



STREET



PHOTOGRAPHY



ERIC KIM

**Ultimate
Beginner's
Guide to
Mastering Street
Photography**

ERIC KIM

HAPTIC

Ultimate Beginner's Guide to Mastering Street Photography

ERIC KIM

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Educational tools to empower you.

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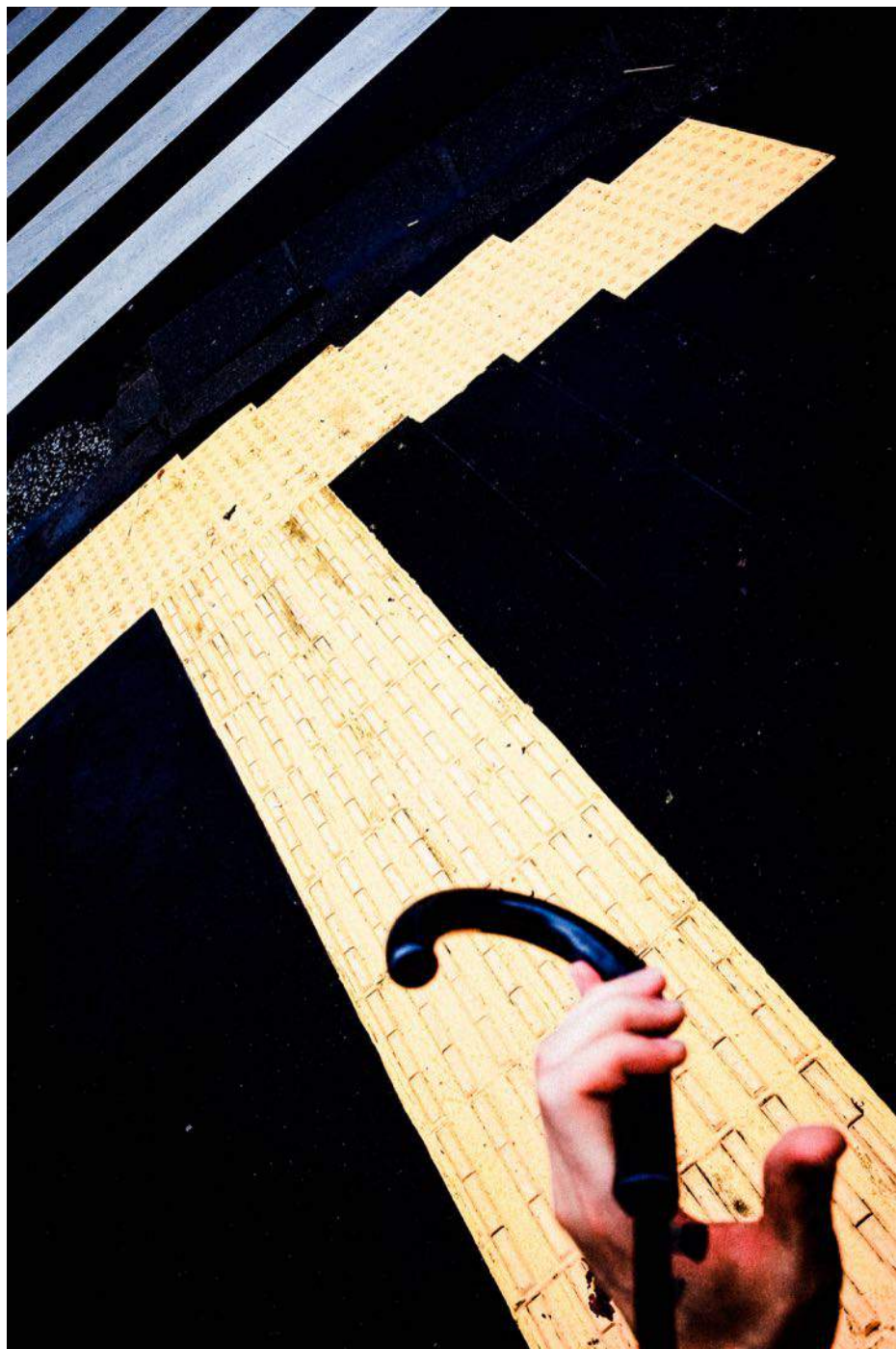
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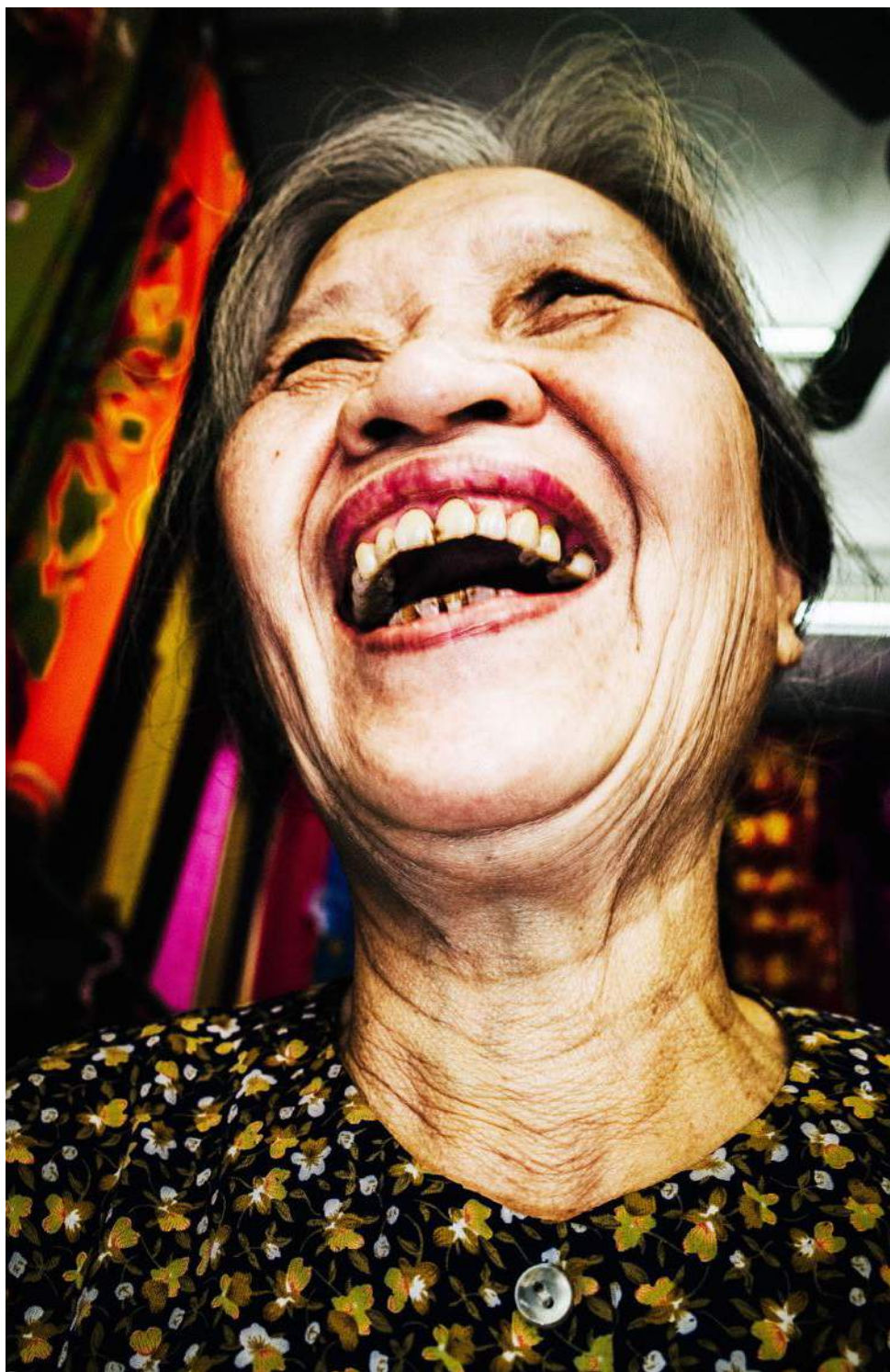
*Dedicated to Sukhee Chung and
Thuy Pham. You encourage
us to always retain our
childlike sense of wonder.*

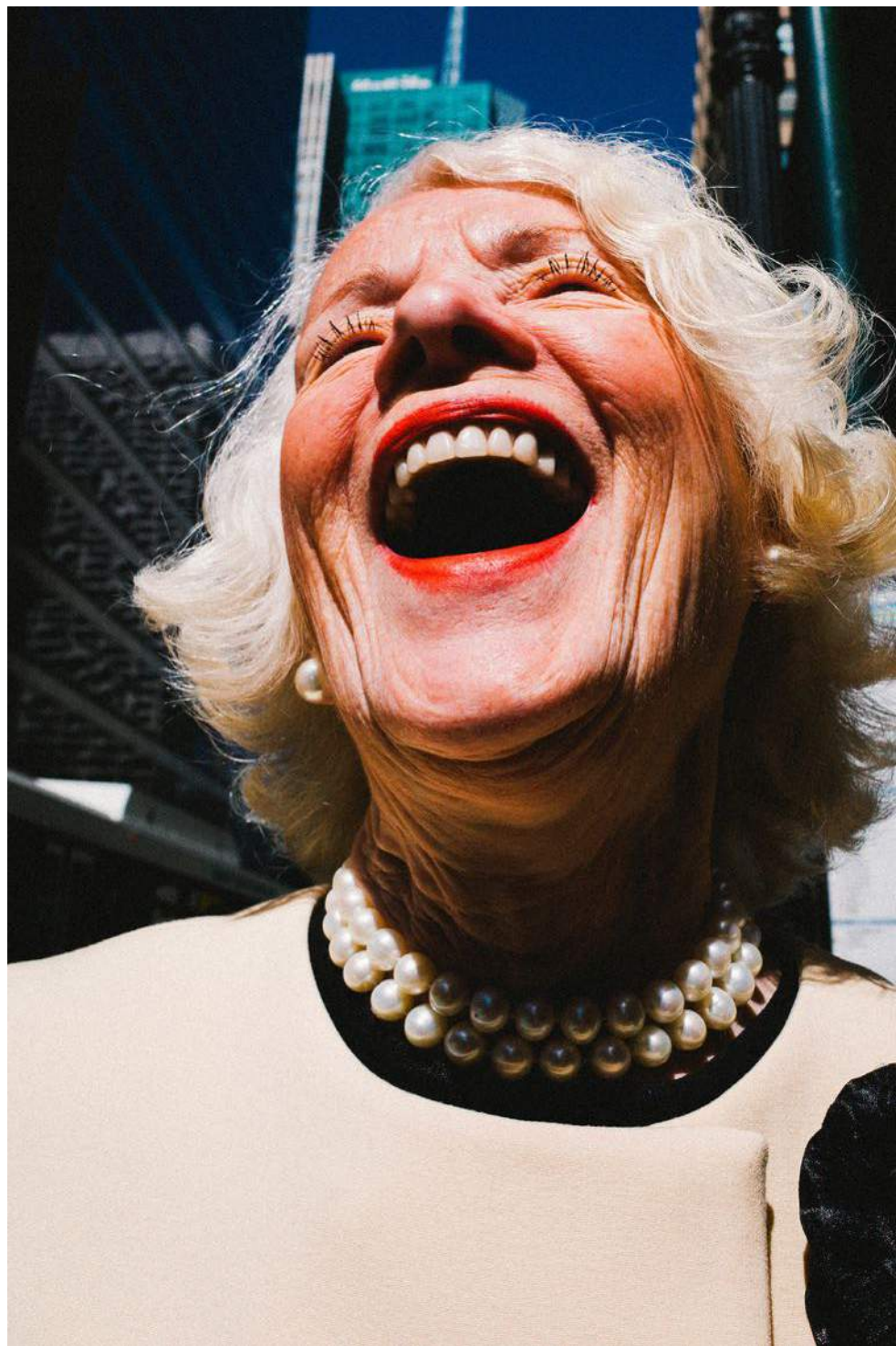
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CHAPTER I

The Joy

Why does street photography bring me joy and happiness in life?

Street photography gives me the opportunity to wander the streets, and find beauty in the ordinary and mundane. Street photography makes me appreciate the privilege of being alive.

I also love street photography because it is the most democratic and open form of photography. Regardless of where you live, regardless of what camera you shoot with, you can enjoy street photography.

When starting off, you might wonder: “Am I a street photographer or not?” If you’re asking yourself the question -- yes, you are a street photographer.

All you need in street photography is a passion for humanity. To improve your street photography, all you need to do is build your courage, confidence, and boldness.

I wrote this book to help you step outside of your comfort zone, and for you to re-spark your child-like sense of joy of making images.

Let’s get started.

ERIC / Lisbon, 2018

CHAPTER II

Camera

Any camera is good for street photography, as long as the camera is always with you.

~~~~~  
*The most useless camera for street photography is the one that collects dust on a shelf at your home.*  
~~~~~

For street photography, just start off by shooting with your phone. If you want a smaller and more compact camera for street photography, I recommend the RICOH GR, Fujifilm X100, or any camera that can fit in your front pocket.

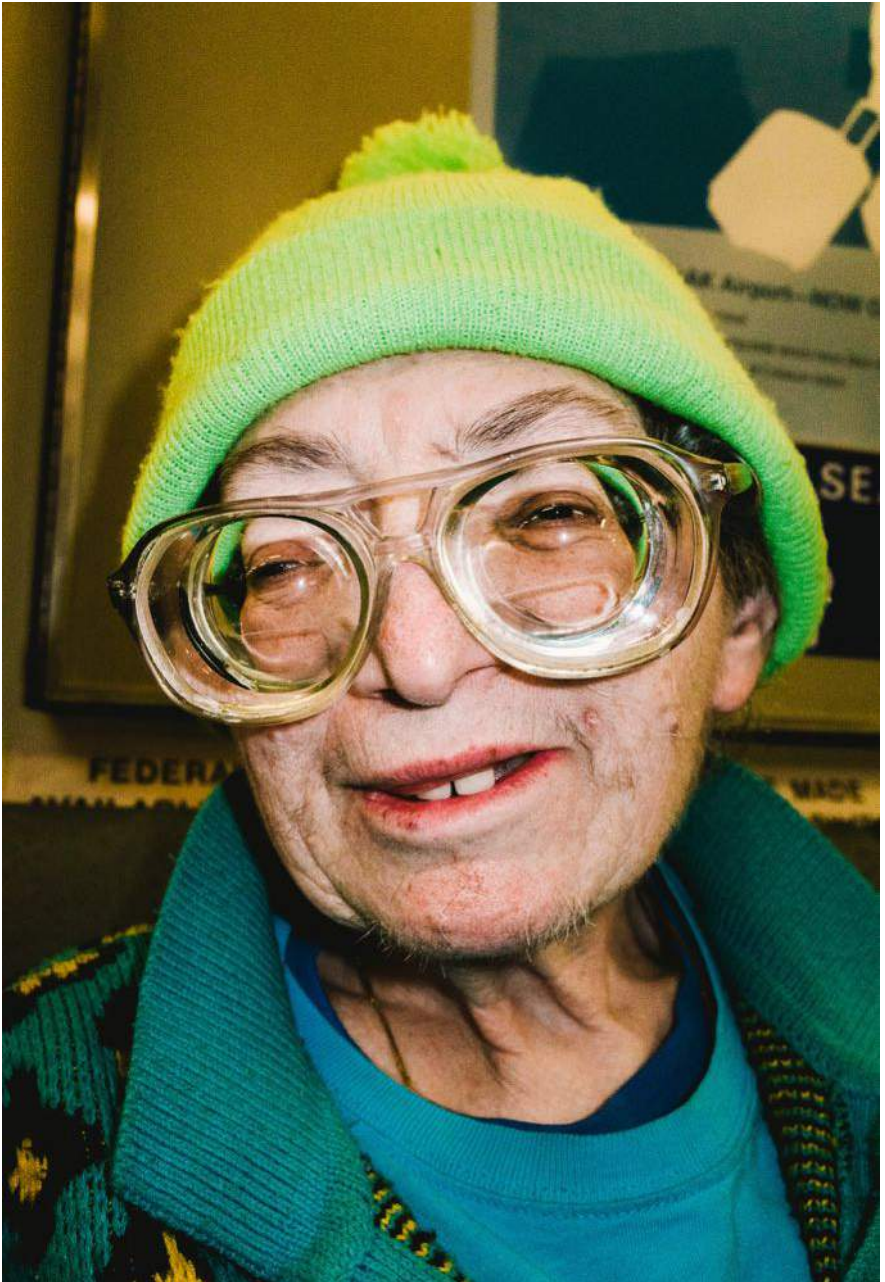
In street photography, the smaller and lighter your camera, the more likely you are to carry it with you everywhere you go. Also, the smaller your camera, the less intimidating you will look when shooting street photography.

Use a camera in street photography that looks a toy, and doesn't scream "PROFESSIONAL!" (like a big DSLR).

Other good cameras in street photography include:

- Leica M Rangefinders
- Olympus OM-D Series
- iPhone

Use whatever camera in street photography that you can carry with yourself on a daily basis.



CHAPTER III

Start Shooting

When you're new to street photography, you might wonder:

~~~~~  
*“What should I photograph?”*  
~~~~~

My suggestion: just walk around the block and make photographs of whatever you find interesting. You can walk around your neighborhood, walk around during your office break, or the downtown area of your city.

As a recommendation, start shooting street photography with the “fishing technique”. This means find an interesting background, and wait your subject to enter the frame.

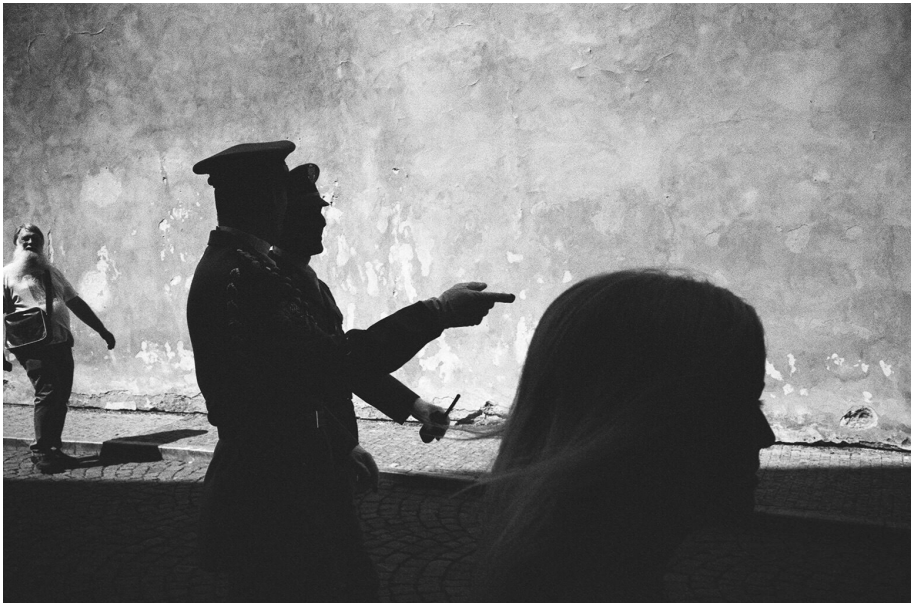
Then you must build your confidence. Do this by starting to shoot ‘street portraits’ -- portraits of strangers with permission. Whenever you see a stranger with an interesting face that you want to photograph, approach them, compliment them on their look, and ask for permission to “Make their portrait”.

When you're shooting street photography, don't ask yourself, “Is this street photography or not?” Just make photos of whatever you find interesting on the streets.

Make photos of people, buildings, and stuff you find on the pavement.

Street photography has no rules, no definitions, and no limits.

Wander the streets like a child, with a camera-in-hand.



CHAPTER IV

Authenticity

The past definition of street photography is that it had to be candid, and shot without permission.

To me, it doesn't matter if you shoot without permission or with permission. The best way to judge whether your photo is good or not is to look at your photo and ask yourself:

~~~~~  
*“Does the photograph evoke an emotional response in myself?”*  
~~~~~

If yes, it is a good photo. If not, it isn't a good street photo.

I think a lot of us are drawn to street photography because we are trying to capture some sort of 'authenticity' or beauty in the world that we experience. We think that by asking for permission, we somehow spoil the 'authenticity' of the scene or moment.

I beg to differ.

~~~~~  
*You can capture the true essence of a person, even when shooting with permission.*  
~~~~~

The secret is to interact with your subject in an authentic way, and continuing to click the shutter, until they reveal their soul to you.



CHAPTER V

Fear

All street photographers feel fear-- otherwise you wouldn't be human.

Often we let fear prevent us from photographing a scene or a person. However, what we want to do is channel our fear-- we have to let our fear guide us. In-fact, our fear tells us what we want to photograph, or what not to photograph.

For example, if you see a scene or a person that scares you, it will probably make a good photograph.

~~~~~  
*Is it possible to still feel fear, but to still hit the shutter?*  
~~~~~

Yes we can.

Treat fear like your friend. Your fear will tell you what is a good street photograph. The best way to not let fear paralyze you in street photography is to shoot with a smile, and when you're really in doubt, ask for permission.



Assignment 1: 10 No Challenge

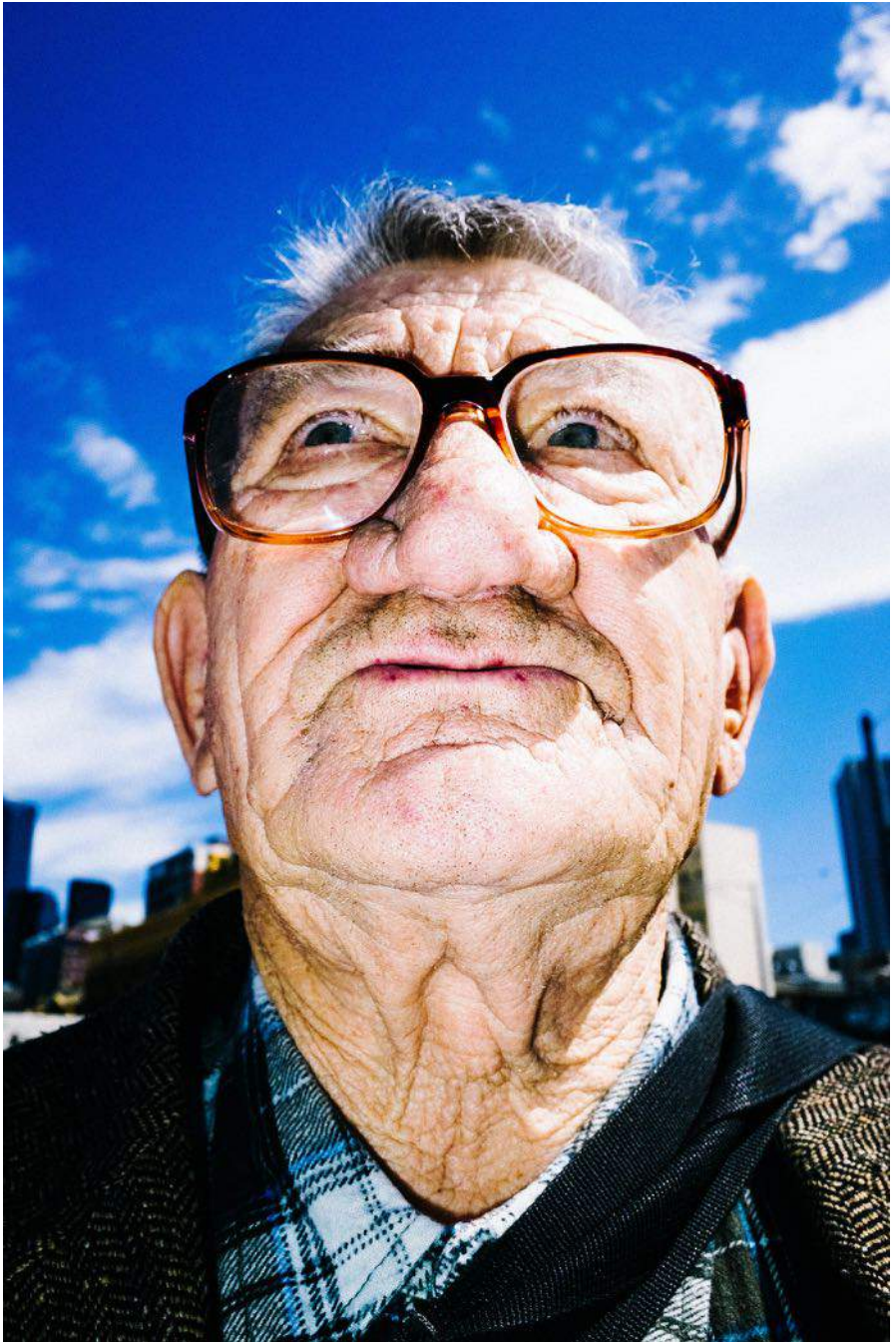
To quickly conquer your fear of shooting street photography, try the “10 no” assignment. The assignment is this:

~~~~~  
*For an entire day, approach strangers who you think look unfriendly or scary. Then ask to make a portrait of them. You must keep asking for permission until you get 10 people to say “no”.*  
~~~~~

The reason why this assignment works is that it retrains us to realize that people who we stereotype as scary or unfriendly-- are often very friendly.

And not only that, but in real life, it is actually very hard to get someone to say “no” and reject you in street photography.

If you can retrain your brain to think that most people are actually quite friendly and open, it will help you build your confidence in street photography.



Assignment 2: Shoot Yourself

A question you must ask yourself:

~~~~~  
*“Do I like having my own photo taken?”*  
~~~~~

If not, ask yourself: “Why not?”

If you don't like having your own photo taken, you will assume that everyone else doesn't like it. Therefore, you will feel guilty for shooting street photography, because you think you are somehow “stealing the soul” of your subject, or upsetting them.

Therefore, to overcome the guilt of shooting street photography, practice feeling comfortable in your own skin.

~~~~~  
*Your assignment: shoot a selfie of yourself everyday for a month.*  
~~~~~

This will allow you to better understand your personal relationship with your own self-image. And the more confident you feel in photographing yourself, the more confident and comfortable you will be photographing others.



Assignment 3: Admit Your Fears

If you want to photograph someone, and feel afraid or nervous-- admit it.

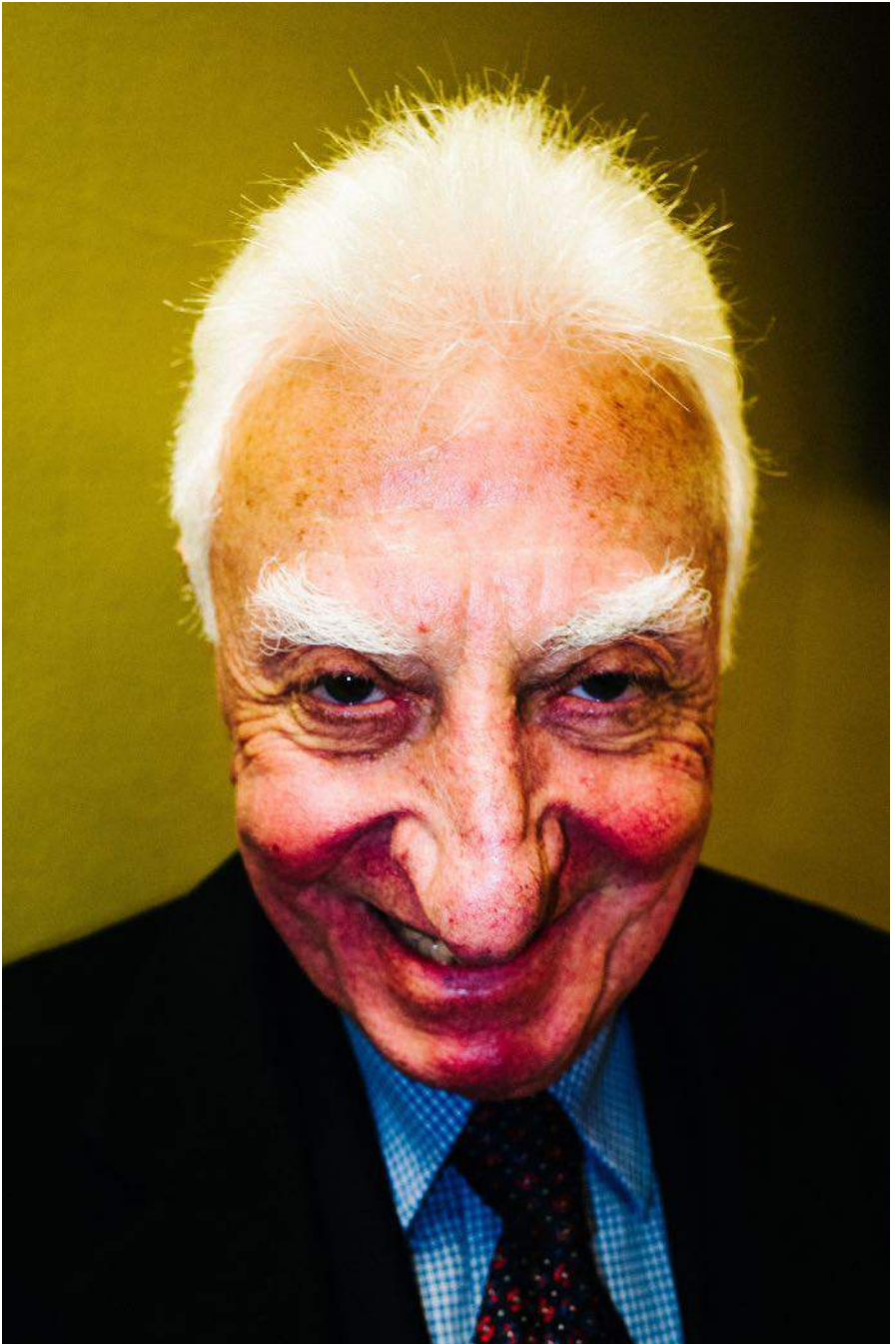
Approach a stranger and say:

~~~~~  
*“Excuse me sir, I think you got a great face and look.  
Except I was really nervous to approach you-- because  
I thought you might get angry at me or something. Do  
you mind if I made a portrait of you?”*  
~~~~~

This approach works well because your subject is more likely to empathize with you. If you admit that you are afraid-- your subject will probably think to themselves: “Oh I know what it feels to be afraid or nervous.”

This is also like public speaking. If you admit before your speech that you are very nervous, everyone in the audience will feel more empathy for you. Because almost everyone has a fear of public speaking.

Don't hide your fear-- admit it openly, and the more comfortable you will feel in shooting street photography.



CHAPTER VI

Engage

Another mistake a lot of street photographers make is that they feel they need to be a “stealth” street photographer, and fear “interrupting” or “affecting” the scene.

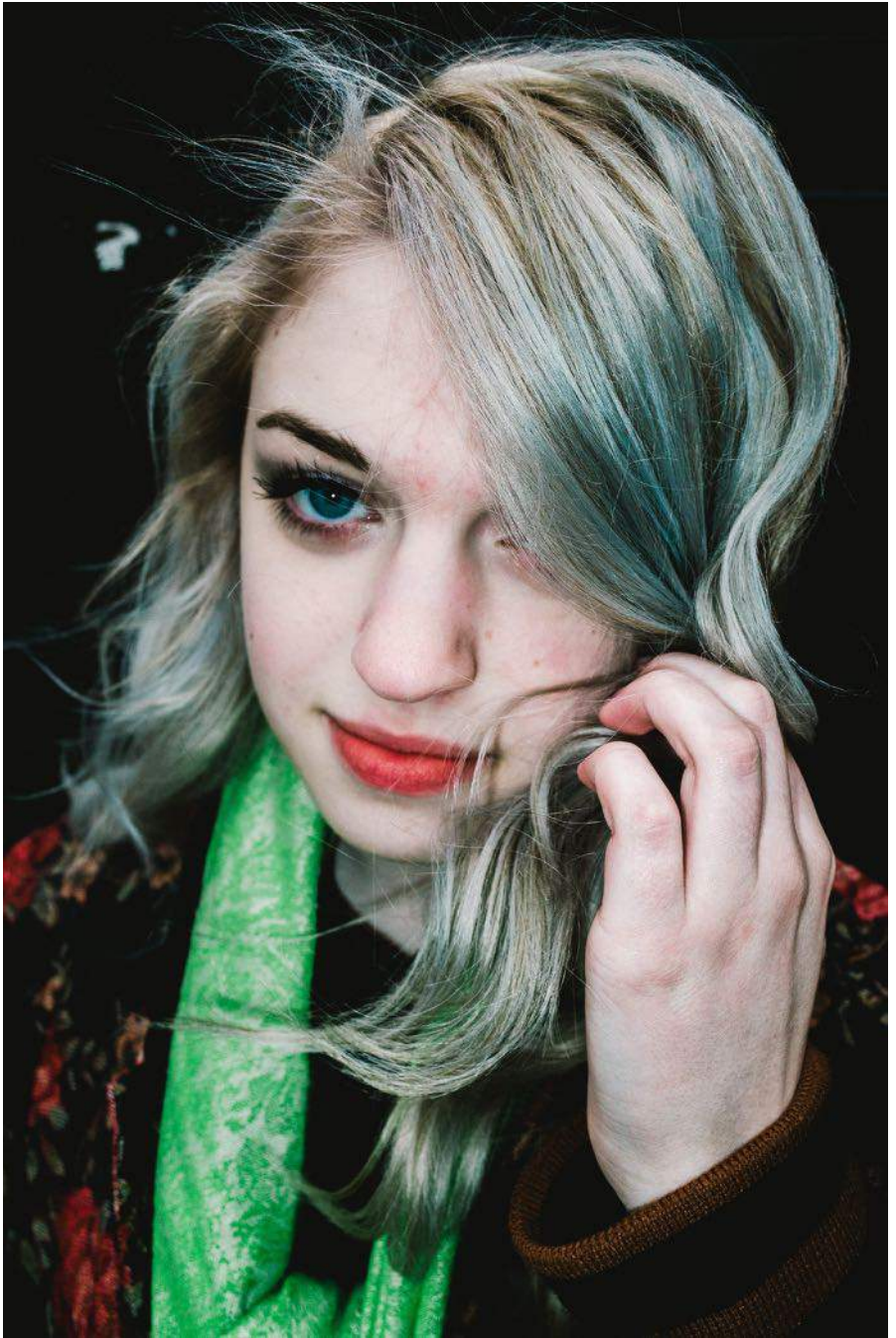
In reality, one of the best ways to make better street photographs is to put yourself in your photos, by engaging with your subjects.

Engage with your subjects by talking with them, asking them for their life story, and asking them other open-ended questions while you’re photographing them.

By engaging with your subjects, you will be better able to overcome your fears in street photography, and also realize-- that a lot of people enjoy being photographed.

Consider-- there are millions of people in the world. By choosing to photograph someone, you are telling them that they are special, unique, and worthy of being photographed.

Also, realize that a lot of your subjects are lonely. You are adding a flash of joy in their life by engaging them, talking with them, listening to them, and photographing them.

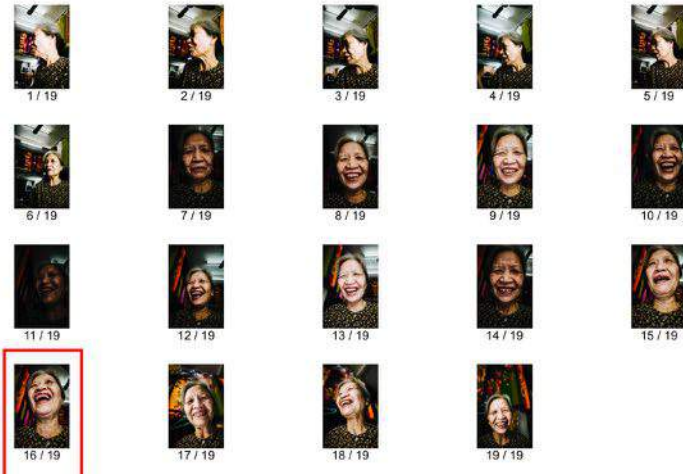


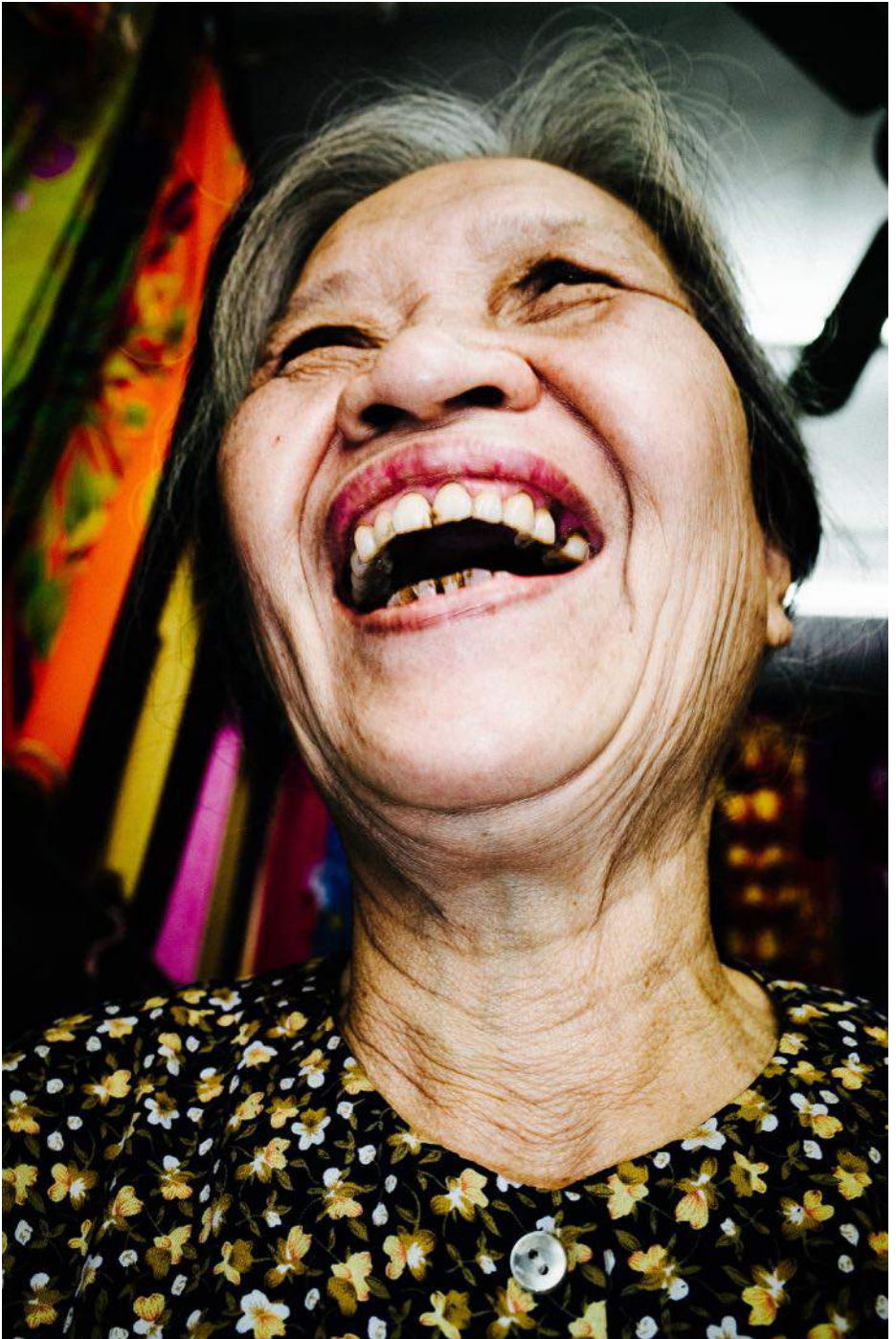
Assignment 4: Work the Scene

The next time you interact with your subject and ask for permission to photograph them, your assignment is to take at least 20 photos of them.

“Work the scene” by photographing them at different angles, perspectives, practice shooting both horizontal and vertical photos. Shoot some photos with a flash, and shoot some photos close-- and for some photos, take a step back.

Try to evoke a reaction from your subject by asking them to laugh, to look grand, or to “work it for the camera.”





CHAPTER VII

Get Close

“*If your photos aren't good enough, you're not close enough.* – Robert Capa

I have found the best advice in street photography is this:

~~~~~  
*If you're not sure whether you're close enough or not, get closer.*  
~~~~~

The problem is that most of our street photographs are shot from too far away.

The benefit of getting close in street photography:

~~~~~  
*With physical proximity comes emotional proximity.*  
~~~~~

That means, the closer you are to your subject, the more intimate your street photographs will feel.

What I like to do in street photography is this:

~~~~~  
*Click, take a step forward, click, take a step forward.*  
~~~~~

Or when I'm shooting a street portrait of someone, I will get close by looking at the edges of the frame, and by forcing myself not to crop. This allows me to push myself out of my comfort zone, and make photographs that are more intimate and personal.



CHAPTER VIII

Projects

To stay inspired in street photography, work on a long-term project. Choose a theme, concept, or idea that is personal to you-- that you can imagine photographing for many years.

You can work on a photography project by focusing on a certain subject-matter. For example, in my 'SUITS' project, I only photographed men in suits. The project is personal to me, because a man in a suit is a symbol of feeling trapped in a corporate job. This is how I felt when I worked my 9-5 office job, and whenever I see a man in a suit, I can feel their pain.

For my SUITS project, the message I wanted to tell the viewer was:

~~~~~  
*If you're trapped in a job that you hate, quit.*  
~~~~~

With street photography projects, work on something that is personal to you. Trust me, your enthusiasm for your project will wax and wane over time. A quick way to think about a project:

~~~~~  
*Can I imagine working on this project for at least 5 years?*  
~~~~~

Also make sure the project is something that is personal and meaningful to you. Meaning and purpose will always triumph over "inspiration" in photography.



















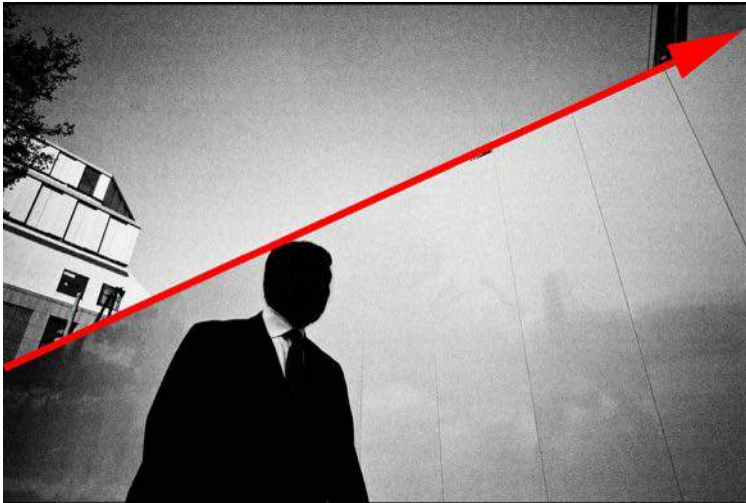
Assignment 5: Diagonal

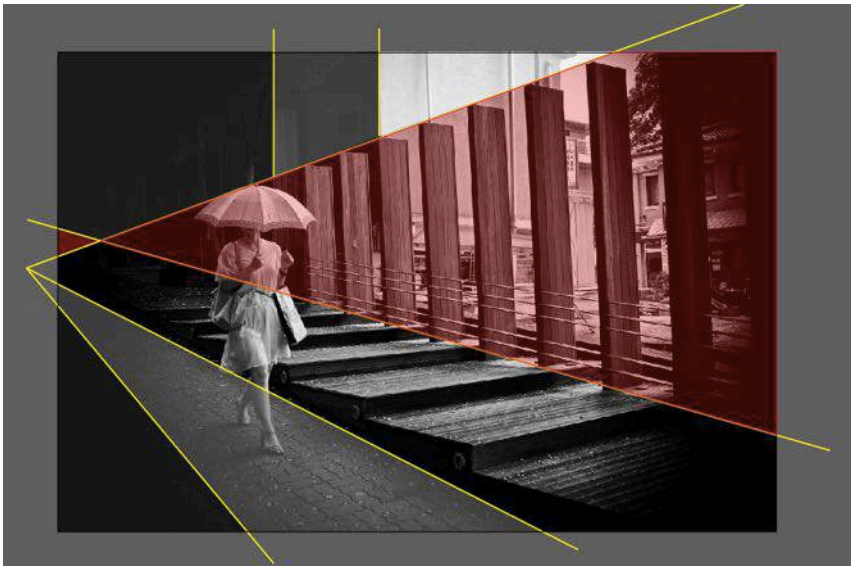
To make more dynamic compositions in street photography, shoot with a diagonal composition.

You can shoot diagonals in street photography by looking for a diagonal or leading line in the background, and waiting for the subject to enter the frame (the 'fishing' technique).

Another strategy: you can tilt your camera and make a diagonal as you're shooting (they call this a 'dutch angle').

The reason why we want to practice shooting diagonals in street photography is because it is one of the simplest ways to make dynamic compositions, without overloading our brains with too much complicated composition theory.





CHAPTER X

Always Be Prepared

One of the mottos I follow from my Boy Scouts days:

~~~~~  
*“Always be prepared.”*  
~~~~~

I think the concept also applies well to street photography.

I’ve missed thousands of great potential street photography opportunities because I either left my camera at home, or because I wasn’t quick enough to get my camera out of my bag.

You always want to be prepared in street photography. If your camera is around your neck or in your hand, you will see more interesting street photography moments. Not only that, but you will make more street photographs.

My rule for myself:

~~~~~  
*I cannot leave the house without a camera around my neck.*  
~~~~~

All of us have busy and complicated lives, and don’t have enough time to shoot street photography. By always wearing a small camera around our neck when we leave the house, we will always be prepared *before* the decisive moment occurs.



Assignment 6: Take your camera for a walk

“*Painting is taking a line out for a walk.*” – Paul Klee

If you want to make more photos, walk more.

Treat street photography as an opportunity for you to just walk more, to get some exercise and movement, and bring your camera along for the ride.

Treat walking your camera like walking your dog. When you go out for a walk with your camera, don't expect to make any good photos. Rather, just enjoy the walk.

Go for walks around your office building during your lunch break. Whenever possible, walk to run errands or when buying groceries. After or before dinner, take a walk around the block of your home.

I've found in street photography,

~~~~~  
*The more you walk, the more photo opportunities you see, and thus, the more likely you are to shoot more street photographs.*  
~~~~~

To become a happier street photographer, walk more.



CHAPTER XI

Aesthetics

A question I'm often asked in street photography: "Is black and white or color better?"

None is better or worse-- they are different.

Frankly speaking, I find black and white easier than color photography, because black and white tends to simplify a scene, whereas color adds additional variables which makes color street photography more challenging.

So as a practical tip, I would recommend if you're new to street photography, start off in black and white. Then when you start to get bored of black and white street photography, more onto color photography.

For black and white street photography, look for abstract shapes, forms, lines, graphical elements, and shadows.

For color photography, look for colorful things. Be playful with color-- try to match colors in a scene, and just photograph anything that you find colorful.

Generally it takes a long time to master either black and white or color street photography. Therefore, when you're learning either, stick with it for at least 5 years before moving on.











CHAPTER XII

Set it and Forget It!

There are many different settings you can use in street photography.

To keep it simple: I recommend Program (P) mode, with ISO 1600, center-point autofocus.

These settings work well 90% of the time.

I've found that the less I need to think about my technical settings in street photography, the less I hesitate before shooting the shutter. Thus, I have more confidence in street photography, and I shoot more.

By thinking less about my technical settings, I can also focus on framing, composition, and timing my photos.

Another way you can shoot street photography is “zone focusing” -- setting your camera to aperture-priority mode, f/8, ISO 1600-3200, and pre-focusing to around 1.2 meters (3 feet).

Zone focusing is beneficial if you're shooting with a camera with really-really slow or inaccurate autofocus, or when shooting with a manual lens.

Don't let anyone tell you that you need to shoot fully-manual to make good street photos. Capturing the moment, essence, and the soul is the most important thing in street photography; not your aperture or shutter-speed.



CHAPTER XIII

Perspective

To make more interesting street photographs, try experimenting with different perspectives.

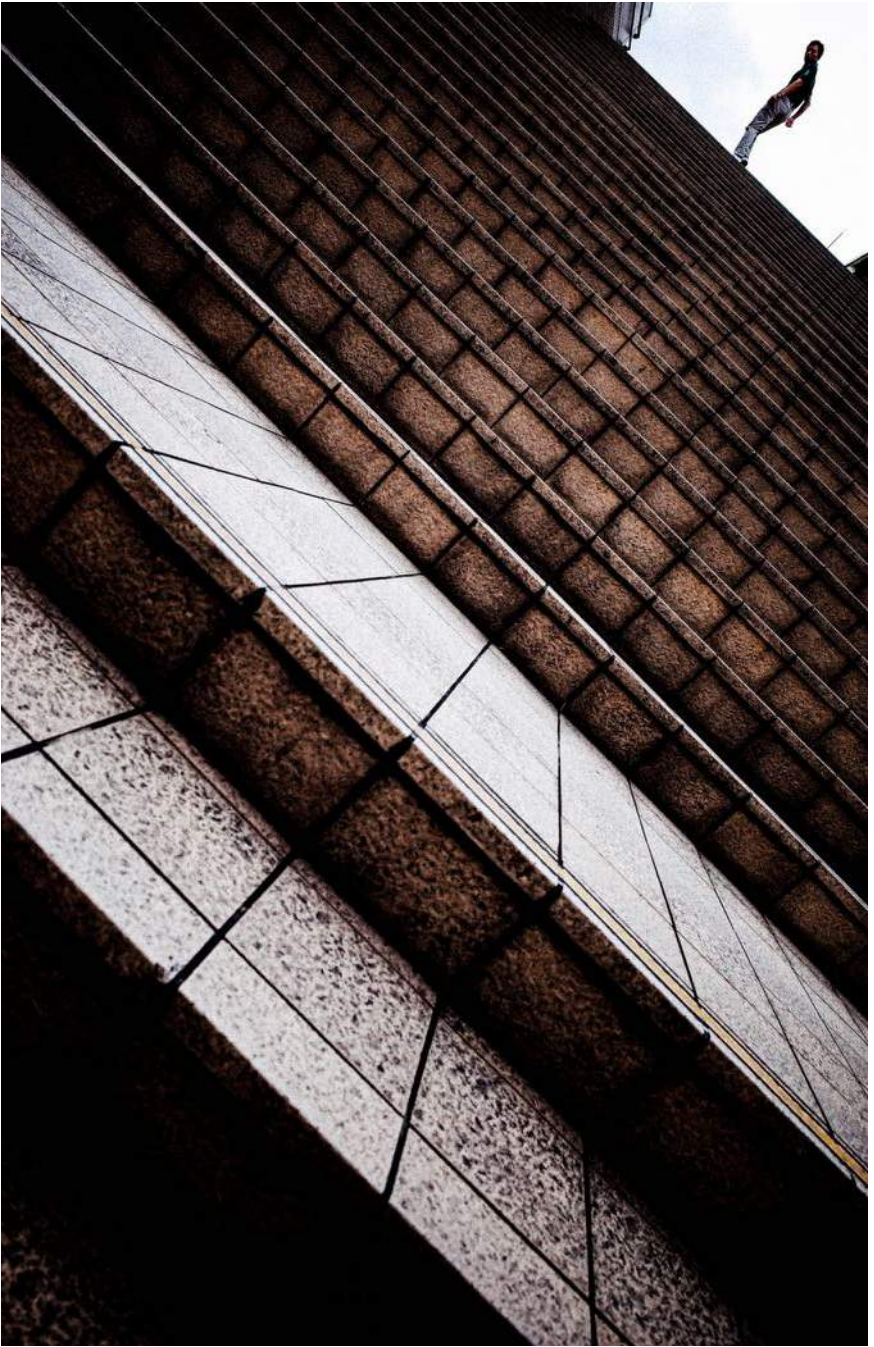
Shoot photos from a very low-angle, by crouching down very low. This will make your subjects look “larger than life” (also known as the ‘superman effect’).

Shoot photos from a very high perspective, looking down. Shoot from the top floor of a building, looking down. Or perhaps even shoot with your camera in the air, pointing your camera downwards.

Perspective makes better street photographs because we can turn ordinary people and situations into more graphically and visually-interesting images; preferably with a wide-angle lens like a 28mm or a 35mm lens.

And of course on a more philosophical note-- you can make better street photographs by giving your viewer your subjective and perspective of the world. As a photographer, you are also a philosopher. You only photograph what has personal meaning or significance for you. Therefore, realize there is no “objective” reality in photography.

~~~~~  
*Your job as a street photographer is to present your  
unique perspective of the world with your viewer.*  
~~~~~



CHAPTER XIV

Surrealism

All of modern street photography is rooted from Henri Cartier-Bresson; the godfather of street photography.

Henri Cartier-Bresson was heavily trained in the surrealist arts. Therefore, a lot of our visual inspiration is surrealism.

I personally have realized that surrealism is something that appeals to a lot of photographers.

And consider as street photographers-- what we do is present ordinary reality, into a surreal hyper-reality.

For example, you can replace someone's head in street photography with another object. You can take ordinary scenes, and create unusual juxtapositions (contrasts/comparisons) to make interesting photographs.

To study surrealism, I recommend René Magritte, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Sergio Larrain.

To show ordinary reality as it is boring. Take ordinary reality, and make it extra-ordinary.











CHAPTER XV

Flash

Shooting street photography with a flash will empower you. Shooting with a flash allows you to photograph at any time of the day, regardless of the light outside.

For example, if you are stuck in the office during the day, and when you leave it is dark-- you can still make street photographs. You can either shoot High-ISO (1600-3200) on your camera, or just use a flash.

The flash is advantageous in street photography because it gives you more flexibility when and how to shoot. For example, if your subject is walking towards you with the sun behind them, using a flash will illuminate them and cause them to “pop out” from the background.

Or if you’re shooting at night and want sharp photos without blur, using a flash will allow you to shoot at f/8 and freeze the action of your subject.

Not only that, but shooting with a flash will add better aesthetics to your photo. Photos with a flash have more contrast, saturation, and allows you to separate your subject more from the background.

If your camera has an integrated flash, use it in “P” (Program) mode with ISO 800-1600. If your camera doesn’t have a flash, buy the smallest and most compact flash and use the automatic flash settings (TTL) mode also in P (program) mode. Don’t worry about your flash settings, experiment and have fun.







Assignment 7: Don't make eye contact

If you want to be stealth in street photography, don't make eye contact.

When we make eye contact with our subjects, they will notice our presence, and sense that we are photographing them. Therefore by *not* making eye contact, our subjects will assume that we're photographing something else-- perhaps something *behind* them.

Therefore as an assignment, spend an entire day shooting street photography and don't make eye contact with anybody. Rather, **keep your eyes locked on the background behind your subject.**



CHAPTER XVI

Tell Lies

There is no such thing as an “objectively true” street photograph.

~~~~~  
*All photographs we shoot are subjective.*  
~~~~~

Therefore, my suggestion is to realize that there will never be any ultimate “truth” in your street photography. Thus, seek to tell your own version of reality, and don’t be afraid to “tell lies”.

For example in this photo I shot in Istanbul, I saw this interesting scene with this man with all these arms growing out of him. I brought up my camera and took a photo, and the man was smiling. I told him, “Don’t smile! Look serious!” By the second photo, he stopped smiling a bit. And by the third (last) photo, he looked dead-serious.

When most people see this photograph, they assume it was shot candid without permission. But you can see-- I crafted my own version of reality with this photograph.

If you want to make a more interesting photo with permission, ask your subject:

~~~~~  
*“Look into the lens and don’t smile.”*  
~~~~~



CHAPTER XVII

Work the Scene

To make better street photographs, you must work the scene from many different angles. Don't just settle by taking 1–2 photos and move. Rather, shoot many photos of the scene. Shoot head-on, crouch down, and move your feet to shoot the scene from different angles. You can even make a better street photograph by tippy-toeing and shooting from a higher perspective looking down.

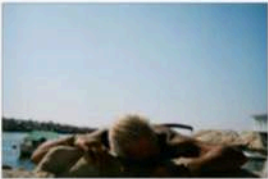
Be like a boxer meets a ballerina-- light on your toes, and constantly moving.

Also generally, avoid shooting from behind your subject. In most circumstances, photographing someone's face is always more interesting than the back of their head. If you can see the face of your subject, you can better see the emotions in their face, and thus your viewer will better be able to empathize with the subject.

Also as a general guideline,

~~~~~  
*Shoot 25% more photos of a scene than you think you should.*  
~~~~~

Generally, when I think I got the shot, I haven't got the shot. By pushing yourself 25% beyond your limits, you are more likely to capture *an even better* moment or photograph.



Assignment 8: Shoot 25% More

This assignment will push you outside of your comfort zone.

The next time you see a good street photograph, start by taking a lot of photos. Then when you pause, and you think you got the shot-- try to shoot 25% more than you think you should.

Try to shoot more by working a different angle. Take a step to the left or the right. Or perhaps crouch down. Or perhaps shoot with a flash.

Don't feel guilty for "wasting the time" of your subject, or "bothering your subject."

~~~~~  
*Remember: You are making art with your street photography.*  
~~~~~

The more you work a scene, the more likely your photograph is going to be beautiful, and inspire your viewers.



1/14



2/14



3/14



4/14



5/14



6/14



7/14



8/14



9/14



10/14



11/14



12/14



13/14



14/14



Assignment 9: Overlay

If you're afraid that your subject won't like having their face photographed, you can experiment with the 'Overlay' technique in street photography.

~~~~~  
*The basic concept is to stack an object, or a graphical element over the head of your subject.*  
~~~~~

Treat this assignment as a fun visual game. Look for circles, squares, or triangles to obscure the face of your subject.

The reason why this assignment is also good:

You know that you aren't revealing the identity of your subject. Thus you know that even if your subject notices you photographing them and gets angry at you, you will be able to tell them that you didn't reveal their face/identity in your photo.

Therefore for this assignment:

~~~~~  
*Try to see how you can make interesting street photographs of people without revealing their face.*  
~~~~~

A great street photographer to study who does this technique well is Siegfried Hansen.



CHAPTER XVIII

Forbidden Places

Don't limit yourself to just shooting street photography in the streets. Shoot in places that are semi and quasi-public; such as subways, inside the bus, shopping malls, hotel lobbies, bars, restaurants, or even grocery stores.

Some of my best photos have been shot in unexpected places.

Therefore, don't limit your street photography. Shoot anywhere and everywhere.



Assignment 10: Elevator

One of the ‘forbidden places’ you can make good street photographs is the elevator. Trust me; it is also one of the scariest and most nerve-wrecking places to shoot street photography. Why? Because if you shoot a photo, you must spend a very (uncomfortable) 30 seconds of your life being stuck next to the person. It can be very awkward.

Try shooting street photographs in an elevator by asking a stranger for permission, or just take a few photos, and pretend like you photographed some advertisements in the elevator behind the person.



CHAPTER XIX

Ethics

What are your personal ethics in street photography?

Don't let anyone else superimpose their ethics onto you. Rather, dictate your own personal ethics in street photography.

My suggestion:

~~~~~  
*Don't photograph others how you wouldn't want to be photographed.*  
~~~~~

If you don't like people shooting candid photos of you without your permission, perhaps you should shoot street photography with permission. If you don't mind other people photographing you without their permission, shoot away.

A practical suggestion if you want to be more empowered in street photography:

~~~~~  
*Become more comfortable being photographed.*  
~~~~~

The more comfortable you are being photographed, the more comfortable you will be photographing others.

Remember: by photographing someone-- you are telling them that they are beautiful, significant, and important.

Photography is a gift and a joy, not something we should be ashamed of.



CHAPTER XX

Children

A lot of street photographers are afraid of shooting children. Why? Because we are afraid of being called pedophiles, or perhaps getting the cops called on us.

However children often make the best subjects in street photography. They are innocent, pure, and uncorrupted by the “real world.”

Whenever I photograph children, I feel the same child-like sense of wonder, curiosity, and excitement in life.

But how can you shoot street photographs of children without getting the cops called on you?

My suggestion:

~~~~~  
*Never be sneaky when photographing children.*  
~~~~~

When you photograph children, be very obvious that you are photographing them. When you make photos of children, smile at them, wave at them, and interact with their parents as well. This will communicate that you aren't a creep, and you aren't threatening.

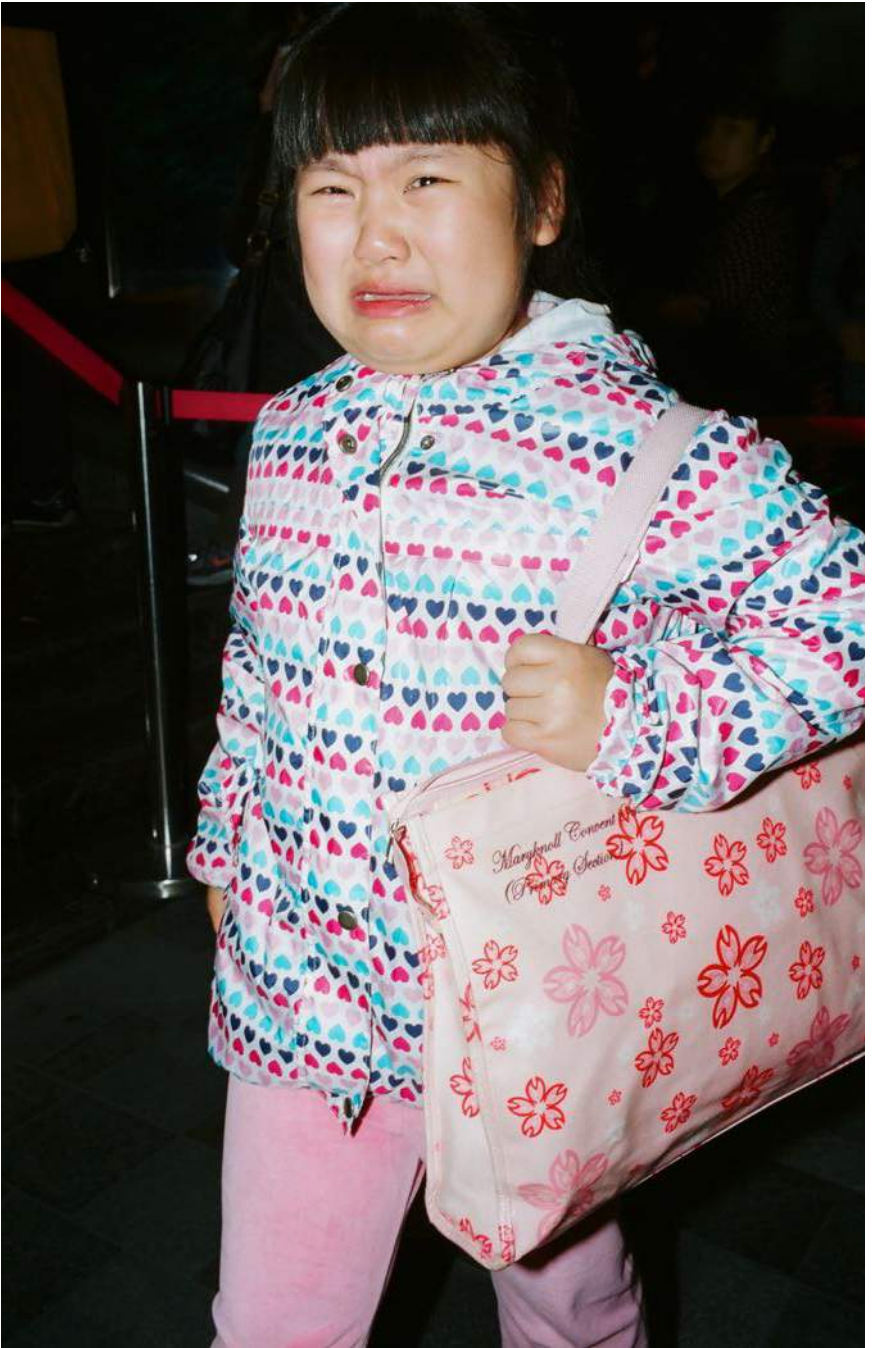
If you're not sure whether you should photograph the child or not, just ask the parents for permission.

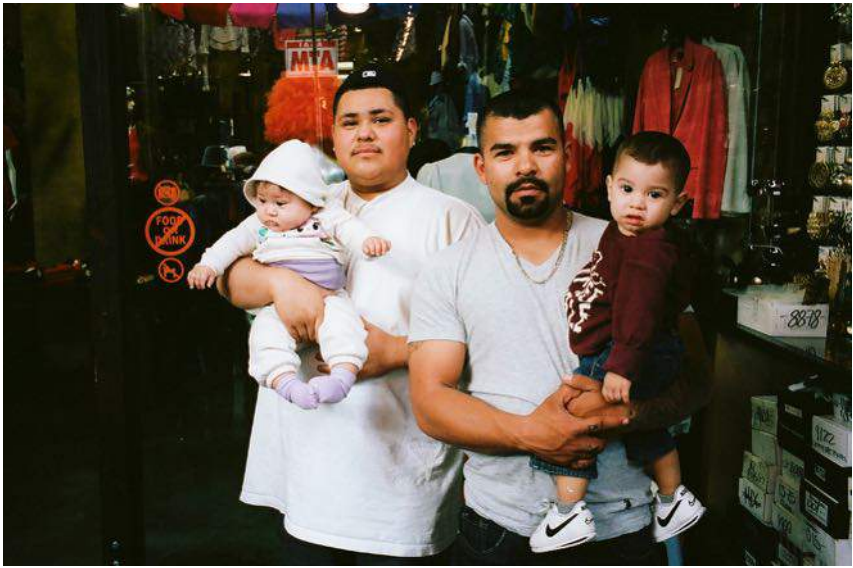














CHAPTER XXI

Mystery

In photography there are two types of photos:

1. **“Closed” photos:** Closed to interpretation. Only one way to explain a photograph.
2. **“Open” photos:** Open to interpretation. Can be interpreted in many different ways.

Generally, “Open” photos are much more interesting to look at. Why? Because it allows the viewer to come up with their own unique story in the photograph.

One of the ways to make a more “Open” photograph is to add more mystery in the photograph. You can do this by photographing your subjects and obscuring their eyes, or shooting in the bright light and shooting with -1 or -2 exposure compensation, to darken the details in their face.

A good test to know whether you have a good street photograph is by asking yourself:

~~~~~  
*“If my viewer looked at this photograph today, and 5 years from now, could they possibly re-interpret the photograph differently?”*  
~~~~~

This is the secret of making a “timeless” photograph -- a photo that says something about the human soul, can be interpreted many different ways by many different people, and photographs that grow better with time (like a nice wine, cheese, or grandmother).



CHAPTER XXII

Juxtaposition

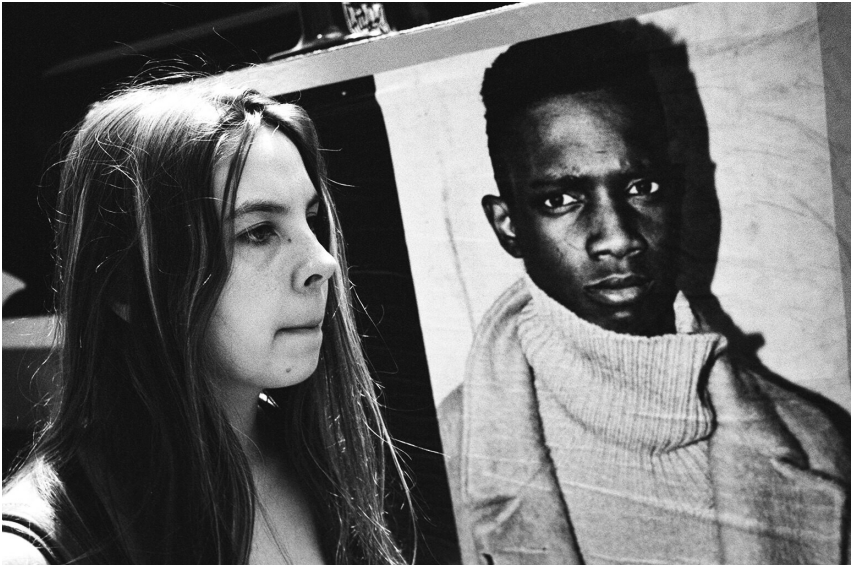
Juxtaposition is the art of putting two subjects or elements next to one another, which either contradict one another, create an interesting contrast with one another, or create some sort of new meaning together.

~~~~~  
*In simple words: Juxtaposition is meaningful contrast.*  
~~~~~

What kind of new meaning are you trying to say with your street photographs?

For example, photographing an old person next to a young person. Or photographing a tall person versus a short person.

You can also go deeper-- create juxtapositions in emotions. Photograph someone who is really happy next to someone who is really sad -- and you heighten both of the emotions of each of the subjects through the dynamic juxtaposition of both emotions in the same frame.



CHAPTER XXIII

Hands

To capture the soul of someone, don't just be restricted to photographing their face or body. Focus on photographing their hands as well.

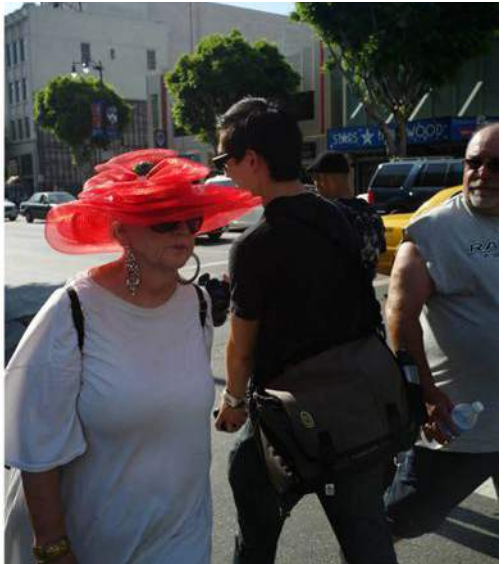
When you photograph someone's hands-- you photograph their personality, and their life story.

When it comes to shooting street photography of people's hands-- try to look for people with interesting jewelry on their hands, people with textures in their hands, and to pose them, just ask them to spread their fingers and face you.

To eliminate distractions from the background, use a flash. Also if you want, you can darken (burn) the background in post-processing afterwards, by using the 'adjustment brush' in Lightroom, and darkening the exposure.

Also realize that you don't have to just photograph the hands of your subjects. You can also hand-gestures. Sometimes people will give you interesting hand-gestures when you photograph them, and they pose for you. Or sometimes when people don't want to be photographed, they will cover their faces with their hands-- another interesting hand-gesture.







CHAPTER XXIV

Emotion

A street photograph without emotion is dead.

You can make a photograph with the world's most interesting composition, but without emotion-- the photograph will not resonate in the heart of your viewer.

My suggestion would be when you're shooting, have an open heart, and try to empathize with the subjects that you photograph.

You can capture more emotion in street photography by shooting black and white, by capturing shadows, by looking for a certain look in the eyes of your subject, or through dynamic hand-gestures of your subject.



CHAPTER XXV

Dynamic Composition

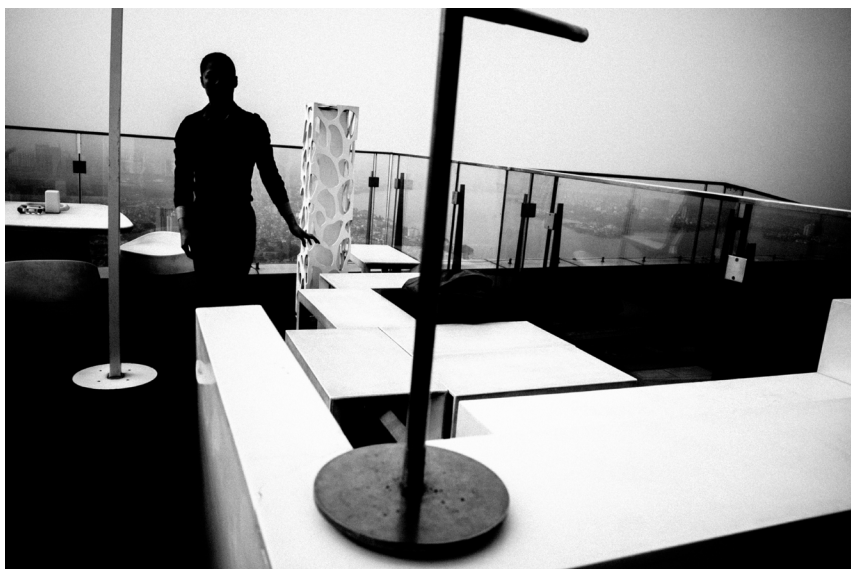
There are simple compositions in street photography like shooting diagonals, and photographing people walking in front of billboards.

To make a more interesting composition in street photography-- try to make it more dynamic.

To make more dynamic compositions in street photography, try to find corners of surfaces and shoot with a wide-angle lens like a 28mm lens. I find the wider your lens, the more dynamic your compositions become.

Also try to experiment with your focusing. Don't always focus on what is closest to you in the frame. Focus on what is furthest away in the scene, and pre-focus your lens to around 5 meters to infinity.

Also dynamic compositions tend to include tilted compositions (dutch angle), have dynamic contrast (dark shadows and bright highlights), and interesting gestures and movements.



CHAPTER XXVI

The Cherry on Top

In street photography, how do you know what makes a great photo? One tip: look for the “cherry on top.”

The “cherry on top” is a small detail of the photograph what makes an ordinary photograph, extraordinary.

For example, in this picture I shot of a little girl playing with a toy windmill, there is a shadow of a pigeon flying away in the background.

The reason I like this photograph: it is a metaphor for the girl. The girl wants freedom and to fly away.

When you’re shooting street photography, you won’t always see the “cherry on top.” Often, you discover the cherry on top after you shoot a scene, and when you go home and notice it in the background.

Yes, there is luck involved in street photography. When you do get a lucky “cherry on top” in street photography, be grateful and smile.



Assignment 11: Love

As an assignment: spend an entire weekend looking for love, and photographing what you would interpret as “love”.

This can be a couple about to embrace for a kiss. Or an older man pecking his wife on the cheek. Or it can be a couple holding hands, walking at the beach, or two friends perhaps enjoying a cup of coffee together at a cafe.

The purpose of this assignment is for us to see more positivity and joy in life. There is already too many photos of pain and suffering in the world. Why not as street photographers find more joy and moments of happiness and love in the world?

You will find out through this assignment that if you are actively looking for something-- you will find it.



CHAPTER XXVII

Layers

If you want to create more interesting and complex street photographs, try shooting layers.

As a basic tip, try to integrate many different layers and subjects in the same frame-- by getting close to the action, and as a suggestion, **keep your layered and multiple-subject street photographs to a maximum of 3 subjects.**

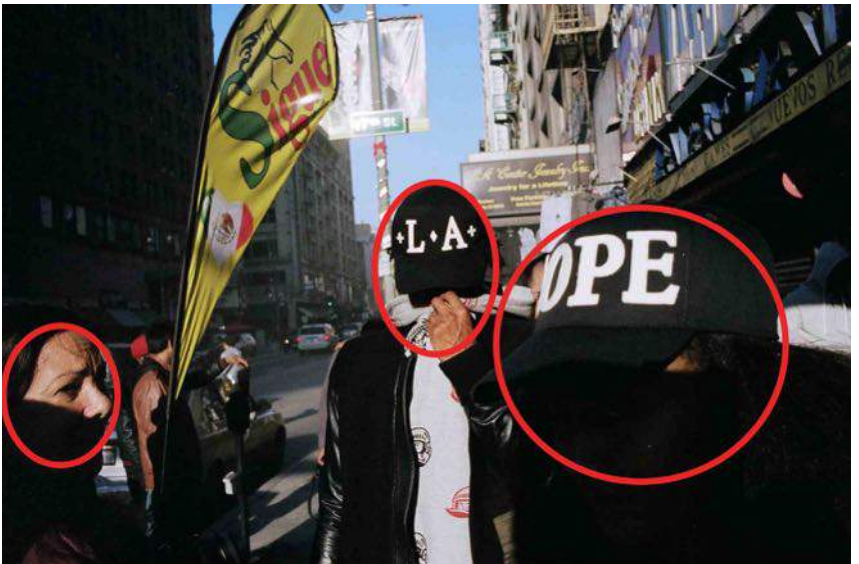
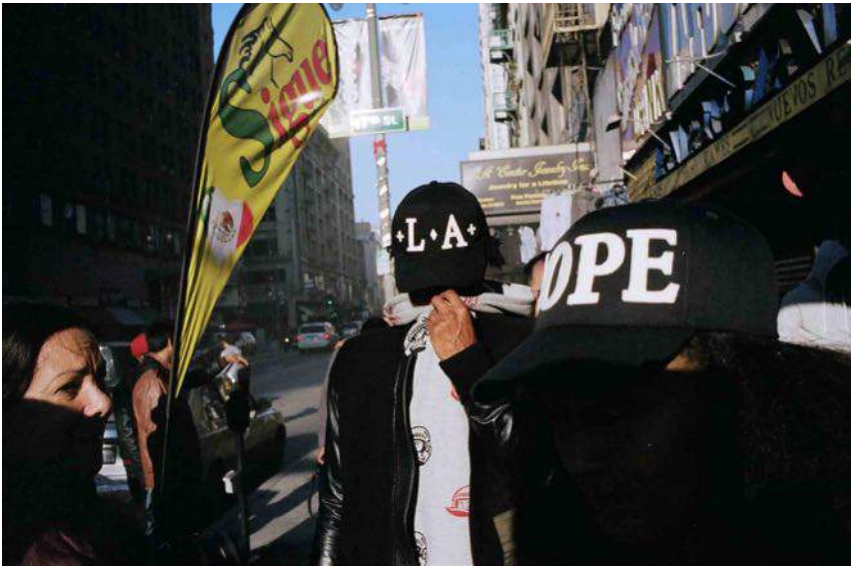
For layered street photographs, make sure you have someone in the foreground, middle-ground, and background.

By having depth and layers in your photos, you will give the viewer more visual space to look through your frame. Also, by making layers in your street photographs, you make your photos seem more “three dimensional”.

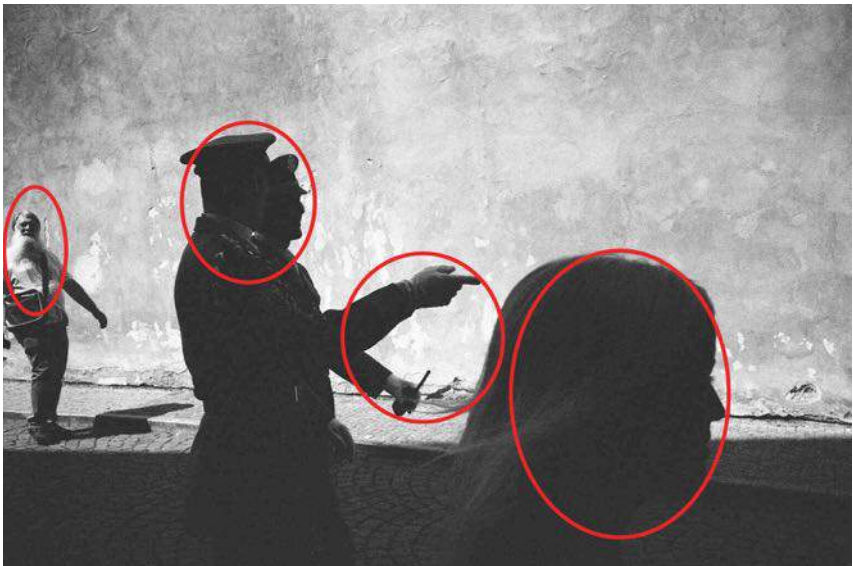
The difficult thing about shooting layers is making sure that your photos are simple enough.

To simplify your layered street photographs:

1. Find a simple background, then wait for your subjects to enter the frame.
2. Pay attention to what is in the background of the frame, to simplify the image. Generally if the background is simple and clean, everything in the foreground will look good as well.







CHAPTER XXVIII

Dramatic Light

The definition of photography is “painting with light.” The more dramatic you can paint with light, the more visually interesting and appealing your photos will be.

Try to experiment shooting during mid-day, when the light is very harsh. Or look for rays of light that are intense, and shoot with -1 or -2 exposure compensation. Put the subject’s face directly in the light, and by using -1 or -2 exposure compensation, the rest of the background will turn totally dark.

This technique will help you paint more dramatic light, that has more contrast and cause your subject to pop out of the background. This will allow your viewer to better focus on your subject, with fewer distractions in the background.







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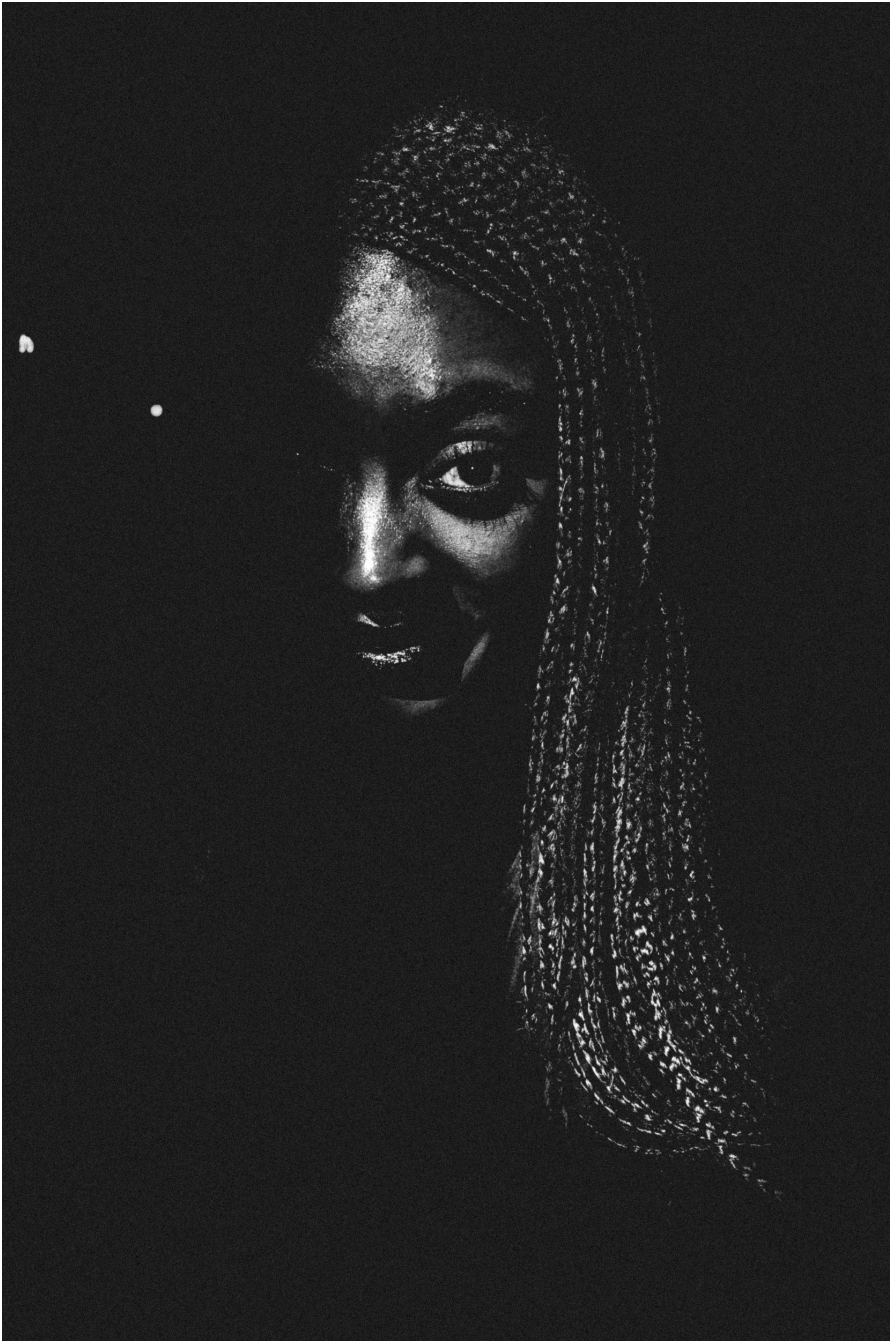
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CHAPTER XXIX

Social Commentary

One of the most powerful things you can do in street photography is social commentary: making a critique or commentary on society through your photos.

I studied sociology in college, and I see myself as a sociologist with a camera (not as a street photographer).

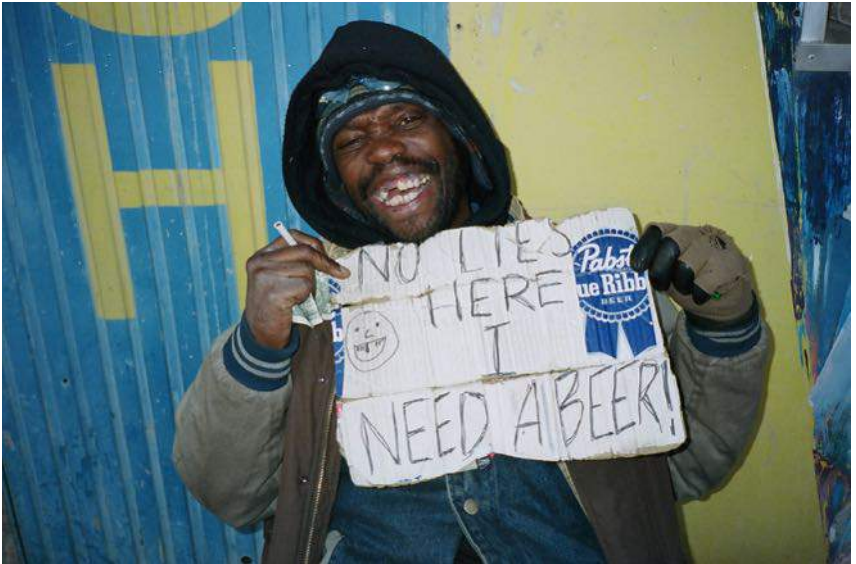
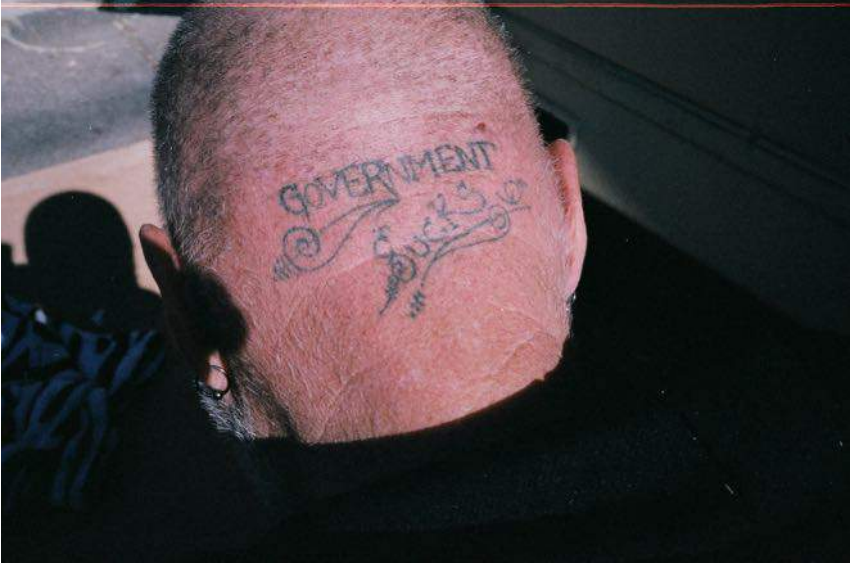
Ask yourself-- what do my photos say about contemporary society? What do I love about society, and what do I hate about society? What do I wish could be different?

For example, for my 'Only in America' series, I photographed America according to my own vision-- a slightly dystopic world that is full of poverty, suffering, racism, distrust in the government, and the rich preying on the poor. A lot of this reflects my personal liberal attitudes towards contemporary politics-- and is a self-portrait of myself, because I grew up pretty poor (my mother declared bankruptcy, and my father was also a chronic gambler).

My 'Only in America' series is quite dark-- yet, I feel that it shows an important grim reality about inequality in America and the rest of the world. I feel we have a duty to make sure to give 'equal opportunity' to those who are under-privileged. Or else those who are born into poverty will never have an opportunity to spread their wings, and also use their gifts to empower society.































CHAPTER XXX

Urban Landscape

Street photography doesn't need to just include people. I also see street photography as documenting the urban landscape. When we shoot 'urban landscapes' -- we are photographing man-made landscapes, and these landscapes reflect a lot about our cultural values.

My suggestion is when you shoot urban landscapes, try to figure out what you're trying to say through the photo. For example, are you photographing beautiful decay? Are you photographing excess and consumerism? Are you photographing a feeling of loss and nostalgia?











CHAPTER XXXI

Decisive Moments

In street photography, there is not one single ‘decisive moment’. Rather, there are decisive moment(s) that you can capture.

To me, a decisive moment is a hand gesture, laughter, or a feeling or expression that catches my eye.

Often, you won’t even know what is the best ‘decisive moment’ in a scene, until when you go home and examine your ‘contact sheets’ (the thumbnails of all of the photos you’ve taken in a scene).

Therefore when you see an interesting scene, I recommend taking many photos of the scene, and afterwards when you go home-- choose the 1 favorite photo you have of the scene.

If you’re not sure what your best photo of the scene is, try the ‘thumbnail test’. The basic concept is make your photos small thumbnails, and based on the small thumbnails, choose the 1 photo that pops out at you.

The reason why it is good to look at your street photos as small thumbnails is that it is easier to see the composition as photos in small thumbnails. Also, it is a quicker way to effectively look through all your photos, especially if you’ve taken hundreds of photos in a single day.

If you miss the decisive moment in a scene, keep your chin up. You will encounter many more decisive moments.



CHAPTER XXXII

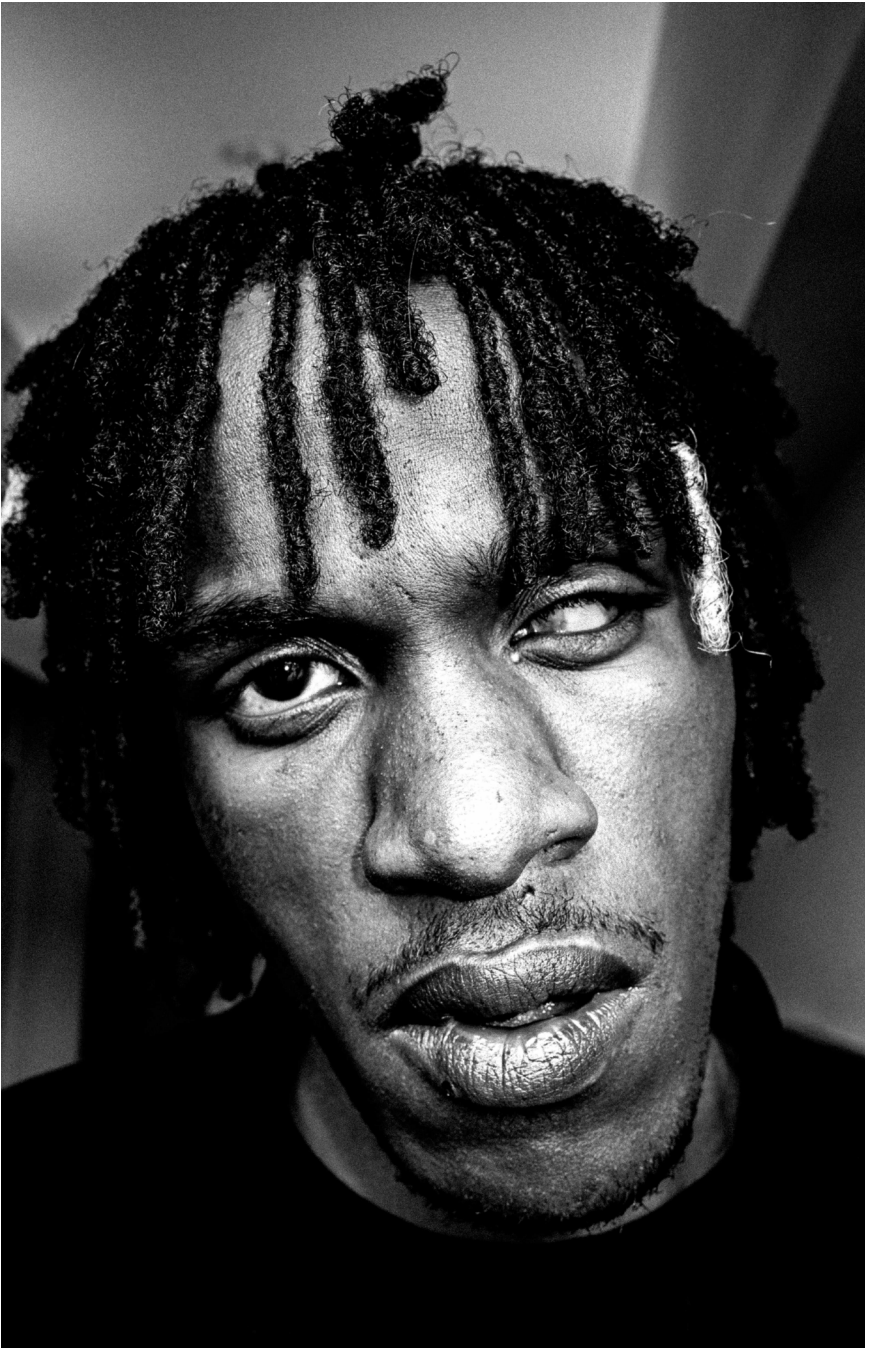
Eyes Are the Windows to the Soul

I feel the most powerful street photographs are the ones which are intimate. Especially when you make street photographs with eye contact.

It goes both ways: when the subject looks into your eyes, they look into your soul. And you also look into their soul by photographing them.

You can get eye contact in street photography in different ways:

1. Ask for permission, and ask them to look straight into the lens.
2. Keep taking photos of your subject (without permission) and once they notice your presence, keep clicking until they turn around and look straight into your lens.



Assignment 12: Eye Contact

For this assignment, get close to your subjects-- I recommend pre-focusing your lens to .7 meters (3 feet), and getting very close to your subject with a wide-angle lens (like a 28mm or 35mm lens), and keep clicking, until your subject looks back at you.

When they notice your presence and look back at you, smile and say "Thank you!" Or if you feel uncomfortable, you can pretend like you photographed something behind them, and keep moving on.



Lenses & Focal Length

There is no ‘perfect’ lens for street photography, but I would recommend using a prime (non-zoom) lens, such as a ‘full-frame equivalent’ 28mm or 35mm lens. Why? Wide-angle lenses force you to get close to your subject in order to fill the frame. Not only that, but because your lens is so wide, you don’t always need to point your camera or lens straight at your subject (if you want to be more stealth).

The practical suggestion:

- **28mm:** If you use a point-and-shoot camera, or you frame with your LCD screen. This will allow you to extend your arm when you’re shooting street photography, and allow you to put your camera close to the face of your subject (the RICOH GR has an integrated 28mm lens).
- **35mm:** If you use your viewfinder, I recommend a 35mm lens. A 35mm is integrated into the Fujifilm x100 camera, and I feel is the ideal focal length for 90% of street photographers.

Of course, experiment with different focal lengths in street photography. I do find the biggest benefit of a prime lens is that by not worrying about zooming is that you have to think less before shooting. Also by zooming, you will draw a lot of attention to yourself.



CHAPTER XXXIV

Blur

I generally prefer sharp and in-focus street photographs. However at the same time, experiment using making blurry street photographs.

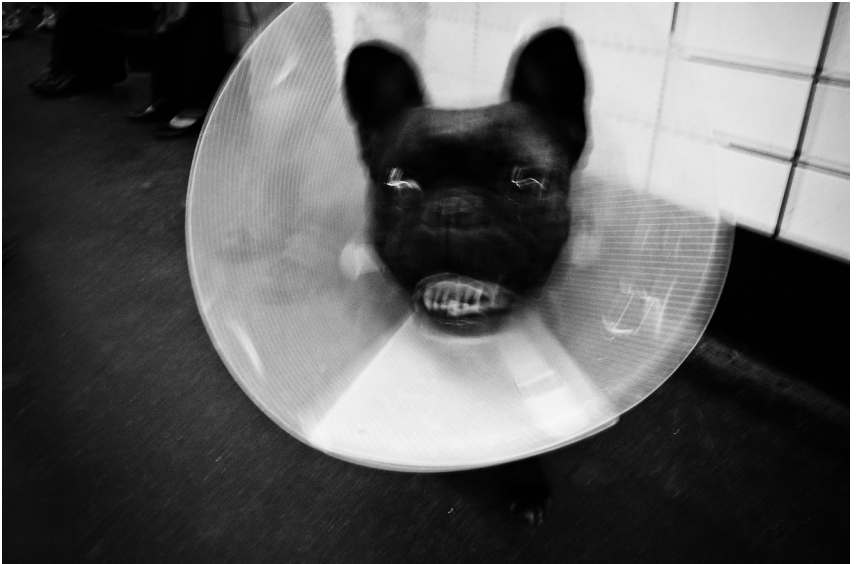
The benefit of blur is that your photos have more movement, feel more dynamic and alive.

Also, blurry street photographs are more surreal. For example in the next page, there is a photograph of a little dog that I shot, and the blur makes the teeth of the dog look like a mini-cerberus (evil dog from Hades).

To shoot blurry street photographs, shoot with a slower-shutter speed. You can do this easily by setting your camera to *aperture-priority mode*, and setting your aperture to *f/22* or *f/16*, with an ISO of around 100-400.

You can also experiment shooting with *shutter-priority mode*, at slower-shutter speeds like 1/15th of a second. Just experiment with your settings, and keep shooting until you find a look that you like.

Realize with blur in street photography-- you will never know what it will look like until you shoot it.



CHAPTER XXXV

Don't Chimp

One of the most difficult things in street photography is to get in a state of 'flow' -- when you are not distracted. When you can shoot unimpeded.

One of the biggest distractions in street photography is checking our LCD screens while we shoot (also known as 'chimping' -- because we often make chimp-like sounds when we look at our photos that we like on our LCD screen).

The downside of chimping is that the second you look at your LCD screen, you get distracted, and you lose your focus to shoot the *next* photo.

For example, if I'm shooting a scene, and I look at my LCD screen and I'm satisfied, I become lazy, and don't keep on clicking. The truth is that *an even better photo* might exist in a scene in street photography. But I will never know if I don't keep taking photos.

As a practical tip, turn off the 'auto-review' function in your camera in street photography.

If you are a true chimp-a-holic and can't stop looking at your LCD screen when you're shooting on the streets, try shooting film for a few months (what I did). Shooting film will help you gain more zen-like focus when shooting street photography (after all there is no LCD screen to check).



CHAPTER XXXVI

LCD vs Viewfinder

A practical discussion in street photography: “Is it better to use the LCD screen or the viewfinder?”

I say try out both.

There are pros and cons with shooting with your LCD screen or shooting with your viewfinder.

- **LCD:** You are more stealth when shooting street photography, you can experiment with more dynamic perspectives (shooting with your camera on the ground, or holding your camera high in the air looking down). Also, you can pre-visualize your photos easier on an LCD screen.
- **Viewfinder:** If you shoot with an optical viewfinder, there is less lag than when you are shooting with an LCD screen (or even an electronic viewfinder). Also with a viewfinder, it is easier to see the scene when you're shooting on bright days.

Ultimately LCD vs viewfinder is a personal preference. I say, try shooting both.

For myself, I prefer shooting LCD screens, as I feel more flexible when shooting. And I can also shoot quicker when using the LCD screen instead of always having to bring up the camera to my eyes.



CHAPTER XXXVII

Editing (Select) Your Best Photos

One of the most difficult things in street photography is the art of editing-- the art of choosing (selecting) your best photos in a given scene.

To judge a good street photograph, don't over-think it. Just look at a photo and the test is:

~~~~~  
*Does the photo punch you in the gut?*  
~~~~~

If the photo evokes a "meh" or a lukewarm response, or a "maybe" -- it isn't a good photo.

To me, a photo that punches me in the gut includes eye contact, a hand gesture, dramatic light, an emotion of fear or joy, and is generally relatively simple in terms of the composition.

If you are not sure what your best photos are, make a folder of your 'Maybe' photos, and look at the photos once a week for a month. Keep looking at the photos. The photos that are good-- you will know it, because the good photos get better the more you look at them. And the bad photos will sink to the bottom-- you will begin to despise looking at your bad photos.

And if I can make 1 good street photo a month, I'm happy.



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CHAPTER XXXVI

Post-Processing

There are many different ways you can post-process your photos. You can use Lightroom and [free ERIC KIM PRESETS](#), you can use VSCO presets (desktop or mobile), you can shoot in JPEG with high-contrast settings, or you can make your own post-processing preset with RAW.

My personal philosophy is with post-processing:

~~~~~  
*Post-process your photos like seasoning your food; less is more.*  
~~~~~

Of course, we all have different tastebuds. Some of us like really salty and fatty foods, and some of us prefer more sweet and spicy foods.

However you decide to post-process your photos is up to you. But my suggestion:

~~~~~  
*Keep your post-processing consistent within a series or project.*  
~~~~~

For example, if you were a movie director, wouldn't you use the same film, camera equipment, and aesthetic for the entire film? So stick with either black and white or color consistently with an entire project.



CHAPTER XXXVII

How to Stay Inspired

One of the most challenging things in photography and street photography is to stay inspired and motivated.

My suggestion:

~~~~~  
*Shoot like a child.*  
~~~~~

A child doesn't shoot for likes on social media. A child doesn't really care what others think of their art. They just paint, photograph, and draw, and when they get bored-- they move onto the next one.

I think in street photography and life-- it is all about **longevity**. Longevity means to never run out of inspiration. Longevity means to be inspired and creative for your whole life.

That means, don't define yourself as a 'street photographer.' Just call yourself a kid who likes to wander the streets with your camera.

Also, don't just trap yourself of the genre of street photography. Photograph whatever you want. **Don't become the prisoner of a genre.**

I used to be very dogmatic, and set very strict rules to myself in street photography. But the more experienced I get, the more playful I am, and the less seriously I take myself. And now, I'm having more fun than ever before.



CHAPTER XXXVII

Conclusion

To make a meaningful, timeless street photograph, ask yourself:

~~~~~  
*Do I see myself in my own street photographs?*  
~~~~~

This is soul in street photography.

To find more meaning in your street photography, integrate your emotions, perspective, and soul into your photos. You can do this by only photographing what is genuinely interesting to you, and only by photographing moments which are personally meaningful to you.

You must ask yourself,

~~~~~  
*“Why am I the only one who could make this photo?”*  
~~~~~

Whenever you identify a scene or a moment, and whenever you decide to hit the shutter, you are drawing upon your life experiences, your perspective of the world, and what you find personally-meaningful.

Therefore to sum up,

~~~~~  
*Only photograph what you find meaningful, rather than photographing what others might think is interesting.*  
~~~~~

Be bold, ERIC



CHAPTER XXXVIII

Learn More

Staying inspired in street photography is one of the most difficult challenges we face. My suggestion: always treat yourself like a beginner, and retain your innocent “child’s mind.”

Also keep in touch, and we can both stay inspired in street photography together, with these resources:

[Newsletter](#)

[Workshops](#)

[Forum](#)

ERIC KIM Blog

- [Street Photography 101](#)
- [Learn from the Masters](#)
- [Street Photography Composition](#)

HAPTIC Books & Tools

- [Street Notes](#)
- [MASTERS](#)
- [Street Photography Visualizations](#)

GOLDEN RECTANGLE

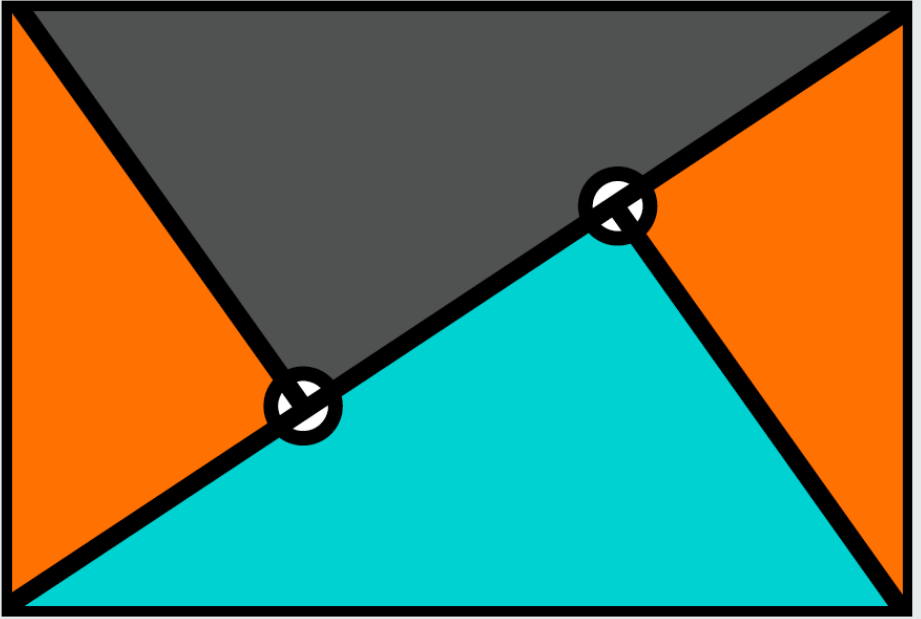


Image from Free [Street Photography Visualizations](#)