



STREET CORE PHOTOGRAPHY

Taking Candid Photography further

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"The first step to freedom is to stop resisting change"
Unknown

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ABOUT ME

Two persons are responsible for your suffering right now when you have to bear my work and my random images. None of these 2 persons is anymore in this world. Rest in peace dad, rest in peace [Niko \(Papadimitriou\)](#)

My father handed me my first camera when I was 16. A second hand Canonet (a rangefinder with the look and feel of a Leica). Rangefinder cameras were (are) adapted to street photography with their size and their discrete noise during operation. Funnily enough I have never shot street photography with that camera.

After a long silence, I woke up in 2004 with a couple of digital cameras (one pocket and one DSLR). The pocket one made me discover the beauty of candid photography and Nikos confirmed me that it was original work. He kept pushing me through exhibitions, competitions, awards until the day he left us.

He was a great fan of Henri Cartier-Bresson and he transmitted me the virus.

Today, a dozen of exhibitions and 2 e-books later, I can safely state that street photography took me hostage because it is the photography of freedom, of emancipation, of synergy among human beings and at the same time the total absence of them.

It is the humanity and the phantom of it. Street photography is not perfect but it is always aesthetic. It can be technically poor but it is always powerful. It is not even the truth. It is an attitude against the ordinary, an instinctive response to the unpredictable, a juxtaposition of the unrelated.

I feel admiration and envy for so many good photographers but I react positively to it. I try to go further and beyond them. And finally to destroy them within my inner vision of the world.

I will maybe repeat here some of my writings of my previous eBooks
<http://www.michail-photography.eu/the-books/>

I apologize for that but I want to reinvent myself every time and in this process I
take the freedom to contradict myself.



PROLOGUE

Why art (photography) as a means of expression? Every form of art is the searching of the universal truth, of one's self. Art is asking questions and finding the light in our quest for happiness.

What is a photograph? A photograph is an illusion created by combining form and content and transforming the world through the artist's personality. But is it the "perfect harmony" between content and form? (we will come back to this "perfect" and "harmony"). This is about the beauty of going beyond our limits; which can alone bring us to an artistic level when creating.

Art is an internal need. And art is best served not by happiness but by introspection. Happiness feeds the body, suffering feeds the soul.

So what is your mood today? Why do I insist on that? The absence of order and peacefulness pushes the artists to the quest of these elements. The superficiality and the emptiness of everyday life make them seek the truth and give birth to pieces of art. Probably having an easy and trouble-free life would mean the end of inspiration and creativity.

The main issues to tackle are:

- Symbolism, surrealism and abstraction in Street Core Photography
- The B&W and the reductionism
- The cheap cheats to avoid and the dirty secret of the rules
- Aesthetics: Is visual literacy something to acquire as a skill or interpreting photographs is just a matter of feeling(s)?
- Critiquing
- Contradictions, allusions, risks, disconnecting from the realistic representation
- Obsessions, impact (melancholy), intent
- The reality-suspending moment
- The freedom to contradict oneself

The reality suspending moment manifests itself when the picture puts our certainties in doubt, our beliefs in suspension. In art, the freedom to contradict oneself is the artist's first step to revive creation and the last refuge to avoid sterility.

The breakthrough in art is operated when our certainty about the obvious reality is suspended. When we cannot tell anymore if the seemingly candid moment has become theatrical or not.



Every viewer is capable in an instinctive manner to perceive the metamorphosis, the profound change, in a photograph. A typical example of street art photography includes everything any critic would dream to have so that they

would feel proud of decoding and explaining to us (you) the elements which only their bright education in aesthetics has the divine power to detect. That is: mute dialogues, multiple story-telling, nostalgic looks on humans.

Don't be fooled by such "specialists complex judgements". Either you feel the power of a picture or you don't. No philosophy around a piece of art would help it to survive. And this is valid for both the photographers and the viewers.

Is there an event which is transferred to us through this extremely accurate means of reproduction as is the photographic apparatus? If our answer watching a photograph is yes, then there is nothing more there to see. The artistic added value, is the metamorphose of a life event into a photographic event where the artist-photographer goes beyond it, (s)he captures its essence through her/his vision of life, her/his sensibility and (s)he returns it to us with a meaning and an emotional burden.

Photographers have to do exactly this with the elements they have in front of their camera. They must disconnect all the details which were specific to that time and place and to distill the real event for us. They have to propose their internal world through the interpretation of a candid moment in order to transform it into a symbolism about our ordinary agonies and uneasiness.

Of course, we are always attracted by geometry, diagonals, triangles and repetitive shapes and patterns. But they are not enough if the photograph does not convey the author's obsessive quest for the extraordinary. The surprising gesture which won't wait, and only an alert mind and lens will capture. No matter any rules, taking a photograph only attains its completion with the edition and the final choice of the photographer.

INTRODUCTION

Some months ago I went face to face with some great pics from a guy on Flickr. I said to myself, well just another guy on the Internet doing pictures. One in like what? Several million photographers and a tsunami of several billion pics around?

And then I found out a bit more about him.

A medical doctor with no relation to photography whatsoever until one year ago when he decided that he has something to say. It made me look at some other random good photographers and much to my surprise 1 out of 2 were just absolute beginners. Then I went through my early pictures and ... all of the sudden, I have put everything I knew about photography under doubt. How someone in just a couple of months can take such images? With no artistic education, with no hi-end camera and in such a short time frame.

I felt confused but the answer came to me too easy and that was suspicious! But in any of the ways I have considered the question, the same answers were popping out. And they will sound to you like what we usually say as the final words of a book. Only this time you will hear them at the opening.

Which are these “final words”?

- I am keen to believe that the less the exposure to "rules", the more the chances to have an original expression of a new talent
- Making art should be an internal need and should stay like this
- Be passionate about what you do. Love your activity, your subjects, your scenes. Make this same choice every day, set the challenge with yourself, make art photography a state of mind
- Don't try to explain your good pictures. Art is creating more questions

than giving answers. This is its spiritual power since questions are more important than answers to the human being

- Great photographers have no decorations, awards and fancy initials by their name! You need no labels. Photographers make art only when they go beyond themselves
- Take a dive in all other forms of art, feel the work of all artists
- Bear in mind that no-one can teach you how to feel. Only inspire you or guide you. The real learning is done by studying the Masters and by discovering yourselves. With lots of practice you will learn through your own photographs. Your pictures will define you
- No thematic packages or projects; An artistic photo communicates individually (eye of the beholder), not massively. Don't strive to create consistently good photographs or you will miss the one which justifies the existence of all the rest! Why ever consider a photograph only as part of a thematic project? How strange this sounds in any other form of art! Great pieces of art stand alone.

Why is this happening (why do we see projects everywhere)?

- a) the photographers are trying to prove that they are not only occasionally good
- b) the galleries have the power to impose their view

Just ignore them. Approach every picture individually. Create many, choose the good one. All the other pictures are there to make the one stand out. They are justifying the existence of the one.

If this one picture keeps the viewer's attention for more than 2 minutes it's a win. Two minutes is a very long time!

- There should be no specific connection of your pictures with the real world, only with your personal artistic world and vision. Otherwise the subjects that you are shooting will remain just another capture of reality. We are shooting ideas ... transforming reality!
- Use contradictions, make allusions, take risks. Finally, the great artists destroy in them the work of their teachers

- Those who advance as artists, experience the paradox of seeing their fans diminish. This is happening because their artistic activity becomes more complex, more difficult, richer, with more significance. The fact that their viewers lag behind should not discourage them. On the opposite, it is an excellent sign
- The most extraordinary photographs combine form and content in a way that established rules cannot explain. Find out how to feel before visualising
- And most importantly: "empower yourself and become your own best critic".



STREET CORE PHOTOGRAPHY

*Empowering yourself: Image making
and critiquing*

01.

Manifesto

*There is a trend to subvert the tradition
of candid photography, a shift where
scenes which at first glance appear
ordinary, they become hyper-real.*

In art photography the sine-qua-non elements are symbolism and surrealism. Neither of them needs the exact representation of reality. The idea of human presence (and other subjects) is used as vehicle for the artist's message. Their realistic portraits are not important. Obsession and abstraction are the 2 additional elements (we will come back to that).

The quintessence in this kind of photography is the reaction of each artist-photographer in front of a temporary appearance of lines, forms, volumes, shadows which are desperately trying to fill a frame. All content is subordinate to the artistic view of the beholder. Stare, pry, listen, eavesdrop and learn how to create your personal style/signature, how to become influential.

At the other end of the process of making there is the selection and the critique. Pictures do not exist until they are shot. And even afterwards we do not try to remember what we have shot but we just choose the outstanding. The truth, the real event has no importance anymore. Nevertheless, heavy post-processing does not mean photographic interpretation. The objective is to learn how to become your own best critic and how to judge with arguments.

Decoding pictures is a step further: answering not the What, Who, When and Where but the Why.

A viewer knows by intuition if a picture is balanced but on the other hand perfect balance and harmony have a boring effect.

Core photography is free of rules where only the artistic expression of the photographer counts. This kind of photography is made by artists who go beyond their limits and capture the magic of a moment which will never come back.

It is not even the truth. It is an attitude against the ordinary, an instinctive response to the unpredictable, a juxtaposition of the unrelated. Sharp or blurred, realistic or impressionistic, the striking result of a photograph made by the photographer-artist, justifies any breaking of the rules.



A few important elements are naturally included in core photography:

Surrealism

It features the surprise, the unexpected juxtapositions. The aim is to resolve the contradictions between dream and reality.

Symbolism

Art should represent absolute truths that can only be described indirectly in a metaphoric and suggestive way.

Obsession

The tension and the alert state of mind of the photographer which is the only way to make a capture stand out.

Instinctive shooting

Degree of preparation (lack of it) as opposed to eagerness to capture the essence of the fleeting magic in a split second.

Emotional impact

Sadness, wonder, anger ... name it. The effects are immediate and transferred to the viewer with no warning. The first impression sets the rules for the rest of the viewing process. Usually we connect if we understand the message or if the picture is appealing to our memories. Pictures of human suffering have an immediate impact because we all have experienced pain (cf. cheap cheats).

Composition or the lack of it

The sun, the light, would not have had the same impact without the darkness.

And last but not least,

Abstraction

It offers the suspension of reality by avoiding the literal description of things from the visible world.

The technical aspect is the first thing to suffer in instinctive photography.

Surely you are wondering why we have not included composition and geometry in the qualities of the street core photography. It may seem that the minimalistic approach is privileged. Well, it is not. We should not ever exclude an image because of its harmonious geometries. But the image will be excluded by itself if the only element it bears are the fine lines and shapes.



02.

The B&W and the reductionism

The debate "B&W or Colour for street photography" is a long one.

First of all art is subtractive. We have to avoid the accurate (realistic) description of the truth. Colour is an additional dimension of the photographic composition.

Colour often distracts the viewer from the subject. It becomes more important than the content. Our pictures should not be just a colourful mosaic. A simple test to consider the real value of a colour photo is to desaturate it. If its artistic value is close to zero then it was not good in the very beginning. Pity! So many wonderful sunsets down the drain!

So, images are recommended in color only in case color brings additional value and information/impact to that capture. Also, use the pure blacks and pure whites. We do not need all the gamme of greys. The image becomes too flat.

Let's listen to the great photographers:

HCB said in an interview *"Reality is like a chaotic deluge and within this reality, one must make choices that bring form and content together in a balanced way; just imagine having to think about colour on top of all this!"* B&W transposes, it is an abstraction, it is not the normality. Colour is for painting.

"Black and white are the colours of photography." These are the 2 opposing forces, a dialectic conflict, hope and despair (Robert Frank).

We have to choose sides at a certain moment. Which is yours?

03.

The cheap cheats to avoid and the dirty secret of the rules (composition)

***Rules have no value in art but in order
to ignore them we have to know how to
recognize them.***

Pictures of human suffering have an immediate impact because we all have experienced pain. Photographers that are aware of this are often trying in an aggressive or more subtle way to boost such feelings. However there must be much more than this first impression.

Avoid “fast-food” shots with 90% architecture, street performers, lowly people, umbrellas.

"Rule of thirds: The subject has to be at a third of the frame. Divide your frame with 2 parallel and 2 vertical lines. The internal intersection points are the optimal spots to place your subject. It is based on the fact that the human eye is naturally focusing at a point about two-thirds up a page."

The dirty secret of photography are the "rules". They have been invented by publishers. Because once you have learnt that you are your own best critic you will never buy again their books on "how to take better photographs". An educated viewer spends less time browsing magazines and more visiting museums and studying the Masters.

In art photography what frightens the most, both photographers and viewers/critics, is the fact that the artwork is performed in a split second. Does it really matter? What is behind this split second? What follows it? (cf. point about aesthetics)

The rules of composition do not have the slightest value for the artist-photographer. Her/his work is the fruit of talent, intelligence and hard work. Through these the artist is led to a number of solutions.

The critics and the teachers are then “studying” these solutions and compare them (in a Procrustic manner) against artificial parameters. The critics are using them to justify their (usually erroneous) choices, and the teachers to impose their views to the students by depriving them of any emerging talent and to trap them into a “mass creativity/creativity for the masses”.

***Rules have no value in art but in
order to ignore them we have to
know how to recognize them.
Let's get to know them!***

04.

Composition & geometry

It is about knowing how to look but also how to pick.

Composition

It is the process of bringing all the visual elements necessary to guide the viewer towards the artist's centre of interest. Pleasing or disturbing, its purpose is to hold the viewer within the frame and convey properly the message intended.

Important elements of the composition are the primary and secondary centers of interest or the lack of them when the whole frame becomes the subject.

Other key elements that impact images are:

- The arrangement of spots, lines, shapes, patterns, leading edges; the visual paths, the visual balance or the lack of it
- The symmetry, the influence of extraneous elements, of negative spaces

By studying your thumbnails (contact sheets) you will easily identify the pictures with compositional value. The same goes by turning your pictures upside down, rotating them, squinting your eyes to blur them or by observing them from a distance.

Magnum Agency was admitting photographers by examining their contact-sheets and not just single photographs. So they could see their thinking. They would rotate the contact sheets from all different angles to assess the composition of the images in an abstract way.

Geometry

Whether you focus on geometry or you don't "over-think" composition it is always the result of your mental process, of your state of mind in that particular moment. Photography is both highly cerebral, and instinctive, subconscious, at the same time.

In the work of great photographers we find compositions that bring together geometry elements in a perfect harmony. In their compositions we find integrated vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines, curves, shadows, triangles, circles, and squares all in a harmonious way.

However, major pictures were taken spontaneously.

We all seek a special way to seize a moment and shape it into a balanced picture.

The dots, the lines, the shapes

Take 2 dots you draw a line, draw multiple lines you have a shape, put the shapes together you have a story. That's all how it works in photography. Like a "Connect the dots" puzzle game.

A spot even if it's tiny draws attention when in contrast. The viewer has the tendency to connect 2 or more spots. If a person puts a hand on another's shoulder it creates connections.

Composition is not a prerequisite in Street Core Photography. Its absence can also be an advantage. But in order to know what an absence is, we need to have experienced the presence, don't we?

So here are the geometrical elements of a picture :

- Horizontal lines inspire stability, rest, weight, gravity and can become the dominant lines in a composition
- Vertical lines create lightness, spirituality (gothic)
- Perpendicular lines overpower the horizontals
- Combining horizontal and vertical lines creates stability and safety
- Jagged lines create tension and anxiety
- Curved lines are related with grace and diagonals with lack of equilibrium or dynamic movement in the direction of the line
- Diagonals are one of the major tools to create depth (3 dimensions)
- Lines in wave evoke slow movement while converging lines create a natural path to a centre of interest
- Repetition in lines creates emphasis

The triangles

They are a strong compositional tool. You can use the urban geometry without abusing of the existing architecture (Keep in mind: an outline of a human subject adding scale to the picture is not street photography. It is still urban landscape!!!)

Lead-in lines

A lead-in line is any line your eye can follow into an image. It could be the edge of something, the horizon, or an interesting pattern you observe.

Diagonals

The frame has some basic diagonals (even created by the looks of the persons). Important elements of the picture should be placed along these diagonals.

The person has to look towards the distant part of the frame (however, it all depends from the final result)

The figure-ground perception

It is essential to separate the subject as much from the background. One way is to put clear on dark. This way we have a clean perimeter. The Rubin's vase application in photography is very simple. Try to keep your dark subjects in a bright space and vice-versa. It helps all the subjects to read clearly. The concept can be expanded to include different colours or spaces (positive against negative).

This way the abstraction and the selection based on thumbnails is done in an easy way. If you have to see your image only in full screen or big format to appreciate its elements, already something is wrong.

All "contre-jour" shots have by definition a good "figure-ground" reading. But overlapping the shapes in this kind of shots is really a bad idea.

Move around the subject, changing perspective, change positions, go up, go low, until the juxtaposition of the subject(s) and the background is "readable".

The high-angle (plongée)

In a high-angle shot the camera is looking directly upon the subjects and makes them look weak and small. The bird's eye shot is taken from a point completely vertical to the scene. The perspective is foreshortened and so is our reading of the photograph. Or is it?

Inspirational photographers like André Kertész, inspired ... inspirational photographers (like Cartier Bresson, René Burri) by using this perspective to produce dramatic images where geometry defines the landscape in a 2-dimensional scene and establishes the actors' synergy irrevocably.

We, the viewers, are witnesses from a safe place of any battles or conflicts; distant and invisible observers of the society below.

The miniature battlefields, the toy-trains, the mini-bridges constructed with patience in a garage, or even in living rooms, aren't they serving the same need of ruling our petty existence and keeping everybody out?

That is why the photographer has the moral obligation to go beyond the obvious and create to the viewers the need to get down of their throne and approach the humanity in distress right below them. Or at least save themselves and participate in this short melancholic movie which is life.



05.

The gear

You have to know the limits of your camera. A good camera is your best friend. Know what you want to achieve, choose the most appropriate equipment for your shooting but then stick to it.

On the other hand, all our choices (technical, gear, printing) should not try to make our pictures prettier. This is not art. Perfection is not art.

Art is a continuous taking of risk (between right and wrong), exaggeration and equilibrium. There is the feeling that at any second we can take a dive but a moment of genius makes us avoid the disaster. The more the risks the better the results.

Don't wait anymore. Express yourself with whatever gear you put your hands on today!



06.

Study art

Look closely the great painters, study their light. Go to the museums. See how the pieces of art communicate (or not) with you.

The artist is an extraordinary person and so is their viewer. They both have the sensitivity to transmit and receive each at their end. This relationship is not there to be elitist, it just cannot function collectively (or extremely rarely).

Study these relationships with the artist as a viewer, try to find the source of this powerful feeling. It will help you to understand that there is no reason to try to reach the masses in a modern marketing way.

Ignore the audience until your work has been completed. Then lay back and enjoy (or learn from) the reactions of the viewers.

Get inspired from the Masters of photography.



07.

Practice

Or how to shoot in Street Core

Photography in order to be spontaneous

A street photographer shoots all the time. Most of the time with no camera. These shots are the most instinctive of all and they are done in milliseconds.

How can we achieve the same result but this time with a camera and a real shot in the box? Without ending at an opportunistic attack and bombardment of the defenseless fellow citizens?

Cartier-Bresson, Kertesz, Burri, Weston ... came and taught us how to use geometry and "good-old" divine proportions. Very often, we can notice in their pictures the absence of any spectacular action, nevertheless they have enormous power. Then others like Leonard Freed and Garry Winogrand went even further and preferred a hard (rules-free) approach. They made the best out of their equipment in the most efficient, innovative and creative way. They approached their subjects within the limits of their equipment. time of reaction of their shutters, no autofocus, no continuous shooting, 12-24-36 takes at most per film ... the list is long.

We are now in 2014. Our monster DSLRs shoot like a machine gun, they focus on 100s of points, they react in milliseconds to any of our commands. Our mirrorless small-sized toys compete in quality with professional gear. The smartphones cameras are at 16 MPs and growing. A good friend showed me how he could trigger the shutter of his smartphone through its headphones without being noticed.

Try to capture the essence of the first impression that attracts our attention. The very core of the image arriving in our neurones and creating the need and the impulse of raising and triggering our camera!

Only, without raising it, without precision composing, with no geometry, golden rules or even correct settings. There is no waiting time, the picture is grabbed, there is no standing still and there is continuous movement and obsessive observation. ***We are not here for long!***

Well, we are all photographers now. What will make us outstanding, different, better than all the rest?

It is (should be) like love at first sight when you only have eyes for her/him and all the other elements, persons, objects, become blurred, almost disappear, and have not the slightest importance for our universe.

When our brain gets an instant tattoo of the object of our desire, of the muse, of the source of our inspiration. In the same way it has to be tattooed on the sensor of our camera.

Like been struck by a thunder and of course with the relevant consequences. Smoke coming out from the thunderstruck photographer and photographed subjects.

We need to capture the core of the inspiration, the core of spontaneous, candid photography !

Street Core Photography is not staged nor extensively composed photography. It is highly instinctive and cannot exist longer than the fleeting moment our brain identifies in a split second.

It takes daily devotion when the camera becomes an extension of the photographer's body. We do street core photographic art when we live in the moments which we want to freeze.

A recipe for a "fast-food" street photography appears to have ingredients like wide-angle lens, B&W, high grain, lots of junk objects in the background, a mutilated body in the foreground.

Go beyond these "recipes" and try not to just capture the world parading in front of us! But try to put your obsessions in a frame. Like an instant straightjacket to your dreams. Otherwise the emotions and the intensity we would like to convey will not be visible.

It will be reasonable to discard some of the elements which otherwise would be necessary for any kind of photography and these are the secondary areas of information. We cannot control much more, except the dominant element. The limits of the 4 corners are not visible to us until they take the form of the captured frame. Of course during the selection we should consider all the aesthetic principles applicable!

Light is important but in core photography you can shoot at anytime (no early wake ups to get the soft light) and anyway in B&W the hue doesn't matter (no sunsets inflation)

From a distance (WAITING)

This is a first and less risky step. It only takes to pick a spot with a background which offers already most of the elements to your story (architectural diagonals, misty atmosphere, interesting textures) and then wait for the crowd to dance and create the dynamic effect you are looking for. Let them invade your space and not the other way round.

A busy square, a train/metro station. Any kind of traffic shot over a roof or other high location. These are only some of the spots where your inspiration won't suffer.

So pick a geometry and wait.

Get closer (HUNTING)

Robert Capa said: "If your photos aren't good enough, you're not close enough". This is one of the most used quotes in photography, quite on the money, as you will find out by yourselves on the field.

Use a wide-angle prime lens. It will take you close to your subjects. Foot zoom. You have to move, change positions, perspectives, go up, go low, do anything except remaining distant.

You will read/hear many tips on how to overcome those fears (how to behave, how to look, how to dress ...)

Forget them! Fears, excitement, nervousness are all part of the creative process. This is what defines you. Your art is you and not another person!

The only reason you will shoot from the hip is to save time and be faster than your thoughts.

Shoot from within the crowd, as part of the crowd (proximity with the subject, preset camera, no preparatory time). literally everywhere! Prefer a place where people are busy with each other and not with you.

Composition may suffer because core photography makes forget any rule but the essential is to be a powerful and story telling picture.

We shoot from the hip, with burst on.

Be alert ... concentrate on humans not on buildings. Buildings are there to stay ... abstraction and magic created by futile elements does not wait. It snaps away

No eye contact/be alone

Do not look at the camera (no reason to do that. You will only get their attention). Prevent eye contact (once they see you it's almost over). People follow eye-lines.

When you seek eye contact two things happen. You intervene in the scene and you change the content that drew your attention in the first place.

Of course the debate is open. You may have some excellent portraits with people looking directly in your shutter. My personal opinion and experience is that you will get a powerful line but you will lose the whole script (the story).

Be alert and prepared all the time. Preparation is mostly mental. You will not see things if your mind is at a peaceful pause, idling over a cup of coffee in a sunny terrace!

The ideal situation is to be alone and wondering. Wondering about the world, you, the others. So that your photograph will come to save you. And you will feel the need to go further, to go beyond your limits!

Burst

Be prepared for the decisive moment. Press the shutter at the right moment but always keep your burst on.

The decisive moment would mean to be patient and wait until all elements are in place. We can choose the right setup and then wait for someone/something interesting to appear in the frame.

Well, (un)fortunately we now have '12-frames-per-second' DSLRs. You can imagine how convenient this is at no cost for developing and printing before viewing the result.

Of course do not inflate your FlashCard but wouldn't it be frustrating to regret the missing frame (how decisive is this) between 2 shutter releases just because you have not kept your burst on? Use continuous mode, but exercise it with caution. Don't shoot like a machine gun even if "Killers Shoot Twice" (an already inflational catch phrase).

We have to be receptive, prepared, concentrated and to wait for something to happen. Try to be selective every time there is a subtle or interesting gesture. Or, we can anticipate the "birth" of a moment and take many shots around it.

When shooting a subject do not limit yourself to one shot. Try all the angles. There are as many good angles (points of view) as many good photographers). Get

closer. Get low. Only at a later stage you will choose among these shots for the one and only piece of art. This last one good shot will justify completely the existence of all the others.

Shoot a lot

Find where the action is and shoot a lot. Always carry a camera with you. Subjects are everywhere.

Learn to put your finger frame and walk around like that all day. It will impress others how deeply you think about your compositions! You make photographic art when you live in the moments which you want to freeze (with or without a camera).

If we manage to get a good shot every month and a very good every year already is a good result! And anyway your best photo still lies with your archive! Revisit your pictures as you go on. Look at them with a fresh eye after some period of learning.

All the rest of the pictures are also useful. They are there to justify the existence of the extraordinary one!



08.

Personal style

What is a signature (personal and recognizable style)?

It is not the extreme experimentation, the grotesque (these only have a historical/documentary value).

It is the plan, the ideas, your state of mind, your suffering, your quest of truth, your need of equilibrium. Don't be influenced by the others. And this is even more true during the moments of creation.

During these moments you have to be highly concentrated in what you feel and think. It is a highly mental exercise and as such you should be away from "noises" and the collective approach. Be receptive to comments and critics but just ignore them when it comes to express your own feelings. It sounds like a "shrink" session? Well, it is!

An easy way to have a consistent approach is to always use the same routine for post-processing, the same lens and perspective.

This will create a recognisable look but still we are not at destination. Persist on the same kind of photography. You will not be able to excel in all styles and forms of art (or maybe you will if you have the talent and the resources).

Crop / no crop

Everything in the frame is important. They are not decorative elements to accentuate the importance of the central subject. The whole composition is the subject.

So we do not see just one theme but a series of elements placed in the frame.

That is why a photo cannot be cut after it has been taken. No that there is anything immoral in it. It is just that a bad photo cannot be saved by selecting just a part of it.

And on the other hand if you crop a piece of a good picture you destroy it. Of course, if it is to serve a purpose/a client (applied photography) then you can crop.

But do not touch an artistic photo. "A change in the form is a change in the content" (John Szarkowski).

The only valid picture, is the one composed at the time of the shutter release.

The lens as an element of signature

Each lens has its characteristics (technical and aesthetic). Pick one of your preference and stick with it.

B&W or colour, hi-low key, contrast as elements of signature

We already talked about how B&W is a choice determining the style. The same goes for shooting in hi or low key, or using highly contrasted pictures.

Quality of light as a personal choice

You can choose the light or the light will choose you. If you decide to work only in sunny days and with harsh shadows be prepared to get an intense graphical result (silhouettes) in your photos. And if you decide so, this can be an element of your personal style.

Or you can use the light at the beginning and the end of the day which is softer and you get those really long shadows. Idem as before you can use this as an element of your signature.

A cloudy sky is like a huge soft box. The diffused light will get you a totally different result. This is the best light in order to have the WYSIWYG effect. In addition, if you are lucky it will start raining and this is a great scenery.

Shooting in the night: You are entering a world of pain. Be prepared for high levels of digital noise unless you are willing to use flash. Alternatively take advantage of the artificial light of the city.

Post-processing

Should we worry about post-processing?

My personal opinion is that they are your pictures and you have to feel good about them. Do whatever is necessary to arrive to this result.

So, there are no aesthetic arguments pro or contra PP. There are however some

economic considerations to be taken into account: You cannot add detail if you have overexposed or missed something from the frame. It is a pragmatic approach. If you have several hours to spare in front of a computer retouching the picture, do it, but wouldn't it be better to think a couple of minutes more during the setting up of your camera and your frame?

A photographer when making art should not shoot predefined compositions but moments of life. Pictures do not exist until they are shot. And even afterwards we do not try to remember what we have shot but we just choose the best compositions.

Myself, I cracked a few times for some severe post-processing. As a play. But the original pictures came back gloriously.

Take the iconic photograph of the Russian soldiers liberating Berlin. The emotional impact of the 2 watches, one on each wrist of the soviet army soldier (disdain and horror), is the complete opposite of the altered (one watch) picture (exultation, honor). Observe reality, do not manipulate it ...

But do print! A real print helps you remain focussed and see the exact value of your image.

Fortuitous pictures? Let your images define you!

Are they any lucky pictures? So what? As soon as you continue to take pictures and together all the risks that the artistic effort contains, you can be sure there will be more and more "lucky" good photographs which you will proud of.

Not only this. The amount of these pictures will finally define your style and your own perception of reality, which is exactly what we are seeking everyday.

09.

Aesthetics

Is visual literacy something to acquire as a skill or interpreting photographs is just a matter of feeling(s)?

"Reasons, not rules make us stronger"

Visual literacy has to do with visual syntax and semantics. There is a lot to study about these but also about aesthetics (from the Greek αισθάνομαι, I feel).

Criticism is by definition a discriminatory act, be it pro or con in relation with a creation/creator. It takes a real insight and a knowledge in depth of the artwork before we engage in a criticism. Studying art history is of paramount help, but even learning the basic solutions of visual problems is a great start.

Pieces of art combine form, composition and content in a magic way, unable to be explained by any predefined rule or method!

Nevertheless when we have to state how good or not good is a picture, a "why" is requested because without giving reasons any evaluation is irresponsible. So when you evaluate a photograph, judge with arguments, do not pronounce!

Most of the artists are either overconfident or underconfident. Both behaviours serve to protect them of being vulnerable.

That is why any critique should be supportive and friendly. When taking a judgement on a picture, it is necessary to have clear notions of what is criticism, its value and types.

The main actions to undertake (exhaustively and not partially) include much of observation (including the abstraction of the image by squinting or blurring the eyes, turning the picture upside down, etc), thinking (reductionism) and talking (conversation between artist and viewer).

Description is the first and essential step to arrive at a meaningful judgement. It is the moment when we collect data or facts. We answer the what, the where ... we acknowledge the content and the form.

Decoding pictures is a step further: answering not the What, Who, When and Where but the Why.

We are not looking anymore for the visible elements of the picture but for the invisible ones (what we do not see in the frame).

We are not looking anymore at the focused, emphasised elements of the picture but we are wondering why the others are not emphasised.

We are seeking the preceding and the succeeding moment of the decisive moment.

We are going further than the factual angle of the picture and we simulate mentally other possible angles low, hi, left, right.

This helps us to interpret context. Especially when information is implicit, and there is no identification of the persons or their purposes, time or place. The process is based then on own experiences and values. In order to see a picture thoughtfully we have to be able to communicate with the same language.

The choice of a picture can be a painful process but also very liberating. It can be done in the same solitude as the taking of the photograph or it can be collective (by expert eyes but of a great trustfulness).

The same rules that apply in the taking, apply here too. We should try to reveal the barriers to sincerity and break them so that the essence of a situation comes out.

How to look at our pictures? With brains, emotions, distance, memory? You start by describing how the objects in your photographs are organised. This is highly necessary especially in the digital where we shoot many pictures and very close one to another .

Some quick tips in order to exclude a picture: unwanted blur, awkward mergers of objects, multiple points of interest, distracting objects, unflattering expressions of people, distorted lines ...

Look for dark, light, abstract shapes, rectangles, diagonals ... There are some main elements that draw our attention. The focal point (not only the focus), the depth of field, the light, the contrast, the leading lines ... are all influencing the viewer's POV.

More specifically:

A human presence is always searched in a photograph no matter which are the obstacles.

A spot even if it's tiny draws attention when in contrast. The viewer has the tendency to connect 2 or more spots like in the puzzle games. If a person puts a hand on another's shoulder it creates connections.



A LONG EPILOGUE

It will be never enough to underline that Street Core Photography should include symbolism, surrealism and abstraction. No cheap cheats. Resistance to the dirty secret of the rules.

It should be done obsessively and should transmit melancholy (melancholy serves in the best way the ambiguity which has to be all over a powerful frame).

In a specialised free eBook that I have co-produced you will find 50 evaluations of the same passionate dialogue between the artist-photographer and its object of obsession. 50 interpretations of the surrealism, the symbolism and the abstraction which magically appear in ordinary every day scenes (<http://blur.by/1o8QEO4>) Some of the elements have been transcribed here.

The most inspiring photographers find in photography the means of expressing their inner world, hopes and despairs, joy and suffering, dreams and realities. We are often overwhelmed by the sensibility and the sincerity found in their creations.

The secret in a picture is that it should not be instantly consumed (like a firework). A fine geometry mobilizes our visual literacy. With contradictions and an unresolved ambiguity, an unstable equilibrium is reached and conveys the full strength of the image.

Pictures of suffering and pain

The photographers are aware that we connect if we understand the message and pictures of human suffering have an immediate impact because we all have experienced such feelings. Avoid that!

The extreme artistic value of an image

A photograph with impact plays with certainty and uncertainty. It contains many

mysteries unsolved. The uncertainty in us is so powerful that the more we try to decode the picture the bigger is the feeling that we know less and less. Great photographers have this charisma to put our beliefs in suspension!

Take the railway sceneries for example. We are certain of our capacity to feel the melancholy of an ending voyage or the joy of a new start? Moments of known and certain feelings, moments of well established emotions. And a personal triumph of knowing all the answers.

However, a successful image should arrive to destroy our comfort zone. To obscure the answers and create even more questions. The obsession should breathe throughout the whole scenery. For you as a photographer no question should have been answered.

What makes or breaks an image?

A photograph! So easy and simple to create it by just a click of the shutter, but so difficult to perceive it through the inner vision of each artist.

The moment we are leaving any frame, this fragment of the world as cut by the artist, we have not the slightest clue of what kind of reasons led him to recognise the value of the chosen content.

The photographer disintegrates the material, the composing elements of the reality to be photographed and reinstates them under another form. Kertesz had the gift to create optical puzzles where the chairs of the public parks in Paris were a complex sculpture of shadows, much like the modern art installations.

We know that among the ingredients of street photography the emotional impact is very important. It is usually helped by the right juxtapositions, the touch of humanity and the abstraction (surrealism finds also its place in the latter). But what really makes a picture is the art of subtraction. It may look like a sophism but the photographer is more busy in finding what to leave out than what to include in the frame.

Master the abstraction!

In order to reinforce the ubiquitous emotion of solitude he is leaving out of the frame the other humans or anything connected to humanity. The mystery of what happened next must be hermetically sealed.

The recipe for "fast food"

Street photography is allegedly the juxtaposition of human body parts in the foreground and some unrelated objects in the background. As all stereotypes this

one also has its bright exceptions. The result, the final frame, is the best and only testimony of the idea that stereotypes, rules and recipes are invented only to justify the existence of critics and teachers.

Every image taken instinctively with no preparation (except the mental one), proves that the impact of street photography does not rely on perfection or the respect of rules and instructions. It only needs somehow to mobilise our sensori-emotional values.

Someone said: "A street photograph should combine an unexpected juxtaposition with the humanity of a portrait while keeping an eye for abstraction." Use any of the above taken separately and we'll produce pictures for the stock photography shops, the lobbies and the living-rooms. So many heartbreaking portraits, so many other abstract (but catchy) frames down the drain? (Un)fortunately yes!

We are flooded by spectacular sunsets and sunrises made in exotic holiday places. We are overwhelmed by random shots in beautiful cities in sunny days (taken during a break from bourgeois small talk and vain activities). I invite these last photographers to spare the photographic art from their creations and pay respect to the authors who struggle.

What motivates a photographer

What makes her/him to take a stroll in a foggy day, in the creepiest of the places, instead of having a hot cup of coffee in a coffee-shop? Vision, altruism, passion? The most noble of motivations? Or is it arrivism, mannerism, ambition? The least noble of them. The answer is easy. Ambition will never produce art. Passion will do! Vision and personal quest will do too.

Our images should be the accomplishment of a long quest. Be assured that there is no luck, these symbolic juxtapositions do not come bundled with a deus ex-machina (fotografica).

The negative space

the geometric abstraction has to be broken in its non-representational perfection by random elements. Everything happens outside the frame, you are just an observer from your narrow piece of the world.

A street photographer must convey much more than a documentary image of an historic value. This way the picture is transformed into an image where the artistic value is such as we should not really care about the where, the when and the who is in the image. Because exactly these points are at the same time those which trigger the uncertainty.

The allusion of uncertainty

What makes the photographer detach from the simple representation of reality, what makes them to be more than just a simple observer of a historic event? When taking the risk to fail is the only drive. What makes this great picture are not the converging lines, nor an uneasy sky nor a moving crowd. It is the allusion of uncertainty. The fact that we try to imagine what the following seconds would bring. There was a vision behind the birth of every outstanding picture. The greatest of an author's successes is that the idea does not substitute the photograph!

We recognize by intuition a balanced picture but perfection has not always the same impact. There are times when the negative spaces or the absence of geometry are simply so meaningless in front of the power of the main theme. Story telling, the capacity of a picture to evoke imagination, is not essential for one reason. There are as many stories as viewers.

Staged images

The artistic value of the picture is by no means diminished from the fact that it has been studied beforehand. Street photography can take various directions. Wouldn't we be slightly hypocrites if, in an exaltation of purism, we would ban partially staged gems?

The hyper-real mood ...

...of a picture does not come from the careful set up of the actors, but from the random synergy of the elements, synergy unknown even to the author before visualising the result. The symbolism can come using a different angle and perspective and the contradictory elements and shapes. Disengage from the futile quest for sharp and technically perfect photography!

An image should be able to make it through the barriers of time. Not only by being timeless but also containing the past, the present and the future moment, the preceding and the successive frame.

One of the great powers of street photography lies in the busting of myths. And not doing it in a documentary manner, not by just capturing reality.

The main subject can have all the hypostases possible depending on the viewer, and that's what symbolic, surrealist photography is all about.

The confrontation!

This is what we are looking for in art photography. We should be against any

attempt from the part of photographers to trigger our sensible hearts and souls. We cannot of course forbid the wow's when pets meet children in a soft focused frame! But if our neurons permit it, we have to resist emptiness, superficiality and all-is-perfect-at-home" attitude.

But we shouldn't be purists or prejudicial and every time the aesthetic result has an impact to our senses we should keep our eyes focused and continue the reading.

Photographers and critics often wonder about the work of Robert Frank trying to see how he could reveal in otherwise totally uninteresting objects and landscapes, a photographic reading and a powerful image.

Put dreams and nightmares in a single shot. Joggle with the dismantling of symbols.

Mystery, perplexity, wonder (and all the synonyms looked up in any dictionary), these are the fascination of photography. The photograph that will stand out is always the one which is never decoded completely.

Surrealism is also the unnatural combinations and the irrational matching.

A cropped image?

Yes! As long as it remains powerful without the missing parts. Any manipulation should not have effect to the frame (similar to the cropping of HCB in the puddle jumper).

The outstanding geometry

...of an image will not disappear even if you turn them around, rotate them, keep them at a distance or squint your eyes to see them blurred, they have the same visual impact. Try to do the same with your pictures. It is (was) a Magnum practice and it works for most of the photographs.

Pictures and the transport

When you shoot people on a bus, tramway or train on a rainy winter day try to capture the collective melancholy, surprise the humanity in distress but do it instinctively and discretely in order not to disturb these fragile moments of recollection.

The public transport is a huge laboratory where people feeling safe behind the glass windows are entering long reflexions. And all of the sudden the photographers have in their disposal a gigantic in vitro observation of this particular behaviour.

Reminder: The "reality-suspending moment"

The essential point in a picture is whether it creates, what we will call, the "reality-suspending moment". Do I try to create a similar unbearable concept as the "decisive moment"? Not at all! There are no concepts ex ante in photography. Everything, including the critique, is created at the moment of the shutter release. An image should suspend everything that may seem realistic or an ordinary capture of yet another colourful event.

Our images should seek the metamorphosis, the art of change

Photography gives us all the means to perform it. We have to go further and transform the observed reality into a window of conflicting existences, diverging lives and unrelated visions, nevertheless forced to cohabitation at least for as long as this suspended moment requires. It is clearly difficult to us, the viewers, to admire something we do not understand and something we cannot evaluate based on technical criteria.

Breaking the rules

Sometimes there is no clear point of focus. And there do not look for golden thirds, fine geometries, lead-in lines, patterns, DOF, diagonals ... Instead if you are feeling the author's obsession, the state of mind which makes street photographers dive under

any conditions in order to catch the essence of their inspiration, then you are getting the most of it (actually all of it). Take some long moments thinking about what ever will happen to this world after we have opened up the four angles of the frame in our eagerness to complete the missing elements and guess what precedes and what succeeds a magic street photograph!

There are times when we cannot express absolutely anything with words. Art came to complement Logos and not to be described by it. Also the stronger a photograph, the more we feel weak when called to describe it.

Art is only a druid's jar

...where different magic potions are created based on the same ingredients, just varying the dose (or changing the druid).

The surrealist juxtapositions were different throughout the decades of photography. What we have now is probably different. Use the contemporary elements as creatively as the author of this inspiring composition. Or rather

decomposition; of the modern values, of our certainties, of our pretensions.

Some other times the reality becomes, through the photographer's mind, a highly decorative abstraction. But also disturbing. Would we hang a disturbing image in our living-room? I think we should, for the sake of keeping our neurons alive!

Well, it is a choice and unavoidable for the followers/students to destroy with their art the work of their teachers/idols.

Very rarely does a street photograph go beyond the limits of the narrow circle of candid photography in order to become a widely accepted piece of art of a unique value. One of those photographs will find their permanent place as a collector's item.



The angle

"There are as many good angles to take a picture as many good photographers."
WINOGRAND. The choice of the angle is as important as the selection of what to

include and what to exclude in a frame. A photographer understates how otherwise insignificant events, places or subjects become of utmost importance for their personal vision, and without recourse to the perfection or technique, transposes it in an abstract essay on humanity. Repetition and revisiting is the key element for the work of all street photographers. Try to visualize your frames as small as possible, blurred. Rotate them. They should never lose their impact.

The 4 corners

Through them the photographer delimits the world for him and for us, the viewers. Not even some pixels are with no value or less important than the others. Consequently when the authors decide to use black or white space with no information it is because they want to guide us through their allusion and their personal vision of the world.

Unrelated, odd objects

Some images of ours appear to have unrelated, odd objects. Nevertheless they seem interesting to us. Trust your first impression and do not interfere. Some of us would have taken away the "odd" objects in order to have a "clean" scene. But try to decompose a picture by subtracting one by one the "intrusive" elements. You will see that each subtraction is reducing the power and the symbolism of the image.

The great gamble

The subtle play between realistic representation and overstated abstraction. We must attain the abstraction without betraying the photographic approach. Leave behind the security of another successful street capture, leave our zone of comfort and face a possible failure. The purists would exclude an ambiguous image from their influential collection of purely abstract photographs. But who cares about the critics? The authors have to reach the point of discovering that they are their own best critics.

The shift in street photography

In art street photography the sine-qua-non elements are symbolism and surrealism. Neither of them needs the exact representation of reality. We can use the idea of humans and not their realistic portraits. The street candid portrait is left far behind.

Simplicity, subtraction, abstraction (surrealism, symbolism)

Did I just manage to proclaim the 4 S's of street photography? Nope! Simplicity is

not a keyword for street photography. Even if we have to dig further down to go beyond, to arrive from the overstated simplicity to the understated complexity.

What a street photographer seeks?

We may use the ambiguous terms of obsession, addiction. But we can also talk about an internal need, a state of mind. They are all correct. The more the above "motivations" are present the more you (we) will be amazed by the result of a street photographer's work.

By taking the risk to fail in her/his photographic composition an author goes beyond a clear visual statement and implements a transcending understatement. This subtraction takes what would be an ordinary scene and transforms it into an abstraction of a universal truth expressed symbolically.

Have fun!



ANNEX

You can find Michail's pictures and opinions at:

Facebook

www.facebook.com/StreetArtPhotographyByMichail
www.facebook.com/mmichail

Street Core Photography group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/496641317130357/>

Flickr

www.flickr.com/photos/michail-photography/

Website

www.michail-photography.eu/

THE LEGAL CONSTRAINTS

Info on regulations/laws on photographing in public

France

http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/23/paris-city-of-rights/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=1&

Germany

<http://www.aufrecht.de/beitraege-unserer-anwaelte/urheberrecht/fotografie-und-recht-was-darf-ich-fotografieren-und-was-nicht.html>

Hungary

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/14/hungary-law-photography-permission-take-pictures>

UK

<http://content.met.police.uk/Site/photographyadvice>

Sweden

<http://photo.net/street-documentary-photography-forum/oobgr8>

