sending your photos to a printing service, it is not enough that the colors look correct on the screen. If you are printing digitally yourself then you need to make sure that your prints match how they appear on the screen. Digital printing is a science in its own right. However, printing is quickly becoming a dying art due to the rise of photo-sharing sites and inexpensive printing services. Technologically advanced monitors, screens, and tablets are everywhere and so many people just do not feel the need to print their photos anymore.

I may have traditional sentiments when it comes to photography, but I do not feel or consider a photograph to be a complete work until it has been printed and framed. Whether you print your work yourself or outsource it, I believe that printing is important. When comparing a spectacular fine art print to the same image on a computer monitor, the effect is like night and day. The impact, the message conveyed, and the emotion evoked from viewers when seeing a print is more powerful than when viewing the image on a screen. It is for this reason alone that you should print your best work.

In addition, I do not think that you can learn to truly retouch and color correct at a high level unless you are printing your photos to see how the final print appears. Something that might look fantastic on the monitor can look terrible when printed. It happens often, especially with grainy street photos. Printing helps to develop your eye.

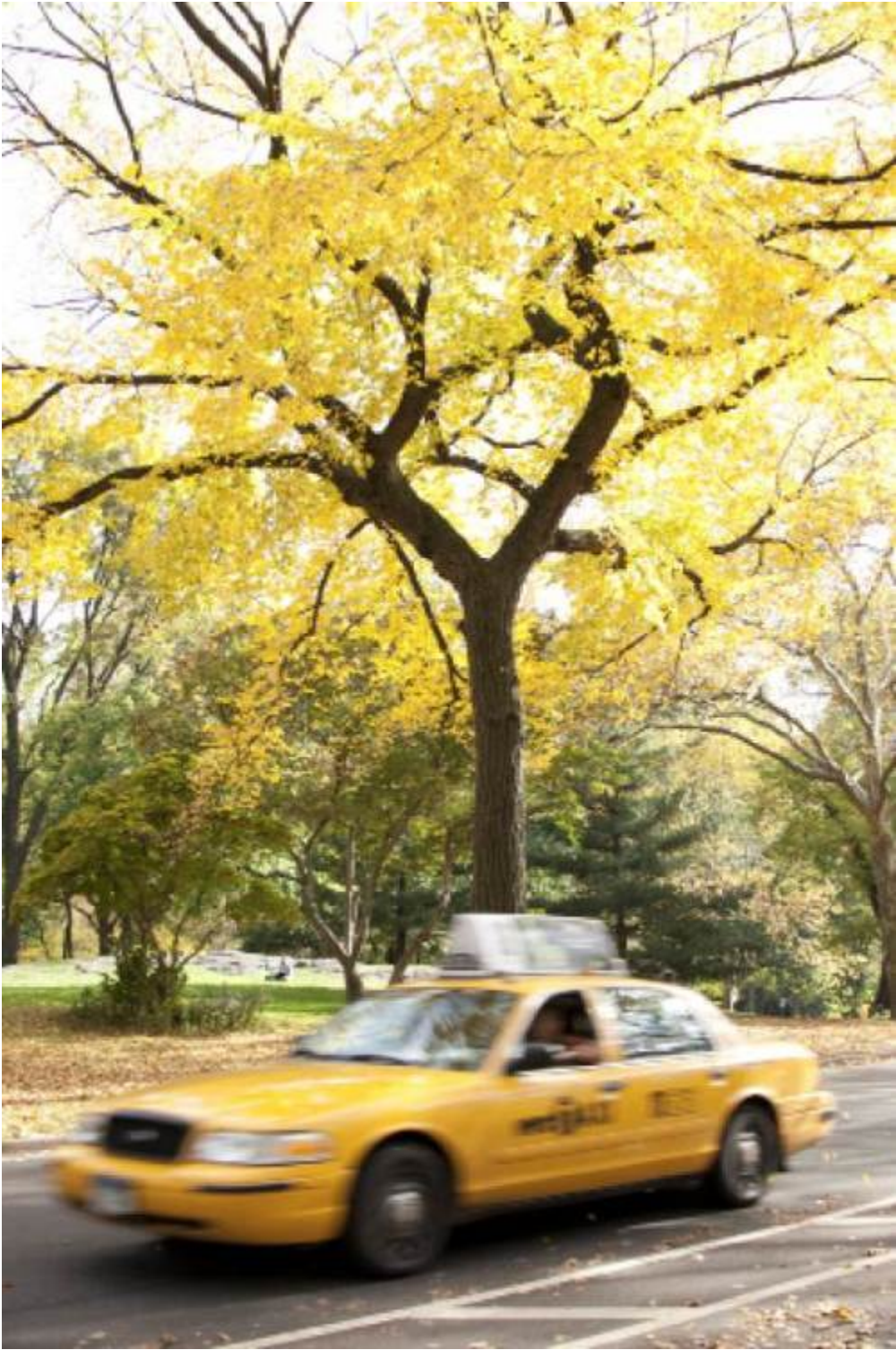
Eventually, after you have printed your work enough times, you will learn to better understand what a photo will look like before it is printed. Even though I have printed thousands of test photos, I often still need to print something to see how it truly looks. However, I now waste much less ink than when I started.

Many people think that printing is just about pressing File—>Print and being done with it, but there is much more to it. It is not as time consuming or tedious as darkroom printing, and a benefit is that once you retouch a photo then you do not have to do it again, but learning to print well digitally takes a fair share of knowledge and practice.

I currently use the Epson 3880 printer and the Epson Exhibition Fiber paper, which is an amazing, archival paper, but can be finicky to use and can scratch easily. However, I find it worth it for the look. Ilford Galerie Gold Fiber Silk is also a great paper and scratches less than the Exhibition Fiber paper.

It is best to try out a few papers at first to see what you like best. Then stick to one or two and maybe test out a new paper every once in awhile. Using just one paper consistently will make your life a lot easier and you will become more skilled at printing on that paper.

Also, do not forget that you will need to create a printer profile for your paper. You can purchase a profiler to do this at home but they cost over \$1,000. I suggest finding a service online that will create the profile for you. They charge about \$100 per profile, so if you start with one paper type then the cost is not significant.



Chapter 29: Writing About Your Work

On a daily basis, people are continuously bombarded by photographs and imagery, whether they are included in articles, advertisements, emails, or facebook posts; they are everywhere. They are impossible to escape and as a result, people begin to tune them out.

This trend is particularly harmful to the art of street photography. Most people (especially when viewing an image on the web) will give an image a quick glance and move on. Images caught on the street may be interesting or intriguing, but they can be interpreted as just another casual moment caught on the street, something that can be easily repeated, and a scene that could be caught by anyone.

This concerns me. I worry that the subtle art of these moments and their meaning is getting lost in the shuffle. I have found that people respond more positively to photos including bright or tinted colors and beautiful landscapes. I receive more feedback and ‘likes’ when I post beautiful urban landscape photographs of New York landmarks than when I post my stronger street photographs.

Should we just sit back and accept this? No chance.

The key to fixing this problem is engaging the public and drawing them into our work by writing about it. We need to explain to our audience the meaning and sentiment behind our street photos. This will hold their attention and lead them to take another, longer look at our work. We need to show people why we found something interesting and beautiful even though it may often not be what they traditionally view as ‘pretty.’ We need to involve them in the moment.



Wallpaper, 2012, was captured in the East Village neighborhood of Manhattan. This area of the City, like many, has experienced rapid redevelopment. Seeing the inherent value, developers are demolishing many smaller structures that contribute to the historic fabric of their neighborhoods in order to maximize their returns by constructing larger and more modern buildings.

This image communicates more than just a building coming down. The wallpaper provides an element of human connection. There is a history here that is being destroyed.

This image is beautiful and fascinating, yet there is such sadness within it.

The additional information provided in our writing will educate our audiences. They will become more knowledgeable, more savvy, will begin to take more time when viewing street photos, and will begin to look for the subtle meaning themselves.

Some photographers prefer to not provide commentary on their work, so as to provide some additional mystery and to allow viewers to generate their own views and opinions of a photograph. I believe that even if you explain your thoughts, this does not mean that a shot will lose its mystery. In fact, it

may get viewers thinking and will prompt theories and/or commentary of their own. Your thoughts can actually trigger a dialog. Keep in mind that although you are the photographer that caught these candid and spontaneous moments on the street, you often do not know anything more about the scene than your audience.

There is also a personal benefit when writing about our work. Writing is a form of creation in itself and it gets our creative juices flowing. As photographers, we are storytellers. When we write about our work it opens our minds to new ideas and helps us to think more deeply and in different ways about our work. It will help us understand more about our styles and thoughts and will help us to look more critically at our work.

Writing will improve your photography. I suggest you create a blog about your work and provide commentary to accompany your photographs.

Chapter 30: Like a Fine Wine

Street photography is like a fine wine; it gets better and more valuable as it ages and as the content of the photo becomes dated.

In forty or fifty years, when the clothing, cars, technology and culture changes, street photos will become reminders of the past and rise in value significantly.

Currently, modern street photography does not yet have a strong market. Landscape, landmark, architectural, and abstract art photographs are much more highly coveted and the photographs that you see hanging on people's walls generally fall within one of these genres. While people love artwork that starts a conversation and has meaning and feeling, many still seek out sunsets or architectural shots of their favorite places.

Figuring out how to sell your street work is challenging. My landmark and architectural photography of New York significantly outsells my street photography and I have come to realize that the best thing we have for selling our work is each other.

Street photography has received a vast amount of attention in the last couple of years, but it is still far from a mainstream accepted art form that people seek to have on their walls. It is up to all of us to raise awareness. We need to work together to strengthen the street photography movement and to communicate to the world that shooting on the street and the resulting images captured is a legitimate art form. Many have already joined this movement and are active participants. However, there is still a lack of understanding about what a true street photograph is and how beautiful it can be. Street photography might become more mainstream in the coming years; it is certainly heading in that direction, but it will take the work of many people to achieve this.

In 2008, for the first time in history, more people lived in towns and cities than in rural areas. The streets are our new landscapes and we need to show

people that they are beautiful and possess meaning.



The Last Throes of Paper, 2012, may not seem very interesting or unique to you right now.

However, in a few years from now, when every single person does their reading, revising, or studying on their e-readers, tablets, and phones, this photo will suddenly become historic and dated and a representation of how things once were.

It will be impossible to capture a photo like this ten years from now and this idea makes this image fascinating to me. This is a reason to never delete your photos unless they are technically flawed. It can be impossible to know what you truly have until it ages appropriately.

Chapter 31: The Internet



Embrace, 2011.

Over the past several years, street photography has exploded on the internet. The web is now the primary medium for street photographers to get noticed and to gain exposure.

What started with IN-PUBLIC and a few forums has grown steadily. There is the passionate Hardcore Street Photography (HCSP) group on Flickr, its offshoot and one of my favorite websites, Street Reverb Magazine, and most recently, Eric Kim has been in the process of creating a great online

resource for street photography. The Vivian Maier story exploded through the internet and through news outlets like a wildfire. Tens or hundreds of thousands of people are now sharing their street photos every day on Flickr, 500px, Google+, Facebook, and Twitter. The street photography community has never been larger and more dynamic.

It has also never been easier to learn about street photography. There are many educational articles out there as well as YouTube videos from iconic street photographers, such as Joel Meyerowitz and Bruce Gilden. The iconic works of almost every famous street photographer are on the internet for everyone to see. Amazon.com can send used street photography books right to your door with a couple of clicks. It has never been easier to learn. You can get in touch with other street photographers instantly and you can upload your photos to many different outlets to get them critiqued. What is happening is absolutely amazing.

However, there is also some danger in this as well. While this spreading of knowledge and sharing of photos is a fantastic thing, it can also influence your photography in a negative fashion. What I am most worried about is a homogenizing effect.

There are so many different ways to shoot on the street, which is highlighted in *Street Photography Conversations*. However, I often feel when I review the work posted on street photography sites, I see a lot of the same thing. People see a style that is prominent that they like and they want to copy it, which is fine when you are learning, but ultimately do you really want to copy someone else?

Also, these styles are usually visual in nature and they can stop us from thinking about the conceptual side of things. It is helpful to learn how a photographer created a specific look, but it is more important to understand why they found a scene important enough to capture and share it.

The volume of work currently being shared on the internet continues to increase, but there is still only a small percentage of work out there that is

great. What was once done in small photo-sharing groups where everyone knew each other is now out in the open for thousands to see and critique. We have no idea who many of these people are or what their backgrounds are and so we should remind ourselves to not gauge our work based on how many 'likes' or '+1s' we get. It is better to find a small group of people whose work and eye you respect and who are not afraid to tell you the truth. Show your work to these people consistently. This type of feedback is much more important than opinions from the masses, and it grows more valuable as this select group becomes more familiar with your work and your thought process.

I recommend acquiring some street photography books. These books typically highlight particular topics or themes, are highly edited, and will show you a side of street photography that you cannot see by only reviewing the top works of street photographers over the internet. In many ways, books are the best forum for street photographs. These famous works take on new meaning when surrounded by similar photographs. There are many street photos that you would never see on the internet and that may not be successful on their own, but that work in the context of a book.

Even this book is a random smattering of photos that are meant to enhance the specific concepts being described. These photos are not coherent in the way that an edited street photography book would be.

Embrace street photography on the internet, but still be wary of it and its effect on your work.

Part 4: Street Photography Conversations



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My ultimate goal in this section was to engage talented and experienced street photographers, whose work covered a myriad of approaches, shooting techniques, and experiences on the street.

When reading through the conversations, the inherent differences between these photographers and their styles is apparent. Some of the photographers featured here work commercially, some are writers and bloggers, some live entirely off their art, and one was even a taxicab driver. Some prefer auto-focus, while others prefer zone focusing. Their gear varies as well, from Hasselblads, Leicas, Canons, and Nikons to wide-angle prime lenses and telephoto zooms. Their work covers various subject matters, from shooting the 80s crack epidemic in New York City to shooting in the quiet city of Eugene, Oregon. The amount of life that these photographers have captured

is simply astounding. Their passion for photography and exploring life is inspiring and contagious.

However, while there are so many different and competing ideas about street photography presented, there are a few constants that you will notice within each conversation: a passion for the craft of photography itself, an interest in studying the works of others, dedication to improving their work, a deep, unique and explorative personality, and a vested interest and passion for their subjects. These photographers love what they do.

You do not need to shoot in a specific way to be a great street photographer, but you need to have these qualities to achieve great work.

For each of the photographers featured, we were only able to show a small glimpse of their portfolios to highlight with their interviews. Make sure to visit each of these artists' websites to get a more complete understanding of the breadth and range of their work.

Matt Weber



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As a former taxi driver who once spent countless hours driving the gritty streets of New York City, Matt Weber has probably photographed more of the streets of New York City than any photographer since Weegee. Matt has photographed these streets with a stunning and compassionate sensibility and he has captured the City in a manner that few have ever done. His book, *The Urban Prisoner*, shows a glimpse into the too-often unseen side of urban life. You can view more of his daily street work on his website.



<http://weber-street-photography.com>.

So let's start from the beginning. I know that you were a cab driver in the 80s. Is this how you got started with photography?

It had nothing to do with wanting to be a street photographer. I was driving a taxi and I saw so many crazy things on the street that I kept saying, "Damn, I've got to buy a camera." Driving a taxicab in 1978 on the night shift at four in the morning in midtown, if you saw the movie *Taxi Driver*, that was the world that was out there. There were prostitutes on the corner, Times Square was crazy; it was a dangerous part of town. I was robbed in my taxicab at double gunpoint.

Very few taxi drivers went up to Harlem. I chose to go up to Harlem because I couldn't disrespect someone and not take them there unless they looked like they'd rob me. I saw some crazy things: knife fights, people having sex on the streets, and all of a sudden I was like, wow, I better get a camera. Then, once I got one, I was constantly looking around and people were like, "This taxi driver can't keep his eyes on the road!"

My other inspiration was the changing neighborhood. Every neighborhood was losing its stores. "Oh man, that Jewish deli is gone," "Oh I used to buy my heroes there for 45 cents," my comic book store was gone, the automat where you put a quarter in and a little piece of pie comes out, where I used to go with my grandma was gone. Suddenly, everything was fancy GAPs and Banana Republics and all these chain stores and banks were opening everywhere. I wanted to start getting pictures of what was left. It was to preserve stuff in my mind.

My early work was basically just documents of the city with a couple of interesting street pictures just thrown in. Then, at one point, I just wanted to see some other photography and learn a little more about it and so I bought a few books and went to a few exhibits and at that point I was like, holy shit, there's this whole world that I didn't understand. I learned about Winogrand and Cartier-Bresson and a few of these other photographers.



About three years into it I started taking it seriously. I grew up in the City. I was never tough but I was always street smart. I knew how to stay out of trouble, how to talk my way out of trouble and I was like, “You know, I can do this.” Then, about 13 years into it, I bought a Leica. I always wanted a Leica and I thought I’d never be able to afford one unless I just bought it and got over how much it cost.

So in 1998, I bought a Leica M6, just to watch in two or three years the whole world turn to digital, which is kind of weird. But it took me so long to become good with film and the darkroom and I’m not reporting news where it has to be six hours later. I’m scanning negatives. It’s almost springtime and I’m looking at photos from last spring.

Do you think it’s better that there’s a delay?

It’s interesting, what Winogrand said about looking at photos with fresh eyes. I don’t even remember taking the photos; I have no memory of them. The only ones that I remember are if there was a big fight or if it was

something particularly crazy. I don't remember taking 95 percent of the images.

It's kind of fun looking at the work with no recollection of having done it. I'm not saying that there's a great advantage to that either, I just get around to the work when I get around to it.

I still shoot film, but maybe I take ten pictures a year that are really worth printing. I mean really worth it, where I say, "I want to have prints of that." The rest of them are borderline and they would be good in certain books, but they don't necessarily have to be printed.

It seems like you have a lot of sentimentality towards your subjects. You have a lot respect for them. You photograph a wide range of people on the streets and capture what life is like. How would you describe your style?

I can't say my style doesn't exist but it's more of a sensibility. Style is more about what you shoot than how you shoot it. As I get older, I start playing games with arranging colors and trying to make nice photographs without just trying to shoot life itself, but shooting life itself is kind of rewarding. You get happy moments, you get love, you get sad moments when people are lying on the street, and you get angry moments when people are fighting. You get a whole range of emotions.



Tell us technically how you shoot.

I zone focus. I'm always focused at about ten feet at first. I start at ten and as I get closer I slip it to eight and if I get closer, then six feet. I don't really shoot closer than six feet because there's a certain point where [it's tough to get the shot candid], unless it's very crowded. On the street, six feet is about my limit because any closer and you're getting in someone's personal space, unless it's really crowded. If someone's walking up to you at ten feet you don't really notice, at eight feet you start to notice and at six feet you start to pay attention. There's a point where you draw attention to yourself. Although, if something incredible is happening then of course I don't care—

everything just switches off and I just want to get the shot. Also, the subway's different. All bets are off because you're in a tin can.

It has to be an incredible shot to risk getting beat up or even to risk getting into an argument. You don't know what people have in their pocket.

Do you ever shoot from the hip?

I don't shoot from the hip unless I feel like I'm dealing with people that can hurt me. If I don't see any danger then why would I want to do it? If the shot is worth taking then I want to get it right. I always say that you should look through your viewfinder if you can. The one exception is where I could get cut up over a photograph.

Even on the subway, I don't like to shoot from the hip because the depth of field is so small, shooting at F1.4. I don't have auto focus so I have to do a pre-focus usually. If they're across the car, say they're seven feet away, then I don't have to worry. If it's three or four or five feet then you really want to be locked in, so you just do a little pre-focus when they're not looking and then you sit and wait for things to happen.

If you're focusing at three, four, or five feet at night then you don't want to be off by two or three inches. You might get one eye in focus and one not. The earlobe being in focus doesn't help. You want the eyes in focus.

When I do need to shoot from the hip I'm also not shooting from low; I'm shooting from right below my chin usually because I want to make sure that I get it right. From down low the [perspective gets too distorted]. I shoot right below my eye level. That way it looks like I'm looking at the camera; If they see me it looks like I'm fiddling with it.



What lens do you use?

Nothing wider than a 28mm. At 24mm the background starts to bend and noses grow like Pinocchio. I don't want people to say, "Oh he's using a 21mm," just like I don't want people to say, "Oh, he's using a telephoto." I don't want to use a wide-angle lens that distorts nor do I want to use a 300mm lens that has bokeh. I think when you use something between a 28mm and a 50mm then the lens doesn't come into play. There's no effect of the lens where you immediately say telephoto or super wide. It looks normal.

Tell us about how you learned over the years.

After fucking up and messing up again and again and again you eventually start to double-check everything. You make sure you have an extra couple rolls of film. The good shots come when they come, not that quickly, and I'm ready, but if my camera's not ready, something like that really annoys

me. Also, you're not ready until you take the lens cap off. I've yelled at people on the street when they have a Leica with the lens cap on. A lens cap with a Leica?

I've had a lot of reasons for not getting shots. In the beginning, I didn't have the courage to take certain shots and later I was like, "Aw man, I should have taken that shot." At first, you're hesitating and then it's gone. That doesn't happen too often now.

What is your favorite area in New York to shoot in?

There are not many left. Obviously Coney Island, but even that project is almost at an end after they renovated it and almost half of it is gone. I like the subways. I was a graffiti artist as a teenager in the early 70s, so I spent a lot of time decorating the tunnels.

It's weird, but when I think back to like '73, when I was running with these crews in the tunnels, I was fearless. I'm not fearless anymore, but a weird confidence comes over me sometimes in the subway, where I feel like, "This is my fucking train," even though it's not. I remember when we used to get like that: "Excuse me, can you move so I can spray paint that?" We were just like little mutants running around. When you get four or five people together you start thinking you can do anything. So I'm thinking sometimes like, "This is my fucking train, I'll take your picture any day I want." Of course, that's not true.



How do you edit your work?

For many years, I just looked at the negatives and based on the memory of taking them I could see what interested me. In the negative I could see the composition; I could see the exposure, if it was well exposed; I could also see the sharpness. I once had this argument with somebody because I didn't do contact sheets. The only thing you couldn't tell was the expression on the person's face; It's hard to know exactly the expression. I can tell if the eyes are sharp, I can tell good exposure, everything. If I was doing portraits I'd be in trouble, but I'm not doing portraits. If I'm looking for the great street shot, the one where the composition is right, where the action is right, then it's pretty easy to pick it right out.

So I didn't make contacts, which is unusual. Most people make contacts. I'm not special, but it takes money, it takes time, and I would always just be rushing into the darkroom to make prints. I already knew which prints I

wanted to make. 99 out of 100 times I was right. But, credit to the teachers, at the end of the year I might have missed two or three great shots because I didn't make contact sheets. But I just didn't have the patience. I just wanted to create the prints that I wanted. I would never tell someone not to make contact sheets. You shouldn't be in such a rush like me.

Now that I have a really good scanner, every time I put a strip of film into the scanner then I see all the frames. So I am actually proofing. But I am still right 99% of the time in terms of which ones I want.

What's some advice that you'd give to someone starting out?

A smart older man once told me a very important statement that has to do with chimping. I think that's what they call it, looking at the back of the camera. The thing about chimping is that when you get a really good shot and you see it then you immediately become satisfied. Now, just because you took a bunch of shots and one of them is very good, just because you have a very good shot of something, doesn't mean the next shot won't be the best shot you ever took in your career.

There's a difference between very good and great and there's a difference between great and once in a lifetime.

Just because you got a great shot doesn't mean the best shot of your life isn't the next shot. You just don't know what's going to happen. I never know what I have because I'm shooting film, so I tend to wait. I know I've got potential but I never know anything more than potential. You don't want to think mission accomplished. That's working against you.



Also, You shouldn't discard everything that's bad. You should hold onto your mistakes so you can see your growth and see what you were trying to accomplish. I have almost every negative that I ever shot. My one problem with digital is that you can delete, delete, delete. Your keepers are probably for reasons that later probably won't matter to you and meanwhile, the one shot that might have meant something to you is long gone and you won't know it because you won't remember taking the picture.

After 20 years, I've gone back and I've found all these outtakes and some of them are even better than what I thought were the original best shots. I found a couple of amazing images; I found a couple of shots that I can't believe. I didn't even know I had them until five months ago. I took a picture in 1985 of the world trade center that was incredible. I had always wished I had photographed the trade center through the arches in Washington Square Park. It always pissed me off that I never took that shot and later I found the shot. There it was. Boom. I had the shot and I didn't even know it.

I found maybe a hundred shots that were really good that I didn't think had any value back in '88. I didn't even mark them. Image after image after image and it took 20 years for those images to gain significance. Pictures of the Lower East Side and now they're significant. Alphabet City, it was crazy; look at that abandoned car in the middle of the lot on 4th street with old junkies around—or Times Square.

You are making a mistake if you just delete like crazy. Storage gets cheaper and cheaper and in 20 years I guarantee you that your average boring shot of a taxi going down the street will be valuable, cause those taxis are long gone, the stores are all gone, and the hairstyles are gone. Even boring street shots have some value.

Everything's going to change. You actually know that. The only thing that's constant is change.

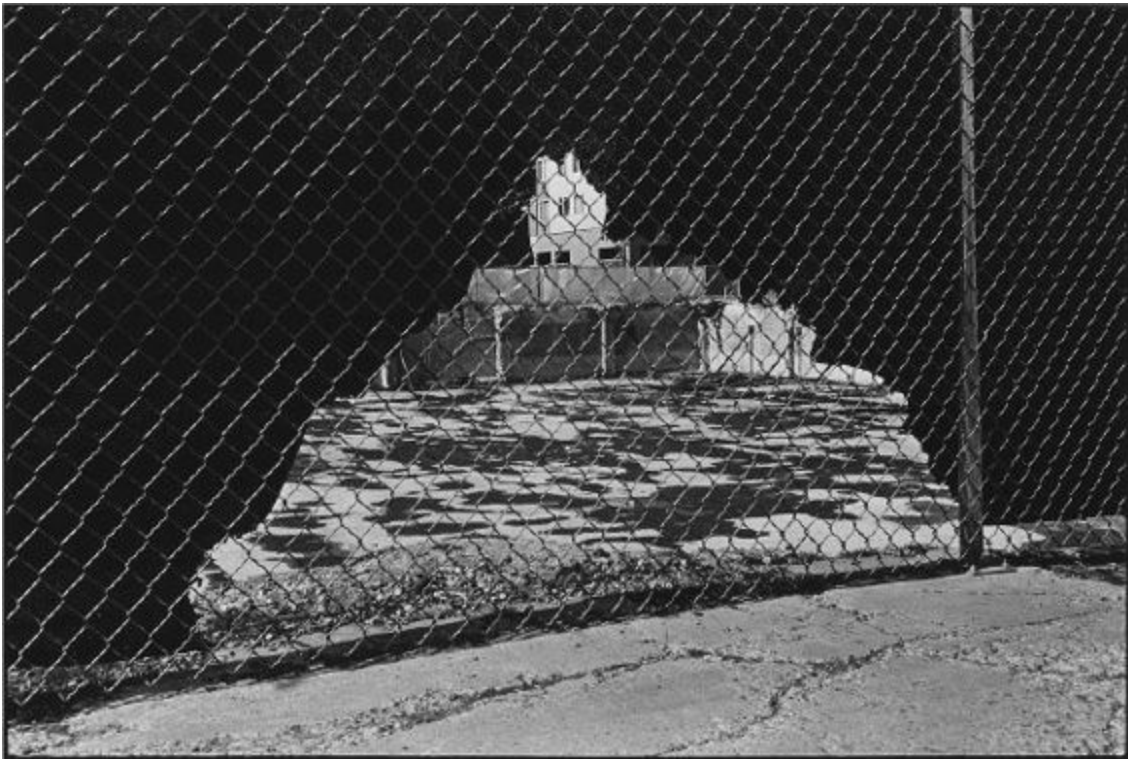
Tell us a last interesting story about shooting on the streets of New York City.

I missed a shot on 94th street. This guy was in a wheel chair and he was squabbling over money with another guy who had a fork. I've never seen that before. The fork was held up to his neck. I was with my daughter though and I wasn't going to risk her over a shot. I couldn't say, "You stay here while I go photograph the guy being held up by a fork." How often do you see a fork in someone's throat? It's usually a knife or a gun, not a fork. Forks are way down on the list of implements to use to take money from somebody.

You just can't get everything, although you want everything.



Blake Andrews



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Blake Andrews hails from Oregon. He began his street photography career in Portland before moving to the small city of Eugene. In addition to being a passionate photographer and a member of the IN-PUBLIC street photography collective, Blake is also one of the most interesting and unique photography bloggers out there. You can access his blog at <http://www.blakeandrews.blogspot.com>. Blake also has a diverse portfolio of images that you should view on his personal website, <http://www.blakeandrewsphoto.com>. In our foregoing conversation, we chose to focus on his work in less populated areas.



How did you first get into photography and what brought the genre of street photography to your attention?

I took a black and white darkroom class and sat in on a few history of photography classes in the early 90s. Then, I just gradually got more and more into it on my own, taking more photos.

At the time I was living in Portland. I would walk around my neighborhood and downtown, places that were filled with visual stuff and I would capture whatever struck my interests. I think Portland was pretty central to how I got started. It's visually dense. If I was starting photography in Eugene, or in a smaller town, I don't think I would have developed in the same way. I would probably have a different style right now.

I guess I am lumped with street photographers, but it can be a sloppy term. I don't think it describes exactly what I do, although I can see how I can fit in there. The typical street photographer shoots more in an urban setting. It's all about capturing candids of strangers. I guess a New York City sidewalk is kind of the archetype. A sea of people to choose from. I don't live in a city like that and so I don't often take that type of photo, although my work is built around some of the same spirit.

Street photography is a form of found photography where you're not planning what you're going to shoot. It's like a scavenger hunt, but with no list. You come home and you're not even sure what you've got until a month or a year later and even then you might not know. That's how I relate my work to street photography: Unplanned moments. They're everywhere.

I'm keyed into timing. That's a central component. I like photos that might not be there ten or five or two seconds later. A lot of times I'll wait for a photo that happens exactly and then it's gone quickly. Those are fun to capture because you know that no one else is going to see it but you.



You are a fan of Lee Friedlander, who did a lot of street photography in less populated areas and now you're shooting in Eugene, Oregon. Talk to me a bit about this type of street photography versus shooting in a city atmosphere.

Friedlander is the classic example of someone that can find photos anywhere. He's one of my all-time favorites for sure. It's hard to keep up with him. Early on he shot a lot in cities like New York and has some dense urban stuff, but then many of his photos have no people in them, yet they all have his style.

The main thing I like about him is that he's very graphic and he separates things into very pure visual components. A tree could take the form of a person taking the form of a shadow and that all kind of blends together. I've probably copied him. I do some of that myself. To the extent that I have that in my style, it's definitely influenced by him.

Why do you prefer to shoot in Black and White?

This relates to Friedlander, who shoots almost almost exclusively black and white. His style is sort of built around the formal, where he can layer patterns and shapes and shadows and combine them. I like to do that too, and the black and white definitely helps. You can layer in color but black and white just mashes it all together even more. You can take the oddest structures and then once you throw out the color it combines them in ways that might not combine otherwise.

It goes back to the idea that when you're taking a photograph you're not really duplicating reality. Some people think of a photo as the same thing as what was there in front of the picture. There is a connection but it's not an exact equivalence, and that's pretty central to the whole art of it. The black and white image gets that idea out front and says, "Okay, we know this isn't reality." We're instantly changing it into something abstract.



What do you shoot with these days?

Mostly a Leica M6 with a 40mm lens. I've gone through a bunch of cameras. I used to use a little Hexar, which was an auto-focus point-and-shoot. That and the Leica are both great cameras. The only problem with the Hexar is that it's not as sturdy. My Leica has lasted me 5 years, whereas I went through three Hexars in about that same length of time. I tend to wear out cameras quickly, like a pair of shoes or something. They go everywhere. Gradually, I beat the crap out of them.

I found it interesting that there are a lot of similarities between the writing style in your blog and your photography style. Both are often playful, witty, and even absurd. Tell me a bit about your personal style.

That's interesting. Is there something there? Yeah, but I hadn't thought of it exactly in those terms. When I'm out shooting, I'm not usually happy with just a static shot that sits there and there's no angle to it.

That applies to the blog too. I don't want to just write something that is a straight take, although I do that once in awhile. I guess my brain is always looking for the other way to see it. Even if there is no other way, I'll make another way.

Sometimes that gets in the way of itself when making photos and you can take a picture that looks like it's too intentional. There's a dynamic there where I think some photos that work best are like a hotel postcard, or some Stephen Shore images, where it looks almost like the photographer is not even doing anything. Then there's the other end of the spectrum like Friedlander, where you can definitely feel his presence involved. If the shot was taken an inch to one side or the other it wouldn't be the same photo.

You've got to have that manipulation. All photos are manipulations. But I don't want to make it so obvious that it becomes the main characteristic. For the blog, I think it's sort of a fault sometimes. I'll just twist a topic into something weird just for the sake of weirdness. And sometimes in my photos it's a fault too. I like to do that once in awhile, but I wouldn't want it

to all be that way. I like to tweak things but hopefully without the tweak taking over what the essence is.

Most blogs are more like a Stephen Shore photo, where they're just a straight thing. Lucas Samaras is someone that is in totally the opposite direction, where it's so bizarre that I can't get much out of it. Somewhere in the middle is where I'm going for with the blog. I want some posts to be totally strange and some totally straight. And I don't want to know what's coming from day to day, nor do I want the reader to know.

How have you progressed over the years as a street photographer?

I think I'm pickier now. If I look back at some of my photos just from five or six years ago there are photos I wouldn't have printed. That might be what it takes to tell. I might have to wait five or ten years to look back on the photos I'm taking now and realize that they're not what I wanted. I guess I'm still learning and changing, although I started out shooting 35mm black and white and I'm still doing that, so I haven't moved past that.

It gets back to what I mentioned earlier. I'm trying to take photos now that look less like photos, that look less intentional. Also, a lot of the photos that interest me now are ones on the contact sheet that might have either a light leak or are ruined or off the frame, just something where I didn't even think about the photo. So I'm reacting afterwards differently. I might have looked at those five or ten years ago and not have even printed them. Now I might print them up and look at them. They're not even an intentional photo but there's something about them, something abstract. Which is kind of sad really if you think about it. All those years of practice and improvement, only to succumb in the end to just random events.



Maybe eventually I'll be like Winogrand at the end of his life. He was on motor drive, shooting roll after roll after roll. I don't think that he ended up even looking at those photos. Maybe he realized eventually that he couldn't improve on chaos.

At a certain point, I think it gets back to the issue of intentionality and you realize that the decisive moment is sort of an illusion. Those photos are fun to take but there can be a transparentness to them. The other side is that I'm not shooting in the city. Sometimes there are people but usually it's a lot of shapes, odd angles and compositional exercises. So I'm more reliant on chance to inject energy, whereas someone in a city is surrounded by moments. They maybe don't have to look as hard.

Street photography seems to be blowing up on the internet, but not quite as much in the real world yet. Do you think this online emphasis will eventually help it to gain more recognition in galleries?

I don't have a good fix on what the main art world is looking for. I've never had a handle on that. I think it just likes to have new things. If there's some novel approach then that will get shown in galleries more than if it's a strong photo. I think in that world street photography is looked at as having been done already. There's not much room to go forward with it. At least that's how I think the art world sees it. I can kind of see that too, although I don't fully agree. Most of the street photos I see feel familiar, but that doesn't mean that you can't go forward. Every second there are new photos to be taken.

So I guess I don't see the main gallery world latching onto it anytime soon. Unless it's something like the Vivian Maier case, where it took something that was done years ago, but now can be seen in a new way, so that's what the gallery world might latch onto. So maybe for street photos that are taken now we might have to wait fifty years and then someone can look back on them. In the future they might be seen as the last gasp of pure documentary, before Photoshop completely took over photography.

There are people out there making really strong street photos. Every day they're making new ones that are great. Now, whether they're going to get picked up and seen in the broader world, I'm not so sure. I think it definitely has a life online and there's a strong community there but it's similar to a bunch of people hanging out in a bar. They all know each other and what they're doing, but it's very insular, and a bit cut off from the main current.

I think there's value to it. I just wouldn't expect it to catch on, but maybe that's kind of the appeal too. Street photography is its own little world.

It sounds like you shoot a lot but don't post many photos online. Do you think that people show too much of their work online these days? Should they edit themselves more?

I think it's fine if people want to put up a photo a day but I'm kind of the opposite.

I don't really put up any photos, but right now as I'm talking to you I'm looking at a thousand photos sitting on my desk, just waiting to be sorted out and dealt with. So I'm probably the worst person to ask about editing.

I edit basically in the darkroom. I go through my contact sheets. I'll take rolls and rolls and rolls and at the darkroom I look at every frame and I'll print anything that looks vaguely interesting. Maybe three or four per roll. So that's one form of editing.



I have a few photo groups here where every month we meet and we share photos. For that, I'll edit down further. I print a few hundred prints a month and I generally edit those down to carefully sequenced stack of 52 for each meeting. So that's another layer of editing.

One main reason why I haven't gone the digital posting avenue is because it's easier for me to deal with my pictures in a concrete way. I like them in a stack in front of me, even if that stack is 1000 random photos. Also, I trust feedback from my local photo friends more than online feedback from strangers. There is a risk of misinterpreting online feedback, but it depends

on the photographer. You have to think about the feedback you're getting and figure out how to value it.

So the next level of editing ideally would be to funnel these down over several years into a nice book of fifty pictures; that's kind of the classic approach. The problem is I don't do that. When I reach this point then I stick them in various boxes and I don't know what to do with them.

At a rate of a photo a day, I think it's difficult to keep quality. I mean, maybe there are people that can do it. Maybe Winogrand might have been able to do that in the 70s, but I don't think most people can make a good photo every day that is high enough quality to merit being singled out. I know I can't.

There are ten thousand photographers out there with the same problem: photos upon photos, and maybe there's some core there but it takes energy to go through. And street photography tends to be its own project. It doesn't divide up neatly into "I'm going to shoot this subject, then this one." Instead it's just a stream. Maybe one reason why I haven't gone digital yet is because the digital editing just scares me. If I have a hard time editing film, then digital is just going to be a mess. From my point-and-shoot, I have about fifteen thousand pictures on my computer that are just mislabeled and I don't know what to do with them.

On this note, do you think these social photo-sharing sites can be harmful in certain ways for the development of a photographer? Do you think it is dangerous to think about how good your photos are based on how many 'likes' you get?

I think those sites are generally a good thing. When I was taking photos in the early 90s, there was nothing like that. I didn't know any other photographers. There was such a smaller photo world and maybe in some ways that was helpful because I was sort of working in a closet for a while, developing my own thing. But I'm kind of jealous. I wish I could have had someone to show photos to.

I think the one danger might be a sort of homogenizing effect. Everyone's putting photos up and looking at each other's photos and styles. When I go to the Hardcore Street Photography group that's on Flickr, it kind of all blends together. There's this type of photo on there that people are looking for almost and trying to take, which kind of repeats itself.

It's the Alex Webb effect. Not that most people can be as good as him, but I see his style as dominant online. Find pedestrians in dramatic lighting, put people in the right positions, create a singular moment. There's a billion things out there to shoot; why is everyone doing that?

Probably before the age of internet and sharing, that wasn't such a dominating effect. People may have had more individuality. So that's a danger, but in general I think the photo sharing sites are a good thing, especially if you live in Oklahoma or somewhere and you're a lonely photographer out there and you're trying to find a community. Then the internet is a blessing.

You write frequently about photo books and have quite a large collection of street photography books. What are some of your favorites?

Here's my list of 25 essential street photography books, in no particular order.

- Bystander, Westerbeck and Meyerowitz
- Saul Leiter (Steidl)
- Slide Show, Helen Levitt
- The Americans, Robert Frank
- Lee Friedlander (Galassi/MOMA)
- Henry Wessel (Steidl)
- The Sadness of Men, Philip Perkis
- A Day Off, Tony Ray-Jones
- Grim Street, Mark Cohen
- Private Views, Barbara Crane

- Inner City, Joseph Mills
- In the Company of Strangers, Gus Powell
- Leonard Freed: Photographs 1954-1990
- William Eggleston's Guide
- American Sports 1970, Tod Papageorge
- 1964, Garry Winogrand
- Signs and Relics, Sylvia Plachy
- Lightlines, Ray Metzker
- No Title Here, Jeff Mermelstein
- Nothing Special, Martin Kollar
- All Zones Off Peak, Tom Wood
- Found in Brooklyn, Thomas Roma
- Personal Exposures, Elliott Erwitt
- Wild Flowers, Joel Meyerowitz
- Recreations, Mitch Epstein



Mike Peters



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When not shooting commercially, you can find Mike Peters wandering the streets of New York City and New Jersey searching for candid portraits with his Hasselblad.

Mike's work successfully blurs the lines between traditional street photography and street portraiture. His candid portraits, typically of the everyday person, capture a stunning emotional depth. The connection he has with his



subjects is palpable. You can view more of Mike's work on his website.

<http://www.mikepeters.com>.

How did you first get into street photography?

I got into photography when I was in high school. I grew up in an urban place in New Jersey and the natural inclination was to go outside and photograph. I never considered myself a street photographer, just someone who photographs on the street.

I've always photographed on the street, but I began to take it more seriously in 2002. Up until then, most of my personal work had been done in 4x5, where I'd walk the street, meet people, and photograph them.

After 9/11, I felt like there was a seismic shift in society in the New Jersey and New York City areas and I wanted to go out and photograph to see what I felt about what I was seeing. It almost seemed like there was a massive Post Traumatic Stress Disorder on the faces of people around here. I didn't want to do it as formally as with the 4x5, so I began experimenting with the 2 and a quarter. I had always liked the square format; I used to shoot with the square format a lot commercially and I decided that I would stick with square and keep it really simple. I didn't want to shoot 35mm. All of my commercial work now is 35mm format and I felt that the square would differentiate what I was doing for myself from what I was doing commercially.

I also liked the idea of a larger negative because I love the tonality that you can get out of it. Also, it puts some pretty severe limitations on what I can do. There are no wild lenses or anything super fast. It slows you down. It was more challenging than going out with an auto-focus, auto-exposure, auto-everything digital SLR and so it forced me to work within the confines of the gear and the square itself. I like having limitations like that.

Tell us a little more about how you shoot technically. Is it tough to shoot with a Hasselblad on the streets?

I shoot with an F-series Hasselblad. It isn't much bigger than a DSLR. It has the focal plane shutter in the body. The ones that I use go up to 1/2000th of a second. I use the F lenses, which don't have shutters on them. I use either a 50mm, F2.8 or a 110mm, F2. Occasionally, I'll use the 80mm, F2.8.

I shoot film. I was shooting Fuji 800Z for the past ten years and they discontinued that so now I'm shooting Portra 800. Film has gotten a whole lot more expensive. Every time I click the shutter it costs me a dollar.

I use a handheld meter. I'm particular that the film is exposed right because it's horrible to scan if it's not. Generally, I'm shooting anywhere from 4 feet to 10 feet away, 15 feet sometimes, but usually at a conversational distance. I'm not using anything long. The 50mm is like a 28mm view. It works well in close situations and the 110mm is good for picking people out. It's just slightly longer than normal.

It's tough to get the focus correct. It's not like shooting with a Leica with snap focus. You have to be deliberate. Very often, I'll shoot at F2 because I like shooting in sketchy light. To me that's always a rush. Recently, when I was shooting down at Occupy Wall Street in Zuccotti Park, I was shooting mostly at 1/125th at F2.8 or F2. The place is like a cave; there was just no light.

You can't zone focus on the Hasselblad. Even with the 50mm, you really have to nail it. With the 50mm, I probably still have a centimeter and a half of good focus. With the 110mm, shooting at F2.8 or F2, I probably have about 5 millimeters. There's no room for error. On a contact sheet everything looks perfect, but then when you scan it and you look at it at 3200ppi, then the flaws show.



You seem to get very close and your portraits seem so candid and full of emotion. You also often capture that split second when a person looks at you before they notice and react to being photographed. Tell us why you like this moment so much.

I like to wait for people to get quiet and I look for those moments where somebody's lost in thought. It's facial expressions and body language, but it's really more. I like to find people who are lost in a moment or people who have something very expressive on their face or in the way they hold their body that suggests a thought that most people can relate to.

Sometimes I'll photograph people not looking at the camera and a lot of times I'll actually wait for them to look up at it. In some situations the eye contact works. Every situation is different so I just try to gauge it.

I like that instantaneous moment where people look up but haven't had a chance to acknowledge the camera or react. People's faces are still neutral at that point and I think it forges a bit more of a connection with the person looking at the photograph. If there's not enough going on with the person in terms of their facial expression or body language that can carry the photo without the connection, then I wait for the eye contact to make the connection.

On the topic of connection, you seem to connect mostly with the ordinary person or the everyday man. Why do you think that is?

It's funny, when I go out I try and look for people that I can relate to. I look for things that seem familiar. I always try to have some sort of connection with the idea about why I am photographing a person.

I'm not interested in photographing people like the homeless or people who are incapable of defending themselves. On the other end, I'm not interested in celebrities, fashion models, or rich people.



I grew up in a working class neighborhood and I relate to the type of people that go through the world invisible, unless they're getting made fun of on the sitcoms. Nobody really pays attention to them, yet it's where I come from and it's who I am. Somebody once said, photograph what you know, and so I took that to heart. It's what I know, who I know, what I'm comfortable with, and where I come from. It just seems to make sense to me. I want to acknowledge people's existence as they go about their everyday lives.

I think you find out more about yourself from photographing other people, just simply by the choices that you make. I walk down the street and I may walk past ten thousand people and for some reason I see one person that I

have to photograph. What does that say about me, about the choices that I make, and about who I choose to photograph?

I feel like a lot of street photographers go out and look for that random moment where there's peak action, or for this weird juxtaposition, and for me it's about making connections on more of a human level. It's more driven by the subject then it is about juxtaposition.

You know, a lot of bad street photography is like a one line joke. You look at it and you go 'ha ha ha' and then you forget about it. I'm trying to get to a level where anybody can look at the photograph and relate to it.

How have you progressed over the years as a street photographer?

I didn't know what I wanted to do when I first started, but I paid attention to what I was photographing and the results informed me. I really just followed the photographs. It continues to be a journey of discovery. It's not like I go out with a specific idea in mind. I go out with an empty head and I learn from the pictures when I get back. I follow the photos.



I find that I get more particular as I've progressed. If anything, I probably shoot less. I think I have a better idea of what I want. Every year the number of rolls of film I shoot goes down.

I'm also less afraid to point my camera at a stranger four feet away and take their photograph without asking. It's easier for me to get close and to feel confident about what I'm doing. I feel like what I'm doing is appropriate. I'm not doing anything wrong and I feel good about my work. I look at work that was done thirty, forty, and fifty years ago and it's easy to see the importance of actually making these photographs. If Vivian Maier or Fred Herzog weren't around making their photographs the way they were in the

50s or 60s, then we wouldn't have all of these great photographs to inform us of what it looked or felt like in those times. It gives context.

You are working on a new book, correct? Tell us a little about the project and your editing process.

I've been working on this book, which started out as a variety of projects in 2002, but eventually became one. I call it *The Dream*. I feel like I'm done shooting for it, so right now I'm going back and rescanning old negatives and editing down to the picture selections that I really want.

[The process] is hard. Sometimes you like pictures for all the wrong reasons. It's hard to be dispassionate. I feel like I get better at editing as I get older. It's a learning experience.

I had an interesting experience a couple of years ago. There was a friend of mine who liked my work but hated my picture selection and he couldn't exactly tell me why, so he introduced me to Christopher Anderson from Magnum. Chris very graciously agreed to sit down with me for a couple of hours and look at my work and he pointed out some really eye opening things to me.

Up until then I was like, "Am I street photographer or do I shoot portraits?" My street photography wasn't that good but my portraits were much better and he got me to see that, so I became very clear about that. It's been much easier since then to make peace about what I'm shooting and how I edit things. I'm not trying to mix in portraits and street. Now I understand where I'm coming from. For some reason I had a hard time accepting where I was at.

For years, I had done portraits with a 4x5 on the street and I thought that shooting in the square would loosen me up and allow me to shoot in a different style. But the reality is that no matter what, I just keep going back to who I am. I tried to be the more spontaneous, weird juxtaposition kind of guy, but the reality is that I didn't do that so well. I photograph people.

What advice would you give an aspiring street photographer? What are some things to avoid?

My advice is to go to Amazon.com or go to the library and get some books about street photography. Go back to the beginning and educate yourself. Try to learn from the acknowledged great street photographers of the past. There are an amazing number of people to learn from.

I see a lot of people that go out and they shoot random people walking past the camera with a wide angle-lens and they think they're Garry Winogrand. What they don't understand is that there's no context to what they're doing. It's just empty. They haven't had any connection with themselves or with the work that they're doing. They're just out shooting in a style.

Really good street photography is not about style. As Winogrand said, it's about the form and content coming together to make something interesting. Not a lot of people manage to capture that.



For young people, don't be too self-satisfied early on. Really look deeply at some great work that's been done in the past, try to figure out which of it resonates with you, and then try to go in that direction. But also try to put something of yourself into the photograph. Have a point of view. Although that's easier said than done.

Everybody wants to be Bruce Gilden or Alex Webb or Lee Friedlander. I've seen Bruce on the street and we've had a lot of conversations. He's a good guy; he's a funny guy. But the work that he does is really based on who he is and where he comes from. There's an authenticity to what he does, but when other people try to do it, it's just a style.

A lot of people think they can't differentiate between style and substance. A lot of people never get what authentic means. It takes a lot of effort to know yourself well and to be comfortable in your own skin. Some people get it right away but some of us have to work at it for a long time until maybe we figure it out.

So you think that the better we know ourselves the better street photographers we'll be?

Not just for street photography but as human beings or as artists. If you're involved in any sort of art then having a better sense of yourself will always make for stronger work. Authenticity cuts across everything. Like Matt Weber: Matt is who he is and he makes no bones about it. So does Gilden, so did Walker Evans, and so did Diane Arbus. They were very much clued in to who they were. That comes out in their work. That's what makes it so interesting.

What do you think about what the internet has done for street photography?

I think that there's a real interest in street photography on the internet, although I'm not sure if that's good or bad for the long run. Everybody with a camera thinks they're a street photographer. I think there's a lot more work out there these days, but there's still a small amount of great work. There's just a vast amount of really mediocre stuff and I think that the vast amount of mediocre stuff has gotten even more vast. And more people can see it.

Also, there also seems to be a balkanization of forms of street photography, where there's this one accepted form and either you fit into it or you don't. I tend to think that street photography is broader than how it is often defined on the internet.

But the internet is a great thing. I've made connections with people all over the globe. A lot of people sneer at Flickr, but I've made a lot of great contacts through Flickr, people who I've met in real life. I see work that inspires me everyday. There's an enormous amount of crap on Flickr, but if you're careful about whose work you look at then you can see great stuff.

There's a great sharing of information if you pay attention to some of the right groups. It has opened me up to a lot of new work. It's a great thing, but it can be overwhelming too. Like right now, I'm in a phase where I'm pulling back and looking at less stuff. I feel like I'm overwhelmed at the moment. I'm just trying to limit my exposure a little bit. I'm trying to edit the book, plus I have a really demanding full time gig shooting for a university, I work a lot of hours there and I also try to have friends and family and other endeavors besides just photography.



Who are a few of your favorite street photographers?

In terms of photographers that I've drawn inspiration from, I certainly have to go back to Walker Evans, Cartier-Bresson, Diane Arbus, W. Eugene Smith was a huge hero for me early on, Leonard McCombe and Grey Villet from Life Magazine, Winogrand, and Friedlander. Somebody who's not a street photographer but whose portraits kill me every time is Richard Avedon, and even Irving Penn's portraits are sort of mind boggling.

Avedon was always looking for that tell-tale moment on the person's face. In a way, his portraits probably inform what I do on the street more than anyone else. Arbus was really photographing herself. People say, "Oh, she

photographed freaks all the time,” but they were pretty much self-portraits, or at least I see it that way. Avedon, when he photographed people in the studio, he was looking for something, just like I look for something when I’m on the street, but instead of working with the person to get what I want, I have to try and find it in the wild. I have to find the person that I connect to and then I wait and hope that some random person doesn’t step in front of my camera, or that the light is good enough, or that at F2 I’ve nailed the focus, or not.

I’m not bringing people into my space; I’d rather go out searching for them.

Richard Bram



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Photo by Jan Meissner

As one of the original members of IN-PUBLIC, Richard Bram has been shooting on the streets and spreading his passion for street photography for quite some time. Luckily for us, Richard is equally as interesting as his photographs and he does not hold back or sugarcoat his thoughts. Richard's work has been seen in galleries from Louisville to Germany. You can view more of his work on his website.



<http://richardbram.com>.

How did you first get into photography and what first brought the genre of street photography to your attention?

For me, it was an outgrowth of becoming a photographer. I was 32 years old, living in Louisville and I had lost several jobs at that point. So out of the blue, with the encouragement of a girl that I was seeing at the time, I decided to be a photographer. I had to make a living in a hurry, so I began doing public relations photography.

The entire job is to make sure everyone looks nice: men in suits giving each other plaques, ribbon cuttings, happy group shots and things like that, but occasionally you take one at a reception and it's a little off and a little weird and everyone looks uncomfortable. At the time, I wasn't intentionally looking for that, but something always made me click the shutter.

I always had just a bit of an edge and a slight bit of cynicism. So over time I began to take more of these and began to see them happen. But I wasn't showing them; they were just sitting in the contact sheets. Then I got my first big break when I became the official photographer of the Kentucky Derby Festival: sixty or seventy events every year within about a three-week span—an unbelievable buzz and a huge amount of work.

But it was all public relations work. You know, you do so many happy photos and you've got to have some bitterness in there, just to keep your sanity. So I began to really look for the outtakes. I put together my first exhibition in Kentucky for a gallery that I was working with and I called it Spectators, or Derby Festival Outtakes, made up of all the uncomfortable little moments that people do not wish to see. That was the start of my street photography, I think.

In the course of doing all of this event photography, your skills become really sharp. You're working every day, all day, clicking shutters. It's in your fingers and not your head, which is where you have to be to be a street photographer.

The first time that I went somewhere with no agenda and a whole bunch of film was when I heard about an agency that ran tours through Russia in '92, where you stayed with Russian families in their apartments rather than with a tour group. It was a crazy time to go because it was a year after the second revolution—that brief chaotic moment between two different controls, when you could go anywhere and shoot anything. I had two weeks, a week in Moscow and a week in St. Petersburg, just by myself with two cameras and film, and I walked all day every day and just shot like crazy. That was when I realized that working like that was what I really wanted to do. It was a seminal moment.

Then in '97, I moved to London and changed everything in my life simultaneously. I began to just do personal work. That is where it really started rolling. It became all I did for the most part.

Tell us technically how you shoot, what camera and lens do you use?

If it comes down to it, I'll shoot with an iPhone if it's all I've got. It's with whatever camera I have with me. If it'll record an image, it'll do. I just blew up a 17" by 22" print from an iPhone and it looks great. If the image is good, it'll work. If it's a bad picture, then it'll look really bad.

But mostly, I use a Leica M9. I've been doing my personal work with Leicas since 1988. Before the M9, I used the M6 and I started with an old beat-up M3. The M9 is small, unobtrusive, the files are gorgeous, and it's a well thought out manual machine. Mostly, I use a 35mm lens and occasionally a 24mm.

The camera is always on and it's pre-focused and I'll check the exposure. Sometimes I shoot automatic, sometimes manual. When the light is a little tricky then I'll go to manual.



As I've progressed, I got less and less afraid of being close to people and shooting very close to people, so the focal length of my lenses got shorter and shorter. If you're closer then it means you're more involved.

I really do look at the backgrounds. Alfred Eisenstaedt said to look at the background first. You get that taken care of and then it's a lot easier.

But I make sure to always have a camera. Whether I'm going to the post office or the dry cleaners, there's a camera around my neck and it's on—you never know. That's the number one commandment. Thou shalt always have a camera.

What's your philosophy on street photography?

There are a lot of different schools on street photography and so I argue with people about this all of the time. My philosophy is that I am looking for something that is a little unusual in the everyday, something just a little

off. I'm looking for something more going on that could be inferred or implied that isn't actually in the rectangle.

It doesn't have to be a joke picture, although the world needs more jokes these days. There's nothing wrong with a really good joke, but that's not enough. Someone standing in front of a funny sign is not enough, unless there is a real interaction that works on more than one level.

Maybe it comes from being a public relations photographer, but I'm always looking for a significant gesture, a look, or something that shows emotion and human feeling. I do take pictures of people just coming at me on the street, but ultimately that's unsatisfying and it's not enough. It's not what I look for in my pictures.

There are a lot of clichés in street photography. We all do it. I might take one today as I walk back to the subway, but chances are that I won't show it to anyone. That's where the editing comes into play. And why is it a cliché? It's because everybody does it. When you're starting out, you pay attention to the focus, to making everything sharp and clear, and to the subject being in the right place in the frame. It's really exciting. But with a little time and experience, you realize that everybody does that. What more is there?

Another cliché is lots of telephoto pictures of faces. Yeah, that's an interesting face, and that's an interesting face, and so is that... But if you see a whole book of them then it's just boring as hell. Maybe there's a place for one of them in a series, but a mass of them? That's all you're doing, close-ups of faces looking at you and mugging for the camera? Oh god, save us! I never want to see another wrinkled old market woman or a guy with a cigarette with his arm out of the car in my life. There's a reason you call these things clichés.

I want you to wonder; I want there to be mystery, where you want to know more. It's like, what the hell is happening? That's interesting and that's what I'm looking for with the really good pictures.

There's a funny color picture from a few years ago of a plump woman looking at a band on a green field with a little bouncy pink-and-white toy castle. It was fifty yards from our house in London; there was a little fair going on in our park. Then recently, I walked into the Museum of Modern Art, and there is Andrew Wyeth's "Christina's World" hanging on the wall, which is the painting of the girl in the long brown grass looking up at an old beat up house on a hill. It's the same image, only flipped and comic. I didn't think of that relationship at the time, but I hit something there. It's a fun picture, but it also keys in.

Look at the controversy over this year's World Press Photo award winner, with the woman in a burka cradling a son. People say, "Oh, it's a Piéta; it's a Michelangelo." It's not just Michelangelo; it's one of the basic cultural touchstones of Western Art, with someone in mourning cradling a loved one. This goes back to the dawn of human history. That's why that picture is great. It's not because the picture is a cliché; it's because it has an echo that goes back thousands of years to the human condition. W. Eugene Smith's "Tomoko in her bath," the terribly mercury-poisoned, deformed girl being bathed by her mother is the same thing. Does this mean that it's a cliché or a copy? No, it means that it's a magnificent photograph and incredibly important.

In a great picture (and I'm not saying I've ever taken anything on that level) you will get something beyond what's there. That's what we all hope for. If you're searching for it consciously then you probably won't find it. But you may, in a moment of grace, get it.



You are very interested in art history. How do you think this informs your street photography?

You need to study the history of art. You're just not going to learn anything about lighting that wasn't known to old portrait masters. Right now, everybody should go up to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and see the Renaissance portraits and then go see the Cindy Sherman show. Where did Cindy learn that? It was from going to art school. Even Salvador Dali said, "If you think that modern portraiture and modern painting has surpassed Velazquez then go on with your blissful ignorance." And he's right. You have to know where things come from.

If I have a distinct style, it's probably that a lot of my work is a little classical in some ways. Not formal, but it will have some of that, because there will still be a balance within the picture as expressed within the rules of art. Not formally, not a triangle, not a square, not a circle within the photo, but the eyes will move through and there will be a balance somehow within it.

If you want to break the rules, great, but first you have to know the rules. Learn your craft and learn the skills. Learn the technical stuff until it's part of you, unconsciously. Then you can do anything that you damn well please.

You have to go to the library and study great photography. Imitate the masters. Go out and make a bunch of Kertész's, go out and do a bunch of Henri Cartier-Bresson's, and then go out and do a bunch of Mapplethorpe portraits. And then go back to your own work. What you learned just goes into the background.

There was a big controversial Robert Mapplethorpe show up in Cincinnati in 1989, with all these sexual images in it. I went in and was knocked out by these gigantic three-foot by four-foot portraits in platinum. I thought, "How did he do that?" So I went home and I spent three weeks working on it until I could get that technique down. And it was just a technique; it wasn't that hard. I never did it again, but I can pull it out if I need to.

Even if you don't like a photographer and don't understand why they're great, you've got to look at their work and figure out why someone else thinks they're great, even if it doesn't connect with you. That is what is not happening now. The literacy is lacking. You're not going to get it just from the web: It takes hard studying.

Let's talk about editing. Tell us about how you edit and evaluate your work. How do you go about looking at your work with an objective eye and pick out your most effective photos.

Editing is the hardest and most important thing of all. The difference between a good photographer and a talented amateur is editing. It's not how many great pictures you get per frames taken.

You have to concentrate on what's actually in the frame and that's the hard part. That's what drives you crazy. Sometimes you think, "Oh, that's a great shot," and you look at it on the computer and it's not so good. You want it

to be great, but it's not. You say, "Well if I could have moved an inch over or I should have bent down." If there's a coulda-shoulda-woulda attached to it then it's no good. That's it.



But that's okay because you'll take another one. There might be more in an hour, there might be more in five minutes, or there might not be one for six months. I've gone through long periods when there was nothing. Editing takes care and you have to know what you're doing. How do you know? You just do it over and over and get really hard on yourself and you take your work to people who are not kind to you and let them critique it.

If you've got a hundred Flickr followers and they all say, "Oh, great capture man, really cool, hot shot dude," that will teach you nothing. You want to

show your work to someone who will tell you, “Actually, you didn’t get it and you missed this and it’s kind of boring and there’s something coming out of his head and you really need to be a better editor of your work.”

I got that beaten into my head until I was bruised and dazed and it taught me a lot.

I discovered very quickly that I wasn’t nearly as good as I thought I was. There’s that comic graph, you may have seen it, where the point where you think, “Oh, I’m so great,” turns into, “Oh, I’m shit,” and then you start to learn from that point and then eventually you may achieve Nirvana, or it’ll be like the rest of us where you just keep looking for it for the rest of your life.

My fourth year in London was when I met David Gibson, Matt Stuart, and Nick Turpin, and became the fourth member of IN-PUBLIC. They’re very fine, very committed, and hard, critical street photographers. We have a private message board where we post pictures for each other and tear the photos apart with knives. It’s a fierce, hard peer review. There are no prisoners taken and no mercy expected or given, but if most guys really like a photo then you know you’ve probably got a good picture. That’s my peer group and that’s why I don’t post things on Flickr.

Look at a person’s work: Do you actually like the work of the people who are giving you the ‘attaboys?’ If their work is banal and ordinary then their critiques are not worth anything. If they’re shooting really good stuff then that’s a different story.

Take a classic photographer like André Kertész, who died in the mid ‘80s. He started shooting before WWI. Immediately, what comes to mind is maybe ten pictures and if you really know his work then you can probably call up thirty, in a seventy year working life! A big retrospective might have a hundred and fifty pictures.

Winogrand shot like a maniac, to a neurotic extent, but he was a great editor. You know, he went to all the rallies in New York, he was at the Love-Ins, he went to Anti-War marches, he was at the hard-hat pro-war rallies. How many pictures of those did we ever see? Maybe ten? He took thousands and thousands of frames and we have seen ten pictures. He never published a book about it. There were a few of them in Public Relations and that was it, because that's the odds. He was judging his photographs and was really, really tough.

I've had a talk with Bryan Formhals, who said, "I want to see the process, all I see is the good pictures," and I said, "Yeah, exactly, there's a point to that." We all take bad photographs; I've got loads of them. The odds in street photography are terrible. It's not 100:1; it's not 1000:1; it's much higher than that. It's really bad. If you take three to four great pictures in a year, then you're doing really well. I don't care how many thousands of frames you shoot.



You shot in black and white for so long but now you have transitioned to color. Why is that?

Digital does have a lot to do with it. I always shot color for my commercial work. In the old days of film, I would always carry two cameras, one with black and white film and one with color slide film.

I did my own work mostly in black and white because I could make the prints myself and I liked working in the darkroom, but I just couldn't print the color photos myself. I could not get color prints to match my conception of what the scene looked like.

I finally got the right printer, an Epson 3880, and when I got the M9 I didn't shoot a roll of black and white film for three months. I shot like crazy and it was all color and I started printing it to my standards because I could finally do what I wanted with color, my way.

So now, when I go out, most of the time, I'm shooting all in color—and it's a challenge. It's harder because you have the distraction of color, which is something else to deal with. Some things work in color, some in black and white, and some in both. But color can also ruin a picture because if what's happening in the front is really strong but there's a hot pink fluorescent thing in the background then your eye is always going to go back to that hot pink fluorescent thing. You should have moved over and hidden it, if you had the time. If you didn't have the time then, well, that's another shot that didn't work.

It's also another way of reinvigorating myself. I've been shooting for a long time. After awhile, you need to try something new to keep yourself awake, because you can't keep falling back on the same things over and over again. The shift to color has done that. It's something new to go out and wrestle with.

Do you consciously seek out the crowds?

I take a camera with me everywhere, but if I'm consciously out shooting then I'll go somewhere crowded.

Gus Powell said, "The city is a generous place. It's always giving you something". If you're in a crowded place, then there's always something coming at you. People are coming and going and they're absorbed and in their own worlds. They're screaming and they're crying and they're talking. There's always something. How can you not partake of this cornucopia, this torrent of faces, coming at you all the time?

I've recently spent a huge amount of time on Broadway and Prince in SoHo, shooting heaving crowds. It's hard to work in that insanely crowded environment. You really have to have your chops and be unafraid and fast. It freaks a lot of people out. You do not know what's going to come at you. It's kind of a new thing for me, but it also harks back to photos that I had done working at the Kentucky Derby with the huge crowds of people. It's a return to something I used to do with a new eye.

Also, people are a lot more conscious now than they used to be. I came to New York in '88 and I shot with my big Nikon F2s, which are really loud cameras; you could hear them a block away. It would go 'clack clack clack' and I wouldn't care and nobody would notice. Now these days, it's tougher.

That's why I admire Blake Andrews, because it's harder to do it in a place like the suburbs. It's a much more sparse landscape for a street photographer, but he does it. For people who say there are no pictures in the suburbs, well, you're just not looking for things and you're not seeing them. They're everywhere. The best pictures are within fifty or a hundred yards from your house, wherever that is. So keep your eyes open.

Do you think your personality shows in your work?

My first three months in London were a little tough because I was adjusting to everything, being married, being in a new country, changing the entire way that I worked. A friend of mine, Susan Lipper, came over to visit one

day and I asked her to take a look at my contact sheets. She said, “Well there are some good shots here but mostly what I’m getting is sort of angry, hostile and alienated,” and I said, “Yeah, that about sums it up,” because that’s what was in them. If I’m feeling good, then my pictures are going to be different than if I’m feeling angry. It’ll show in your pictures.

I think I probably have a couple different styles depending on my mood or how I feel that day. Depending on what kind of attitude, I may or may not use a flash, even in the daylight. Not quite in a Bruce Gilden style, but just trying to do something different with the light. It depends on whether or not I’m feeling critical, because I think that using a flash is inherently a little hostile, because you’re banging somebody in the eyeballs. So you’ve got to decide whether your subject matter deserves that. If you’re doing it just because it’s a cool thing to do then it’s not enough.

For example, the first time I had a whole body of work where I did that was Big Hair and True Love. I was in a really bad mood; I just had a bad breakup and I was feeling kind of hostile and so I went to the State Fair and worked on it in that style for several years. Because it was nighttime, I did a whole bunch of the work with a flash. It was pretty harsh. I resort to that now and again depending on how I feel about the subject, or maybe because I’m not feeling good about myself. As I said, I think our psychological state at any one moment will show in our work.



There are not many contemporary street photographers that have had their work shown in galleries. Can you tell me about your experiences with galleries?

My involvement with the gallery world started early. I had always went to photography shows in galleries and I wanted to be there on the walls myself. At the time, it seemed like the best option for getting my personal work seen and noticed was in Louisville. In 1988, I was invited to join Zephyr Gallery, an artists' coöperative, after selling a print that I'd submitted to them in an open call for work. I enjoyed being a part of Zephyr and remained with them until I left town in 1997.

The constant interaction with creative people—painters, sculptors, print-makers—who were not photographers was great, too. These colleagues afforded me critiques from a different viewpoint, which was so important. As a member, one was allotted a solo show every year or two, and there were always group shows to be part of. This gave me a chance to put together bodies of work apart from the bread-and-butter shooting that

consumed most of my energies. My first street photography shows, Spectators and Big Hair & True Love, were premiered at Zephyr to good reviews in the local paper and regional art publications and even sold prints at respectable prices.

When I took trips, I would carry a set of slides with me to show to appropriate galleries. This led to a funny incident: In 1990, I went to visit a friend in San Francisco. I summoned up my courage and walked into Fraenkel Gallery, the foremost photography gallery in the city. Fraenkel's assistant took a look at the slides and said, "Jeffrey, look at these. There are some great images here." Jeffrey asked, "What is it? Street Photography?" "Yes." "Eh, it doesn't sell—I got boxes of Winogrand's back there and nobody buys 'em." ...and that was that.

I was one of the only straight photographers showing anywhere in the region so I stood out from the more photography/art-school work being shown. Thus, in 1995, some of my photographs were included in a works-on-paper exchange show with the visual art community of Mainz, Germany, one of Louisville's Sister Cities. In 1996, several artists from Louisville were chosen to go to Mainz for a Sister Cities' Art Festival and I was included. I made friends with the local art community there, which served me well when I moved to London less than a year later.



In London, I found representation with Art for Offices/International Art Consultants, and they have fairly consistently sold a few prints every year or so. But Germany turned out to be good to me. Through my Mainz artist friends, I met a gallerist in Mannheim, Friedrich Kasten, who loved and has championed my street work. Galerie Kasten has given me several exhibitions and we collaborated on my first little book, “Richard Bram: Street Photography,” a bit of a ‘best of’ selection from several different portfolios. (OK, it’s not a clever title.) This led to further exhibitions in Mainz and Frankfurt as well.

Since I’ve been in New York, I’ve had prints in one group show, and in 2011, I had my first exhibition of color work in 25 years. I still show every other year in Kentucky, too, and have been in group shows all over Europe and America. Even though the numbers of people who might see a gallery show is a tiny fraction of those who will see an image on the Web, I enjoy it. There is still no better way to see a photograph than in a well-made print, right in front of your eyes. The immediate impact of a physical object is a much deeper experience.

Street photography is still only rarely seen in the big galleries, though, and rarer yet from current practitioners. At last year's AIPAD show, I asked a dealer if he had any contemporary street photographers, and he showed me work from the 1980s. I've often felt that the only way to be seen in a major gallery is to be already famous, dead, or preferably both. The obvious question is why? If it is shown, it will sell. However, it is not as easy a sale as work that is more decorative. I do not mean that in a bad way, but I know what Jeffrey Fraenkel was getting at. In buying a photograph to go in your living space that you will look at every day, you are not likely to buy something that could feel uncomfortable.

Also, the mainstream art gallery world just doesn't seem to get straight photography. As Paul Graham (who is the rare exception) said in his 2010 essay, *The Unreasonable Apple*, "They get artists who use photography to illustrate their ideas, installations, performances and concepts, who 'deploy' the medium as one of a range of artistic strategies to complete their work. But photography for and of itself—photographs taken from the world as it is — are misunderstood as a collection of random observations and lucky moments, or muddled up with photojournalism, or tarred with a semi-derogatory 'documentary' tag."

Jay Maisel



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Jay Maisel began his career as a painter, studying at Abraham Lincoln High School with Leon Friend, Cooper Union and Yale, before becoming a photographer in 1954. Since then, Jay has had a long and illustrious career as a commercial photographer, but has also amassed a huge archive of stunning personal work, much of it captured on the streets and much of taken in New York City, his hometown. Jay has a keen eye for color, light, graphic views, and stunning gestures. His photography workshops at his studio in New York City are intensive and extremely well reviewed. You can sign up for his workshop and view his work on his website.

<http://www.jaymaisel.com>.

You began as a painter, correct? How do you think your painting influenced your photography and the way that you see things?

I was a painter before I morphed into a photographer. It influenced me in a major, major way. I have an edge over guys who never painted because not only did I paint but also I became aware of the history of art. That, in some ways, can free you up because you begin to understand that you have no obligation to do anything new.

Whatever it is, it's already been done. You may find a new avenue or a new path but you don't have that obligation, which is sort of a weird way to come at it anyway. Certainly the painting helped me enormously.

I have noticed that your style tends to be very graphic, focused on lines and colors, yet it is humanity and gesture that is often the centerpiece of many of your photos. Tell me more about your style and how you bring these elements together.

I think gesture is probably the most important part of any photo. If a photo has something to say, one of the ways that it is said is through gesture. Gesture has to do with the subject matter, while light sometimes has to do more with the photographer.

I don't like the word style. I think it's a very superficial attitude. If somebody says, "I want to develop a style," I say, "Good luck Charlie, why don't you develop your heart and your soul first and then see what comes out of it." To me, a style seems to be something that's applied at the beginning of the process and acts as a limiting factor.

A guy named Don McKay sent me a quote: "Photography is only a tool to see life, and the way you embrace life is how you photograph it." Another great quote is by Jean Dubuffet, "Art does not like to sleep in a bed that is made for it. It would rather run away than mention its own name. What it likes is to be incognito. Some of the best moments are when it forgets what its name is."

People are always looking for answers and what they should be looking for is questions.

After all of these years, what it comes right down to is that I have no idea what I'm going to do and I like it to be that way. I try not to have any idea what I'm going to do, although sometimes it's hard to go out empty. I might preconceive something, but not in street photography. I might find something that I like and failed at and then I'll go back and do it again, but basically I try to approach it with no axe to grind and no tales to tell. I have no specific things that I'm looking for. I'm looking for anything that interests me.

I'm looking for something that's out of the ordinary and you just can't choreograph that; it has to happen. On the other hand, if you're fascinated by the way that somebody looks and you want to photograph them, then you may have to talk to them. My classes seem to do that very, very well.

Street photography can be a lot of things. It can be portraits or it can be interaction. Portraits are easy but interaction is a bitch because you have to know in advance what's going to happen. So it involves a certain kind of perception without interference.

But for any answer I give you there's a million opposite answers. I know some guys who have been taking the same pictures for thirty years, literally, and they've done very, very well, but that's not what I'm interested in.

Tell us technically how you shoot. Why do you often prefer to shoot with a telephoto view?

When I started out, I carried around a lot of lenses. My major lenses were a 50mm, a 90mm, a 180mm and a 300mm. I never liked wide-angle that much because I felt like it puts you in a position where you're exposed to a lot more in the frame. The guys who are really good use 28mm, but I never really liked anything below a 50mm.



A telephoto view is hard to use for street photography in some ways, while a wide-angle view is hard to use in other ways. Telephoto gives you an immediate and dramatic grab of the landscape, while a wide-angle view gives you more scope, but then you become responsible for more real estate.

So now, I walk around with one 28-300mm zoom lens and it takes in the 50mm, the 90mm, the 180mm and the 300mm view. It's a slow lens, but I'm not shooting at 10 ASA anymore. And since there is a 28mm on the lens then I sometimes shoot at 28mm. But it's not my predilection.

I have not put another lens on the camera in about three years. I'm very free now. My Nikon 28-300mm is about the same size as your Canon 24-70mm lens. Over the last three years, since I found this one lens, it has never occurred to me to put on a prime lens unless it did something that the 28-300mm can't do. For instance, if it was a 50mm F1.4, since sometimes I shoot at ISO 12,800 and there still isn't enough light. So F1.4 would give me 4 stops more. Also, I don't know if I could work anymore without automatic focus. I used to, but you get slower with age.

There are a lot of attitudes and ideas about lenses and one of them is that you should be about two stops down from maximum aperture to get to the sweet spot on the lens. That's usually true, but I've been looking at some of my stuff that was shot wide open and I can't believe how sharp it is. I talked to my Nikon rep and I said, "What do you think is the real sweet spot of that lens," and he said, "You're not going to believe me, but wide open." It's incredible. You cannot take pictures of normal people who have normal skin without thinking, "oh god". I'm showing pore pictures. It's scary sharp.

Another issue to pay attention to is white balance. Auto white balance is something that you should only use as a last resort, because what auto does kind of compromises everything. If you're in a situation with nine different lights then auto is perfect, but if you're in a situation where you know it's daylight and you know you're going to go into fluorescent, don't be lazy, change it for each one.

In fact, if you're in any kind of a situation and you don't know what the light is, try it on all settings before you start shooting, because you have a wide range, and it also depends upon what you want. You may be shooting at the end of the day and the light is red and beautiful, but you may be interested in the 'real' color of the images, in terms of what they truly are. So you switch it to tungsten, because that's the color of the light at that time of the day.

I would not use automatic unless I was really forced to. I only use it if something is happening quickly and I don't have the time to pick out, whether it's fluorescent or tungsten or daylight. But it's a lazy solution.

I noticed that you like to bracket when you shoot. Why is that?

One of the reasons is that if you're bracketing then you don't have to look at the frame as much to see what you've got. If you're in the midst of shooting and it's really good then you don't want to waste time making sure [that the exposure is] okay. I know I'm okay; I know I have it one way or another.

There's a lot of resistance to this on the part of people who are very comfortable with computers. They will say, "Look, you don't have to do that, you can make a command and you can look at all of your pictures light and all of them dark and all of them in the middle." And I say, "Yeah, but I have to take a minute to do that on the computer." I don't like to sit in front of a computer. I enjoy looking at my pictures but I hate sitting in front of that thing.

Then, there's another thing, when I'm out in the field and I bracket, I can say, "Hey, light works much better than dark in this particular situation," or, "Wait, you know, I'm right on. I'm right on and under and over don't work." The interesting thing is that there's never, ever in my experience a situation where it's always one or the other. Sometimes light is better; sometimes dark is better; sometimes right on is better and that is why I bracket.

You've got to understand that it's not film and darker isn't always better like it used to be. But I'm still surprised when the lighter one is better.



You've taught a lot of workshops. What are some of the biggest mistakes that your students make?

I don't really look at it that way; I don't think they make mistakes, I think that they have technical difficulties and sometimes they're just not fast enough and that's part of what the workshop addresses.

You know something that they don't know yet. You're shooting at 1600 ASA. They're shooting at 200 ASA and I'm like, "What, are you out of your fucking mind?" And they say, "Well, I'm using a Canon and I can't get the high ISO." Then change cameras.

Light was really an issue when I first started because you were talking about 10 ASA film and 32 ASA film and then maybe 100 ASA. It was a different thing. Now I almost always shoot at 1600 ASA.

What are some of the best qualities that your students can have?

Curiosity and more curiosity. Then sometimes just the ability to render what they think or what they see. My wife is a terrific photographer. She gets things that I don't see, but she's too lazy to carry around a camera. But now she has a cell phone camera and some of the stuff she captures blows me away. It's really good.

Also, when they're good they're very, very open. I had a guy in one of my classes who was amazing. He had a feel. He took a picture of a woman in the streets from above her looking at her hat and it was a great, great shot. Whatever he touched was good. Other people went out shooting with him and said that they were so glad to come back alive and that nobody killed them, because he was so passionate and intrusive with his work.

I think that a lot of people when they're beginning get interested in things that don't move, like buildings. Then, later on, they realize that they should try something more challenging, so they begin to photograph people.

I loved the perfection in the work of Ernst Haas, and then as he got older he wasn't doing perfect stuff anymore, he was doing people more and I thought that was a shame. Finally, I realized that he was going for bigger game, not just perfect and easy, but more challenging things. He had upped the ante; his images were more emotional and less graphic.

Tell us a little bit about how you carry yourself when you're out taking photos and trying to capture candid images. Do you think these factors play a difference in your images?

I was told early in my career by an art director named Bob Cato that I walk too fast and I said, "How the fuck can you tell?" He said, "There's nothing happening from picture to picture; you're here; you're there; you're here; you're there." I talk about that in my classes; I teach them that advice.

There are amazing photographs that are taken by satellites and amazing photographs that are taken from planes and helicopters, but when you get down to the ground and stop and wait, that's when you're able to make pictures about people.

As it gets tougher and tougher for me to move, because I have bad arthritis, I find it works into my plan because I try not to move quickly. I like to lurk. I had a guy who was in one of my classes who was hyper, excited, and active. And so I said, "You're going to go photograph the parade, but the parade is not important, so don't photograph the parade. It's just going to go by. Photograph everyone standing around with nothing to do and most of all, stop running around."



So as luck would have it, in a city of seven million people, two million of them who are at the parade, I run into him and he says, “It’s fucking amazing. I’ve just been standing here and everybody comes to me. I would have been running around like a chicken without a head.”

It takes a long time to realize that sometimes the best advice is ‘Don’t do anything. Just stand there.’

For keeping candid, there are a lot of ways. It depends on what’s happening in front of you. There’s no one way to do it; there’s no one answer. It’s not medicine and it’s not law.

Some tricks are to not make sudden moves and always keep smiling, especially after you’ve gotten nailed. I don’t mind being nailed; I just don’t want to get hurt.

One way is to be really fast and not take a lot time to capture the photo. Another way is to be really slow and engage people, although I am not

really interested in engaging people.

There was a kid in my class up in Vancouver who got the best pictures of everybody technically and she did it with a point-and-shoot. One day, we were walking together and I realized that she could get pictures that I could never get, because she would talk to people and she would feel them out, so that's one wonderful way to do it. I'm kind of a hit and run guy. I love engaging people but I don't think that's what I'm there for.

Tell us about how you edit and organize your work. How do you go about looking at your work with an objective mind and picking out your most effective photos?

How do I edit? With great pain.

There are certain photographers who are really good editors and they'll go through a hundred pictures and pick out three. I'll go through a hundred pictures and I'll knockout three and I just keep knocking them out. But to be able to pick out the good ones right away is really difficult.

Although, sometimes you know right away that you've got a great shot because you were so petrified when you shot it that you might you screw it up.

Right now, I'm doing something that I never did years ago. I never, ever cropped anything and never manipulated the photo after. Now, I'm cropping because either I can't get close enough and I know that from the outset or I fucked up around the edges.

Prior to this, I always thought that if I cropped then I was going to lose image quality. Now, I can take half the frame, throw it away and show the other half and unless you're some sort of technical genius or asshole, it's not going to make any difference because the content is still what's most important. I remember in 2000, when Nikon came out with the D1, which had 2.8 megapixels, I was making 40 by 60 inch prints.

I'm currently creating a slideshow of about 225 images and about 12 of them now are cropped. I would never have done that before.

Why do you prefer to shoot in color?

All of my work is in color. I shot black and white for the first ten years or so and then I never shot in black and white again. I don't really see in black and white at all. Some guys do, but I don't.

There's one picture I shot that made me realize, "don't shoot black and white," because when I got the picture back it wasn't what I meant; it was an American flag with a chartreuse tree and a viridian green porch on a cream colored house. It was nothing of what had moved me.

Look outside; it's color. Black and white is like an inside joke among photographers. You know and I know that the only thing that looks like a black and white print is another black and white print, because there's nothing in the world that looks like a black and white print. Having said that, I still love and admire the black and white of other shooters.



What advice would you give an aspiring street photographer?

I would say to be respectful. For me, it's very important that I don't fuck up anybody's day, so sometimes I won't take a shot when I really want to take a shot, because I don't want to make them unhappy, or I don't want to get killed, neither of which is a very attractive option.

Be aware of other people. Put yourself in their shoes and treat people with the same type of respect that you would want. It doesn't matter if you're shooting a tree, but when you shoot people be aware that they shoot back.

What do you think makes a great photograph?

It's a visceral thing, it's a personal thing.

You need the content. If it's only light and it's only gesture and it's only color, then it's a study. Studies are valuable but they don't move people

emotionally.

A lot of work that is very beautiful, is empty. They're studies. And studies are fine but they're not photographs. They don't reach you on a visceral level.

There are millions of things that I've photographed that for me have resonance. They are personal and I love them, but they may not reach other people. You have to accept that and understand that it's really all about the photographing, not the reactions of others.

Dave Beckerman



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Originally from the Bronx, Dave Beckerman has been photographing in New York City since he was 15. He began his professional career as a screenwriter and then a computer programmer until leaving the corporate world to pursue his passion in 1998. Always experimenting and testing new waters, Dave was one of the first photographers to begin selling his art over the internet. He was also one of the first photography bloggers and consistently provides some of the most interesting insights on the genre.



<http://www.beckermanphoto.com>.

How did you first get into photography?

I got into photography when I was 15 years old, living in the Bronx. I was trying to be the Avedon of 15 year olds. I was getting everyone to pose for me in what I considered to be high couture. I'd have my 13-year-old sister put on a miniskirt and then I made a backdrop out of a foldable aluminum table and I draped different things on it. Eventually, I joined a course at a community center.

From there, I started taking pictures at night. That seemed really interesting to me. Back then, I shot in pretty much the same way as I do now. Even from the very beginning I had a fast lens, a 50mm F1.4, and I took pictures of friends. There always seemed to be headlights in the background of the shots. I would put somebody in the street on a busy thoroughfare and I would take the type of shots where today everybody would go, "Oh, what beautiful bokeh." Also, I never used flash, even in those days. I never liked the way flash looked.

There was a long period where I got into filmmaking. At 16, I made a 16mm film that got a lot of praise and awards and was shown on television. I always had a certain affinity for film, almost for film itself, for the innards. I had a feeling for the emulsion and the actual physical thing.

Then college began and I took pictures for all of the college magazines. What I found interesting when I went back and looked at all of the pictures I had taken was that very little has changed over all of these years. It's absolutely amazing. The only difference is that at some point I became interested in photographing strangers.

After college, you've got to jump a long way till I got back into photography. I didn't shoot again until I was about 35 years old. In college, I studied literature and philosophy and wanted to be a writer. I worked as a screenplay writer for ten years, very poor, living in the East Village. Screenplay writing led me into computers. I went back to Columbia, studied heavy-duty programming, and began to work as a programmer.

Then one day, I walked by a guy's cubicle and saw this shot of New York City taken with a Hasselblad from New Jersey. I looked at this print and the detail was incredible. It was perfect in every way and so I started talking to him. Eventually, this guy gave me a Canonet rangefinder, which had a fixed 48mm lens on it. That was it. I was off for the rest of my life.

Whatever job I had I always took the Canonet with me. Wherever I went, that was my world; I wanted to photograph my world; and I was very uncomfortable in that world. I definitely had phobias about the subway at that time and I always thought that it was a good idea to photograph the things that you were most afraid of. That goes back to my father. He would always tell me World War II stories about walking to the hedgerows on Normandy and there were snipers all over and I was like, "Well there are no snipers here, what's the worst that can happen?"

So I began to photograph the subway because that seemed like the most difficult thing to do, since there's no escape. You're very close to people. One of the things that people don't realize, other photographers know this, but the average person doesn't realize, is that it's not just the person you are taking the picture of. There's also a crowd of people around you looking at you and wondering what you're doing. So you have to be fast on the subway. I began to measure out distances. I would know that on the six line from this pillar to this pillar is eight feet or twelve feet or whatever it was. I began to memorize all the distances and then you would wait for something and pre-focus. I began to learn all these secrets

During that time was when I began to actually study photography. I got a book that was a consolidation of the whole *Zone System* by Ansel Adams and I was also very thrilled by Cartier-Bresson and the things that he had done.

Eventually, my phobia went away. I had all sorts of fears. People often say, "I'm afraid to put the camera to my eye. What if somebody says something to me?" I was just as afraid as anybody else, maybe even more so, and so I would always say to myself, "Pretend that today is the last day of your life

and really believe it.” Now if today was the last day of your life and you saw something, you’d take the picture. So what’s the difference?



Over the years, nothing bad ever happened. In fact, only good things happened. For example, one day I took a picture of a very tough looking guy standing next to a businessman. The tough guy is in a wife-beater on the subway right next to the businessman, who looks so meek, reading his book. So I bent down, took the camera and put it to my eye. That’s another thing that I learned, don’t ever try to be sneaky. Just do it. If you’re going to do it, do it. And I took a couple shots and it was perfectly framed.

The tough guy saw me take the picture and I just sort of smiled at him. Then, about a year later after I had it posted in my blog, I got the sweetest sounding email from him. He had found it and he says, “That’s the best picture anyone’s ever taken of me and I would just love it if you could send me five prints. My mother wants one and my girlfriend wants one.”

But you do have to have a sense of what is real danger and what is not real danger. It’s not all Cinderella out there. One of the first street photography

students I had told me he went to take a picture of a guy selling souvlaki and the guy chased him with a butcher knife. I was like, “What did you do? How did you take his picture?” He showed me, “First, I went up to him and I took the lens cap off and then I was fiddling around with the camera.” I’m like, “You’re already gone; you’re dead already.” If there is any secret to it, it’s that everything is set before you shoot and you’re gone before anybody realizes. Basically, you want to be a shadow.

Another time, I did a workshop on street photography and I got like ten or twelve people. It was the most pleasant day and it was that special summer weekend where Park Avenue was closed to cars and it was perfect with just bicycle riders. I’m shooting all over and everything looks sort of interesting to me and I turn to them and nobody has their camera to their eye. I’m like, “What are you doing? Look around. Don’t you see anything?” And they’re like, “No, I don’t really see anything.”

So the next part of it that I gradually learned is that you are basically photographing yourself. It’s like all the things that you’ve learned. I’ve read a lot of Russian literature; I like classical music. One time, I went around photographing an idea from music, where there’s a major theme and a minor theme. I had the idea that every picture should have a major theme and a minor theme, so that there should be something that you should see immediately, but then there should always be a secret. But where does an idea like that come from? It comes from having studied and cultivated knowledge at some point.

It was all interesting to me; the people were interesting and I was somebody coming from the Bronx and then living in Manhattan. I hadn’t really seen a skyscraper. My parents didn’t take us into the City to see Central Park. I don’t think I saw Central Park until I was 28 years old. I’m just like any other tourist in New York.

Tell us technically how you shoot. What camera, lens and settings do you use? How do you get candid photos?

I use a Canon DSLR and for the most part I use one prime lens and that's it. I haven't changed lenses in a good eight to ten years. 50mm is my natural view.

The only reason that I use a zoom is for when I need a longer lens and compression for some reason. I don't use a zoom because it can zoom. I use it more because it has a long lens and because it has image stabilization.

On my SLR, everything is set, so for example, if I walk into a dark place I'll put it on AV and it's ready to go and if I'm walking on the street I'll put it on TV so I can shoot at 1/1000th. The only thing I generally change is the ISO.

Everything is pre-focused. I always use the center dot and I often hold the focus on the back of the camera. I also don't hold down the button and fire thirty frames per second. I wouldn't want to deal with that. I come from the old school where everything's manual. I'd do the same thing with a manual camera. I'd pre-focus on something near and then reframe.



You may find that your techniques change. I did zone focusing for years. Now I really hate zone focusing. First of all, zone focusing with a 50mm is tough, but even when I was zone focusing with a 35mm or a 28mm, I like for the main subject to be in focus and the other stuff to not be in focus. I don't really want everything to be in focus. I like to shoot often at F1.4, even on a bright, sunny day and with an automatic camera you can pre-focus in a second.

I also don't like shooting from the hip and not looking through the viewfinder. I have developed a whole series of do's and don'ts and I think they have to do with the idea of hard and easy. Zone focusing is just a little too easy, so I try to make it as hard as possible.

There are a lot of tricks. A great one is that you want to look as much like a novice as possible if you can. I used to go out with a tourist map and stand on the corner and sometimes I would ask people where 35th street is.

One thing that really impresses me about you is that you like to experiment. You have done large format, 35mm, darkroom printing, and you jumped right into the digital with Epson printing, digital infrared, and your newest experiment is digitally painting over your photographs. Tell us about this progression and why you enjoy experimenting with new techniques.

From the very beginning I had a very experimental attitude. I basically took pictures of my family back then that were very posed, but I experimented with things like putting wax on glass. I wanted to get that special glamour or Hollywood glow.

One of the first experiments that I did was when I had seen these Max Fleisher cartoons and they were all very carefully hand drawn, but they always had effects where it looked as if they would scratch the film. So I came up with an idea. I got a glass plate with a light under it and a razor and a magnifying glass and I began to etch into the emulsion of the film itself and make little holes and stuff like that. Film was the medium and it was interesting to put a hole into it and then make a print from it. Somewhere I have a bunch of very old negatives with a bunch of holes and scissor marks in them.



I have that bug in me. As a kid, I took apart radios and I took apart the television. Sometimes I put it back together again and sometimes I didn't. I went to infrared film and infrared flash; that was a couple years of my life.

Another idea that I had was that I wanted to be the Ansel Adams of urban. I had wanted to take the techniques that I had learned that he was shooting in Yosemite and bring them to the city. Once I took a view camera and I brought it into the subway and into a subway car.

I rented a 1200mm lens and I rented what's called a rectilinear lens. It's not a fisheye since everything is proportional. The lens itself was like \$20,000. It was a Zeiss and it was the widest lens available. It comes with its own radial neutral density filter that you have to put on top because there's so much light that falls off. It comes with a level because if it's off by the slightest amount then everything looks screwed up. I just went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art on the front steps and it looks like the museum is six miles away and there's somebody in the foreground that's huge. None of them are good pictures.

I do need that new thrill every once in awhile because otherwise it gets boring. How many times have I seen that shot? It's funny, I have gotten the most keepers with a new camera on the first day. At one point, I bought a Hexar, which was a very silent rangefinder film camera, and the first day, just as I'm walking into my building, I see two guys and one of them is taking books out of my garbage, so I turned around and took a quick shot of the guys, just as a test. It was the first shot on the roll and later on I developed it and I see that the guy has a book in his hand and the title is 101 great careers. I normally wouldn't have taken that shot because I would have been too bored. I see people going through my garbage every day.

There's a funny story about experimenting from when I was working in filmmaking. I did a lot of things with a guy named Hollis Frampton, who was an experimental filmmaker. He was very well known. His thing was that he would walk along the street and every once in awhile he would find a little strip of 16mm film and then he would take it and turn it into a loupe and he would just watch it for 2 hours, the same maybe 8 frames, over and over again. I got into a big argument with him. I said to him, "This is incredibly boring. This is some incredibly boring shit," and he replied, "Well, just wait till you get married. If you think that this is boring, wait till you get married."

How would you describe your personal style? How has it evolved over the years?

I like the idea of something enchanted about the very best shots. I thought of photography as a way of going beyond the curtain of what we really see. This is sort of a philosophical thing. Plato has the story where he's in a cave and there are a couple of people in front of a fire casting shadows on the side of the cave. He's basically saying the shadows are what we see. Shakespeare said the same thing. I always had a feeling with photography that if you did it well you could sort of pull the curtain aside, like in The Wizard of Oz, and see what was really there. That's sort of a romantic idea.

I think in general there's a sweetness to my work. I don't really do hard edge things. There are some emotional stories and there's some mystery to it.



While you do a lot of traditional street photography, you seem to do just as many urban landscapes. Do you think that urban landscapes fall under the umbrella of the term street photography?

A straight shot of the Brooklyn Bridge is not street photography. If someone is jumping off of the bridge then that's street photography. If Cartier-Bresson took a shot of the Brooklyn Bridge it would have been street photography because he would have done something with the design that would have made it not about the Brooklyn Bridge anymore. It would have been about something else.

It has to go beyond just being a document of something or even just a pretty shot. There has to be a kind of tension. There has to be a thought. Street photography is actually a very literary sort of art. As soon as you start seeing things that are juxtaposed, like what doesn't belong here, then it is street photography. If you look at the picture you'll find something that you didn't see the first time.

That's why I sometimes get confused when some people say that I have a style, because one third of my work is street photography and the rest is basically urban landscape photography, documentary photography, and painted photography. They're all different genres.

You were one of the pioneers of selling photography over the web, beginning in 1999 and you have a very interesting point of view about selling street photography. What have you learned?

Here are the rules. There are rules about what sells and what doesn't sell given your audience. If you're selling to the connoisseur in a well known gallery and your initials are HCB or you're Doisneau, that's one thing. If you are a name, then it doesn't matter anymore because you can sell anything.

The difficulty with selling street photography of people is that people do not want to see pictures of other people in their living room. They just don't. I remember having this argument with a friend because he was telling me, "I don't understand that Dave, because the first thing that we recognize, the most important thing our brains are developing as babies, is to recognize faces." I said, "Well, if it's a face of your mother or somebody in your family or an idol, fine, but if it's a stranger it won't sell, unless the buyer is an artist or an art collector and that side of the brain has grown from looking at too many good pictures."



For example, one of my very best shots is the one with the girl and her tongue out tasting snow. It's a technically difficult shot; everything had to be working in order to capture it. When people see the image they say, "Wow, that's great, what a great shot!" That shot has never sold and cannot be sold because she's an actual human being.

When people put something on their walls, it's like a badge. It's basically saying, "These are my creative tastes; this is what I want to look at every day; and this is how I feel about life," in the sense that it's sort of like any other part of decorating a house. Life is hard and you want something peaceful on the wall.

On the other hand, street photographs work very well in books and eventually, what happens is that in forty or fifty years they become historical and then they become worth a lot of money because of the clothes people are wearing and because the culture has changed. If you have children and you leave your estate to them, then they will eventually be worth something. They become documents of what life was like. The perfect example is Vivian Maier.

Tell me a little about your printing. You put a lot of pride and effort into your printing. Do you think that it's as important to learn to print these days?

Now you're making me feel like an old timer. When I began, we walked to the darkroom with no shoes in the snow. The final product was the print and you were really only as good as the print was. You worked hard and you used different papers and you wanted a good dynamic range and all this other stuff.

That's not true anymore and it's becoming less and less true. I don't know. I really only see it going in the direction where there will be thirty by forty inch flat screen frames in every home and you'll change it just by clicking.

I don't know if in fifty years if anybody's going to give a crap about whether or not they have a print except for that very small group of collectors. There's always going to be collectors of things with an intrinsic craftsmanship. But for the majority of people, everything is digital and video, based on something flashing, and they don't even know if you have a really good print.

So is it worthwhile learning to print? I don't know and I find that fascinating.

What advice would you give an aspiring street photographer? What are things to avoid?

Try not to concentrate so much on the photography part of things in life as a general rule. Remember that your street photography is only going to be as interesting as you are.

Exercises

The following exercises are meant to help you progress and become a better street photographer. They are split into four sections of development and when possible, especially if you are a beginner, they should be completed in order. Take your time as you progress through them.

1. Overcoming your fears:

This section is meant to help you become more comfortable photographing strangers on the street. If you are not comfortable, then will you never be able to become a successful street photographer. Forget the settings, forget the concepts, and just focus for a couple of days on capturing people and becoming more comfortable on the streets.

- A. Photograph in a crowd, fair, or festival (alternate standing in the same spot and walking around and shooting);
- B. Stop 8 strangers on the street and create street portrait of them;
- C. Capture a candid shot of a friendly looking or stylish person, approach them, and tell them you are a street photographer, and show them the photo and offer to email it to them.

2. Technical:

Before we can think about the conceptual issues, it can help to focus specifically on your camera settings, different focal lengths, focusing techniques, and similar technical issues. You should bring yourself up to a general level of proficiency with your camera on the street before you begin to think more about the conceptual.

- A. Shoot for a session with a 28mm view, a session with a 50mm view, and a session with a 100mm view (if you have a zoom lens then tape it to the particular angle);
- B. Take a photograph that is all about light and shadows;
- C. Take a photograph that is all about emotion or gesture;
- D. Take a photograph that combines light and shadows with emotion and gesture (hint—find a location and wait there);
- E. Find an interesting background and wait for a corresponding person to complete the scene;
- F. Capture a photograph where the eyes are the most important element;
- G. Capture a candid, wide-angle shot of a person within 10 feet of you from the hip, using zone-focusing, where the person comes out tack sharp;
- H. Capture a shot with motion blur;
- I. Photograph at night without a flash (or with a flash if you prefer);
- J. Take a candid shot using Live View.

3. Conceptual:

Here you should bring all your skills together and focus on creating images that tell stories and portray emotions. Content is king.

- A. Describe your neighborhood in 12 shots;

B. Take a photograph that you think will be historically significant in 10 years;

C. Take a conceptual shot that has personal meaning to you;

D. Think of an idea for a project based on something that you know a lot about or would like to learn more about;

E. Photograph the same area on at least 3 different occasions.

4. Editing:

Here is where you bring everything together. Go through your shots and see how well you were able to capture sharpness, correct exposure, and framing. Experiment with the editing tools and do not be afraid to get creative with them. But remember that it is the content that is most important. Think about the content within your photos and the overarching themes within your work.

A. Take a color digital negative and give it a dark, cold feel;

B. Take a color digital negative and give it a warm, vibrant feel;

C. Create a stunning black and white;

D. Create a set of 10 photographs that relate to a common theme or idea;

D. Print this set of 10 street photographs at a size of at least 8x10 (use a printing service if you need to);

E. Print a couple of your photos at 12x18 or larger.

Websites and Resources

If you would like to view more of my work or the work of any of the photographers interviewed in Street Photography Conversations, please use the links below:

James Maher: <http://www.jamesmaherphotography.com>.

Matt Weber: <http://www.weber-street-photography.com>.

Blake Andrews: <http://blakeandrews.blogspot.com>.

<http://www.blakeandrewsphoto.com>.

Richard Bram: <http://richardbram.com>.

Mike Peters: <http://www.mikepeters.com>.

Jay Maisel: <http://www.jaymaisel.com>.

Dave Beckerman: <http://www.beckermanphoto.com>.

In addition, here are some fantastic street photography resources:

Street Reverb Magazine: <http://streetreverbmagazine.com>.

Magnum Photos: <http://www.magnumphotos.com>.

IN-PUBLIC Street Photography Collective: <http://www.in-public.com>.

Eric Kim Street Photography Blog:
<http://www.erickimphotography.com>.

SevenSevenNine by Nick Turpin: <http://www.sevensevennine.com>.

Hardcore Street Photography (HCSP) Flickr Group:
<http://www.flickr.com/groups/onthestreet>.