

The Street Photography Project

Manual

by [Eric Kim](#)

When I first started shooting street photography, I was very much focused on “single images”. Meaning– I wanted to make these beautiful images (like pearls) that would get a lot of favorites/likes on social media. I wanted each photograph to be perfect, and stand on its own.

However after a while shooting these single-images became a bit boring. I felt photography became a way for me to produce “one-hit-wonders” – which didn’t have that much meaning, soul, and personal significance.

In trying to find more “meaning” in my photography– I started to study photography books, learning from the masters, and how they were able to craft stories that had a narrative and personal significance.

Soon I discovered that I was much more interested in pursuing photography projects– projects that would often take a long time (several years), would require meticulous editing (choosing images) and sequencing, and were personal to me.

I wanted to create this book to be a starting guide and a primer in terms of starting your own street photography project. I will try to make this as comprehensive as possible, while still being practical. Here is an overview of some of the chapters I will like to cover:

- Chapter 1: Why pursue a street photography project?
- Chapter 2: What makes a great photography project?
- Chapter 3: How to come up with a street photography project idea?
- Chapter 4: How to stay motivated when pursuing your photography project
- Chapter 5: How to edit/sequence your photography project
- Chapter 6: How to publish your photography project
- Chapter 7: Conclusion

Chapter 1: Why pursue a photography project?

Of course we are dealing with street photography– but there are many different reasons to pursue a photography project in general:

Reason 1: Photography projects are more personal

First of all, one of the main reasons you should pursue a photography project is that you can make it more personal. If you really want to express yourself as an artist, it is very hard to do so with single-images in photography. However when you pursue a photography project, you are able to create a narrative and a story, which shows your view of the world with others.

When I first started pursuing to create a body of work, I wanted to work on a long-term photography project that I would be proud of when I was 80 years old– a photography project I could exhibit, print as a book, and

share with joy and pride (rather than just showing people my Facebook or Flickr streams).

I think the main advantage of pursuing a personal photography project is that you know your own life better than anybody else. A lot of photography projects are outwards looking (documenting the lives and communities of others) – rather than inwards looking (documenting your own life).

Furthermore, your life is unique– and the more personal you make your project, the more unique it will be.

Reason 2: Photography projects give you direction

Another reason to pursue a photography project is that they give you far more direction.

With crafting single-images, you sometimes go out and you don't know what you're looking for.

Personally, when I was trying to create strong single-images, I would lose motivation. When I was out on the streets looking for “decisive moments”, I would ask myself– “What does this really mean? Why am I out shooting? Am I shooting to get lots of likes/favorites on social media, or am I trying to create something greater?”

Consider a photography project like having a compass on your ship. You don't always know where the ship is going to take you, but it takes you in a general direction, which gives you a sense of purpose.

Having a sense of purpose with your photography is one of the best ways to stay motivated with your project– and will give you more meaning.

Reason #3: Photography projects last

While it is true that many strong single-images have lasted through the decades (Henri Cartier-Bresson’s man jumping over the puddle, Steve McCurry’s “Afghan Girl”, Elliott Erwitt’s iconic images of dogs) – I think it is the photography books and projects which last throughout the ages.

A photographic print (single image) is nice to look at and frame on the wall. But I think ultimately a photography book is a much more robust way to preserve your work as a photographer.

A photography book is durable, can be mass-printed, doesn’t require a Wi-Fi connection to load, and is a relic that your great-grandchildren could look at and admire.

While it is also true that you can make a photography book of strong single-images, I feel that they aren’t as interesting as projects that have an overarching theme and arc. A photography book of just your “best of” images is like a “best hits” music cd– interesting and full of good songs to dance to, but lacking a narrative and flow. When I am listening to music by artists, I like to listen to the full CD and album– as it allows me to get a full sense of what a musician is trying to do with the full album.

I feel if you make just one strong body of work (and print it as a photography book)– you have done your job as a photographer.

I think especially in today's world– less is more. I would much prefer to look at one strong body of work from a photographer, than 10–20 mediocre projects.

Reason #4: Photography projects flow better

There is nothing more that I love than watching a film and totally being raptured by it. I love falling into the narrative of the story, and totally forgetting where I am. I love movies that have a soft and slow beginning, action later on, slow parts, and final climaxes. I hate movies that are just non-stop action (like a Michael Bay Transformers movie).

Photography projects (if you decide to sequence and edit them like a story) generally flow a lot better than just looking at a bunch of random single-images. If you are writing a book or a story, you can't say much with just one chapter or one page. You need several chapters (and many pages) to tell a full and dramatic story.

I also feel the best photography projects are the ones that have very strong images (and some quieter photos that push the story and narrative along). While a weaker image (that is necessary for a project) might not get a lot of likes/favorites on social media, it adds a lot of value to a project.

Reason #5: Photography projects are fun

Remember at the end of the day– photography should be fun. If photography isn't fun for you– why are you doing it?

I love the process of working on a photography project. I love coming up with ideas, coming up with titles, editing and sequencing my work, getting feedback and critique from others, and finally publishing it. I think the process of working on a photography project is often more exciting and fun than the final result.

A single-image (on the other hand) is a bit boring. You go out and you shoot a lot, try to edit down to your best strong images, and just post-process them and upload them to social media. They feel a bit hollower to me.

So if you want to enjoy more of the process of photography– projects are for you.

Chapter 2: What makes a great photography project?

What makes a “great” photography project is very subjective. At the end of the day, what I find interesting might not be interesting to you.

For example, if you never went to New York City and saw street performers in Times Square for the first time in your life– you might think it is the most fascinating thing. You might then do a photography project on the street performers, and then show it to some photographers who live in New York City. I can bet you \$100 bucks that the New York City photographers will find the project very boring and uninteresting– as they are used to seeing photos of street performers all the time.

Another example: let's say you did a photography project of African villagers. These photos might be very interesting to suburban white people, but very boring if you shared them with (other) African villagers.

However at the same time, here are some things I think make an interesting photography project:

1. Novelty

Like I discussed earlier, I think novelty is one thing that makes a great and interesting photography project. It is generally true that as human beings— we are drawn to the novel. We hate monotony— we want to see something new.

So in terms of the photography world (and photography projects in general), everything has been “done before”. However at the same time— you can pursue a photography project (that has already been done before) in a novel way.

For example, while there were a lot of photographers that took photos in the New York City subway ([Walker Evans](#) with a hidden spy camera in black-and-white), there was nobody who did it in color (and with a flash). Therefore [Bruce Davidson](#)'s “[Subway](#)” book was very powerful and interesting— as nobody saw the New York City subway in color.

Similarly, while a macro lens and ring flash has been utilized by photographers for several decades— it was first [Martin Parr](#) who found it interesting to use it to photograph strangers candidly (Martin Parr actually got this idea from Araki, who photographed flowers with a macro lens and ring flash— you can see where photographers are always inspired

by others). [Martin Parr](#) then published his series of “street photography” macro/ring flash shots in his “[Common sense](#)” book.

The Roma people (Gypsies) have always been a subject of photographic interest (and photographed from the outside, like animals). But it was [Josef Koudelka](#) who first treated them like human beings– and photographed them from the inside (after gaining their trust and friendship, and living with them and photographing them for almost 10 years). You can see his great book: “[Gypsies](#)” for inspiration.

Therefore know that while it is true that novelty is what makes a great photography project– you can take an old idea and spin it (to make a new idea).

If you are going to pursue a photography project, don’t do it exactly how it has been done before. See how you can remix it and make something new.

2. Emotion

I feel the greatest and most memorable photography projects are the ones that are emotional.

This is the biggest reason why I am actually interested in street photography (as opposed to landscapes and flowers). I find myself being able to empathize more with other human beings (in photographs) than with animals or nature.

The photography books that I most connect to are the ones that are emotional– and connect my heart and soul to the subjects in the photographs.

For example, “[Love on the Left Bank](#)” by Ed van der Elsken is memorable because the intimacy and closeness he got with his subjects.

The photographs of [Jacob Aue Sobol](#) in his “[I, Tokyo](#)” book are so powerful because he got really close to his subjects (physically and emotionally), and you can see how he felt when he was photographing in Tokyo (lost, confused, and lonely).

While it is true that you can create very strong emotions in single images— I think that if you have projects with re-occurring themes and emotions, the viewer can better get a sense of that emotion.

For example, if you have a Flickr stream of street photographs (some funny, some depressing, some weird) – there isn’t a sense of consistency a viewer can follow.

However when you are working on a photography project or a book, you can much better string images with similar emotions together.

So know that if you want to make a memorable body of work— put your heart and soul to it. Don’t just be a callous observer, be an active participant. Street photography is all about documenting people and humanity.

Also as a tip, if you want to make more emotional photographs, try shooting with a wider-angle lens. While not always true— I generally find that **with physical proximity comes emotional proximity**. Which means— if you shoot with a 200mm lens (from a block away), you can never get the true emotions, feelings, and expressions of your subject. But if you are within breathing-distance from your subject with a 28mm or a

35mm lens, you will make yourself vulnerable with your subject, which can lead to stronger emotions in the image-making process.

3. Edit and sequencing

I greatly admire photography books that have tight edits (not too many images, most of them strong) and photography books that have great sequencing (a flow of images, that keep you moving along).

When it comes to an edit in a book– I don't like books that are redundant and simply show the same photograph over and over again. While I do like consistency in photographs, I also enjoy variety. So consistency can be shooting all the same film, focal length, and in black and white– but variety can be shooting different subject matter (portraits, landscapes, and details of things in the street).

So when you are working on your photography project, I recommend trying to stay consistent with your gear, and whether you shoot it all in black and white or all in color. This is a hotly debated point (I have seen projects in which they mix mediums and it still works)– but I think if you're starting off working on photography projects, it is best to stay consistent.

Furthermore, when I am looking through a photography book– I am always seeking for a good story. A good story requires a good sequence.

What makes a good sequence? For me, a good sequence in a photography book follows a good sequence in a movie.

Sometimes a movie will start off with the most dramatic part of the movie, and then backtrack for the rest of the movie.

Sometimes a movie will start off really slow, then build up to a grand finale.

Sometimes a movie will follow a linear fashion.

There is no “one way” to sequence a movie that works. A lot of the sequence depends on the story you are trying to tell.

In terms of photography projects I have seen in which I love the sequence— I recommend the following books:

- [“The Americans” - Robert Frank](#)
- [“The Last Resort” - Martin Parr](#)
- [“Gypsies” - Josef Koudelka](#)
- [“Love on the Left Bank” - Ed van der Elsken](#)
- [“I, Tokyo” - Jacob Aue Sobol](#)
- [“Wonderland” - Jason Eskenazi](#)

If you want to also learn how to sequence photographs better, watch a lot of great films— and analyze how the stories move. Analyze when the movies get dramatic. Analyze when the movies are slow and quiet. Analyze when something unexpected happens.

If you want to also learn how to sequence photos better, analyze music. Analyze when the melody speeds up, and when it slows down. Analyze how a song starts, and how it ends.

The art of a good edit and sequence is more like poetry than a science—much of it has to do with feel, and is subjective. But the most important point is to be very conscious of the importance of your editing and sequencing.

4. Time

I have also noticed that the greatest photography projects I have seen take a long time.

Not all photography projects have to take a long time— but generally the longer you work on a project, the greater it will be. Imagine working on a project like letting a lovely wine age. The longer you age the wine, the more complex, delicious, and refined the taste will become.

Some of my favorite photography projects have taken a long time to complete. Jason Eskenazi's "[Wonderland](#)" took him 10 years. Josef Koudelka's "[Gypsies](#)" took him about 10 years.

Of course time doesn't always make a better project. For example, if you work intensely on a project for 2 years (everyday) – it is better than half-assing a photography project for 20 years (shooting once a month).

So time isn't always the best test of whether a photography project will be great— but a good guideline.

The longer you work on a photography project, the more images you will collect. And the more images you collect, the higher the chance that some of these images will be really good. And the more good images you collect, the tighter you can edit them (and only show really great images).

The longer you work on a photography project, the more feedback and critique you can get from fellow photographers and editors. The more feedback and critique you get, the more direction you can get in your work. The more direction you get in the work, the stronger a sense of purpose you can achieve in your work. The stronger the sense of purpose, the more heart and soul you will put into your work to make your photography project truly great.

Out of all the photography projects I have seen, the minimum time (it seems to take) is around 2 years– and the long end being around 10 years.

As a general guideline, I think in street photography getting 1 good shot a month is a good “hit ratio”. So if you get 1 good shot a month, that is 12 good shots a year. If you want to do a photography book that is around 30–40 images, this will take you 2.5–4 years.

So even though the prospect of working on a photography project for several years might seem daunting– don’t become overwhelmed. Break it down into more manageable chunks.

For example, thinking to yourself: “I will pursue this photography project for 5 years” might be a bit overwhelming.

Instead I might think this to yourself, “I will aim to make at least 1 good photograph a month, and at the end of every year I will aim to make a strong mini-edit of my years’ worth of work. At the end of every year, I will get my work critiqued by other photographers that I trust– and figure out the holes in my project. Based on this feedback, I will learn what other kinds of images I need for my project, what images I need to ditch, and what direction I need to take my project.

Then after a few iterations – I will be able to produce a body of work that I am pleased with, and can publish it as a book (can be self-published on Blurb, presented to a publisher, or exhibited in a gallery).

So don't feel like you need to be in a rush with your photography. Take your time. Make it good. Let your project age and mature in a positive way with time.

Chapter 3: How to Come Up with Street Photography Project Ideas

In this chapter, I will talk about the difficulty of coming up with street photography project ideas– and some practical tips and ideas on how to get started coming up with your own ideas:

How I came up with my “Suits” project

I started to think about the personal issues and challenges I had in my life at the time (2011).

In 2011, I got laid off my job as an online community manager at eHow.com (part of company “Demand Media”) and I reflected on my experiences working full-time for a “corporate” company.

I remember when I first joined the company, it seemed like a cool and hip Internet start-up– and I expected it to be a lot like Google. There were a lot of free drinks in the kitchen (and snacks), people seemed friendly, and I thought I could unleash my creativity through the company.

While it was true that the company was pretty lax (and I had awesome co-workers), I started to realize that I was just a cog in the corporate wheel. Many of my dreams and ambitions weren't achieved in the company, and I started to feel oppressed.

Not only that, but when I started working at my company, I started to thirst after money, wealth, power, and status. As a Sociology undergrad at UCLA, I always told myself, "I will never sell out to the man." But the reality was— I started to get suckered and tempted by earning more money, buying expensive BMW's, and stacking the 0's in my bank account.

But after I got laid off— I suddenly felt great relief. I felt that I was suddenly freed, and I could see my prior life (as a "Suit") with clarity. I realized that this relentless hunt for more status and money was self-destructive, and was making me depressed, empty, and frustrated.

So now whenever I see guys wearing suits, I see a former self-portrait of myself when I worked corporate.

Even though I never wore a suit-and-tie (nor was my job very "corporate") — I realized that a person wearing a suit was a symbol of how I felt when I worked corporate— sad, trapped, and alone. So whenever I see "suits" — I can empathize and feel their pain. I still have a lot of friends who work corporate jobs, who hate their jobs, but earn a lot of money— and therefore have a hard time quitting.

So anyways, this is a rough outline of how my personal "Suits" project came around. I wanted to do a personal street photography project on my experiences working as a "suit"— and I pursued this by photographing

guys wearing suit-and-ties on the street, with hand-gestures, facial expressions, and body language which showed pain, entrapment, and sadness.

Tips How to come up with ideas for your own photography project

So if you want to come up with ideas for your own photography project, here are some of my suggestions:

1. Write down your emotional state

So first of all, I think the best personal photography projects are the ones that are emotional. As human beings– we are an emotional species. We have deep empathy for others. Therefore if you are able to make photographs that can resonate on an emotional level with your viewer, you will make a memorable series and project.

I sometimes find the best photography projects happen after photographers have emotional difficulties (and joys) in their lives. This can happen after a break-up (or entering a new relationship), this can happen during a death in the family (or a birth of a new child), or it can happen during a depressing time in a shitty job (or the excitement of joining a new job or corporation).

So if you are a street photographer and want to pursue a project– you could do a project in which you focus on a certain emotion, and focus on photographing that. For example, here are some emotions you can pursue and attempt to photograph in the streets:

- Happiness/joy/excitement
- Loneliness/solitude/depression

The best way I think to capture emotions on the street is look for hand gestures, body language, and facial gestures. For example, if you want to photograph someone who looks happy, try to catch a moment in which he/she is raising his/her hands in the sky, with a huge grin on their face. If you want to capture depression and loneliness, look for capturing people who are hunched over with their hands over their faces.

2. Copy a project that has already been done before

For me, I think ideas are dime a dozen. I think more important than any idea in a photography project is execution.

So if you are relatively new to pursuing a photography project, don't feel like you need to break new ground (immediately). My suggestion is this: look through photography books and projects you already like, and try your best to mimic it.

See the structure, the flow, edit, and sequence of images. What is the opening shot? What characters are in the photo-series? Which shots are detail shots? Which shots are action shots? How does the project end? How does it make you feel? What kind of compositions does the photographer use?

Literally try your best to imitate or copy the work the photographer has done (but add your own twist to it).

Or you can just look at a list of photography projects that have already been done before (in terms of subject matter), and try to pursue a similar topic. Some ideas for street photography projects:

- Subway (study Bruce Davidson's "[Subway](#)" book)
- Park (study Bruce Davidson's "Central park" series)
- Beach (study Bruce Gilden's "[Coney Island](#)" series and "[The Last Resort](#)" by Martin Parr)
- Your own family (study Sally Mann's "[Immediate family](#)" book)
- "Stream-of-consciousness" (photographing whatever is going through your mind, study the work of [Daido Moriyama](#))
- "Personal documentary" (photographing your own life and making it personal, study [Anders Petersen](#) and [Jacob Aue Sobol](#))
- Photographing a certain community or group of people (study "[Gypsies](#)" by [Josef Koudelka](#))
- Neighborhood (photographing a certain neighborhood, study "[East 100th street](#)" by [Bruce Davidson](#))
- Mall ("[iDubai](#)" by [Joel Sternfeld](#))

This of course isn't a comprehensive list of project themes or ideas— just some suggestions.

The best way to go about it is first of all pursue a subject that you are interested in general (even if you weren't a photographer).

Also know that certain subject matter is more photographic-able than other types of subject matter. For example, while it might be difficult to photograph "Envy" as a theme, it might be a lot easier to photograph "Dogs" as a theme (study the work of [Elliott Erwitt](#)).

3. Don't take yourself too seriously

I think one of the biggest deterrents to photographers who want to pursue certain photography projects is that they put too much pressure on themselves. They feel that their work has to be done “seriously” as a photographer– in order to be taken “seriously” by other photographers.

I would say this: **Don't give a shit if others think your photography project is interesting or not. Only pursue a photography project that you find personally meaningful. Pursue a photography project that you find interesting, not what others find interesting.**

Of course it is wise to get feedback/critique on your project as time goes on (if you ever plan to exhibit or share your work with others), but don't let any naysayers prevent you from pursuing any idea that you find interesting.

If you think about every great or revolutionary body of work that has been pursued, each artist was ridiculed, critiqued, or not taken “seriously.” Just think of Picasso and his art, think about the impressionists, think about Andy Warhol and his pop art, think about William Eggleston and color photography, think about 35mm-black-and-white photographers who weren't taken seriously by large-format photographers, think about the art world who didn't take photography seriously as an art-form.

Remember– when you pursue a photography project, **it should be meaningful and fun.**

If a project isn't personally meaningful, why would you start it?

If a project isn't fun, why would you continue pursuing it?

4. Pursue the outside arts

One of the best ways to come up with ideas for photography projects is to look at the outside arts. Don't just study photography – study literature, poetry, sculpture, music, dance, painting, film– or any other art that strikes you as interesting.

I feel the best ideas are the ones in which you have “*idea sex*” (said by James Altucher) in which you take two separate ideas, mix them, and the baby which comes out is a unique combination of two separate ideas.

For example, [Alex Webb](#) studied literature at Harvard while he pursued his photography. I find his photography very poetic and beautiful. Ansel Adams was passionate about nature and conservation– and made his mission as a photographer to capture beauty (to protect it). [Elliott Erwitt](#) has a great sense of humor (you can see it in his photos). [Henri Cartier-Bresson](#) was first a painter, and then saw photographs as merely “instant sketches” (therefore he has great compositions). [Lee Friedlander](#) was a huge fan of jazz (which leads to his edgy off-beat images).

So what outside interests do you have outside of photography that you might want to pursue photographically?

For example, one project I worked on in the past (no longer working on it) is photographing people at the gym. Why? Besides photography, I am quite passionate about weight lifting, and go to the gym quite often. Therefore I wanted to combine my passion of weight lifting and photography, to photograph other weight lifters at the gym.

5. Find re-occurring themes in your work

Another way to figure out what kind of photography project to pursue is to look at your pre-existing work, and figure out what kind of re-occurring themes happen in your work.

For example, go through a years worth of your archives in Lightroom (or whatever photo-editing software you use) and start to tag your favorite images with certain subject titles. For example, you can use tags like “night”, “beach”, “mall”, “portrait”, “architecture”, “color”, “elderly”, “children”, “reflections”, “shadows”, “gestures” – and then see which tags have a lot of selections.

Based on what tags you find re-occurring a lot in your work, you can use that as a compass to see what kind of projects you might want to continue pursuing.

Chapter 3 summary

Coming up with photography project ideas can be challenging (if you try too hard). Honestly, don't take yourself too seriously and simply pursue any idea that you might find interesting. I think it is better to pursue photography projects and fail many times (killing off uninteresting projects) than never starting any projects.

Not every project idea (or photography project) you pursue is going to be interesting. But then again, you don't know what you can get if you never try.

Get out of the photography ghetto. Visit unrelated art exhibitions, learn an instrument, or perhaps pick up painting or drawing. Pursue any sort of ideas that interest and stimulate you.

But how do you know if an idea for a photography project is “interesting” or not? Well, “interesting” is a very subjective term (no matter how “interesting” your project is, not everyone will find it interesting).

So my advice is this: **pursue photography projects that excite you, make you feel alive, are personal, and are fun.**

How do you know when it is time to stop a photography project? You know when to stop a photography project when you lose the heart for it. You will no longer have the urge to photograph your project, find it to be a drag, lose passion, and be filled with boredom & repetition. But then again sometimes these dips in inspiration are good chances to re-evaluate your project, to perhaps switch up the direction you want to take your photography project, whether to ditch it (or to continue pursuing it).

Chapter 4: How to stay motivated when pursuing your photography project

When you are working on a photography project, sometimes there is a time when you face a “dip” – a dip in motivation when you are around halfway through a project. [Seth Godin](#) talks about this more in-depth in his book: “[The Dip](#)”.

“The Dip” happens to all photographers, artists, and creatives.

While many of us fear “the dip” – we should embrace the dip. The dip is a chance that we can re-evaluate our work, figure out whether it is worth pursuing our projects, and figure out when it is worth ditching our projects.

For example, let’s say you came up with a project idea, and about a year into the project, you lose motivation. This is when you fall into the “dip” (your motivation dips).

Rather than simply abandoning your photography project, you might think to yourself: “Why am I feeling this dip in motivation? Is there a different direction I need to take my photography project? Are there other perspectives that I am missing out in my photography project? Are there certain subject matter that I need to photograph?”

For example, let’s say you are doing a photography project of your neighborhood. After photographing your neighborhood for a year, you might get bored and fall into “the dip.”

Rather than quitting your project– perhaps you need to change gears. Perhaps you can explore other neighborhoods (close to your neighborhood). Perhaps you’ve photographed only buildings in your neighborhood– maybe you need to shoot more portraits of the people in your neighborhood. Perhaps you’ve shot your neighborhood only during the day– perhaps you can shoot more at night.

On the other hand, sometimes we can utilize these “dips” to know when to quit a project.

The upside of quitting

In the west, “quitting” is seen as a negative thing. We are told to persevere– to “never give up”– and that quitting is for losers.

However sometimes we should quit in a smart way. If we are pursuing a project that has no legs, quitting halfway is smarter than wasting valuable time and resources.

The reason we hate quitting projects halfway is because of the “sunk cost bias” – that once we have committed some time and resources to a project, it feels wasteful to quit halfway. But the logical thing to do in many cases is to quit halfway, and pursue other projects that might be more interesting and might have more impact.

For me, I have pursued a lot of photography projects over the last few years, about 80% that I have ditched.

When to ditch and when to keep pursuing a project

How do I know which projects to ditch and which projects to keep and continue to pursue?

The biggest lesson I’ve learned when it comes to photography projects is **avoiding boredom**. I simply follow my curiosity. Once a project bores me, I put it on hold– and try to explore different ways to shoot it. But if I have explored all different avenues and ways to shoot it (and still am bored)– I figure out it is time to retire the project.

I also constantly ask myself, “**What is the meaning and significance of this project?**”

I don't want to only work on photography projects that are fun and cute. I want my photographs to mean something deeper.

For example, having studied sociology– I am interested in working on photography projects which include “social commentary”. For example, the reason I have worked on my “Suits” project for several years is because it is an important social issue to me– many people work corporate jobs, hate it, are depressed, and feel empty in their lives. This is the impetus that keeps me going– and drives me to continue photographing “Suits” as a subject matter.

So to sum up, I think the best way to know when to continue working on a project or ditching it is this: **Avoid boredom, and latch onto meaning and purpose.**

Taking a break

Another strategy you can employ when figuring out how important a project to you is **taking a break**.

Try the following: purposefully leave your camera at home for a week or two, and see if you feel an urge to continue photographing your project.

There was a period of time in which I felt a bit burnt out photographing my “Suits” project– and I started to leave my camera at home. I then would walk around the city and downtown area, and see all these great guys wearing suits. I would then feel frustrated that I didn't have a camera on me– and then would rush home to get my camera.

Sometimes taking a break is good for your creativity– as it gives you a chance to recharge your batteries and see things afresh. Kind of like muscles, they only grow when you are resting and recovering (not when you're working out).

Don't force it

When you're feeling a lack of motivation, I don't think it is wise to fight against it too strongly. In Taoism, there is a philosophy of “wu-wei” – which means “effortless action”. It is the same idea of “going with the flow.”

For example, if you're feeling unmotivated with your project and forcing yourself to fight through it– it is similar to trying to swim upstream. You don't want to swim upstream, you want to go with the stream. This is kind of how Judo wrestlers have strength– they don't muscle their opponents to the ground. Rather, master Judo wrestlers leverage the strength and movement of their opponents and use that energy to throw them to the ground.

When I'm writing an article or a book (like this one) – once I no longer have any energy left to write, I try not to just chug down more coffee and continue fighting against myself. Rather, I simply take a break, recover, and continue writing when I am rested up.

Chapter 4 Summary:

When you're working on a photography project, anticipate delays and dips in motivation. It is all part of the creative process. Don't fight against this

dip of motivation– use it as a chance to re-evaluate your project, and ask yourself if it is really meaningful to you (to continue). Use the dip of motivation to your advantage– to give you purpose, direction, and strength.

Chapter 5: How to edit/sequence your photography project

So let's say you've been working on this photography project for quite a while– and you want to start editing and sequencing your project. Now what?

Get honest feedback and critique

First of all, I aim to get honest feedback and critique from other photographers I trust and admire.

I will generally load up my images to my iPad, and have them sit down with me in a cafe, and ask them to be “brutally honest” and tell them to choose their favorite images. Then I ask them to analyze why they liked certain images (and why they didn't like certain images). I ask them to be very specific– and when they explain their rationale, I don't interrupt them or make excuses. I then make a new album based on their “selects”.

I then continue this process with many different photographers– and then I start to notice, generally 90% of photographers (at least those I ask) agree on the same edit. The great shots are kind of like oil mixed in water– over time, they rise to the top.

Of course there will be conflicting opinions. Some photographers will agree that certain shots are really strong, and other shots they will totally disagree. In these circumstances, you need to make the final decision as an editor. It is important to get as much feedback and critique on your project as possible, but the final edit of your project belongs to you.

Print out your work as small 4x6 prints

Another way you can start doing a pre-edit of your work is printing them to small 4x6 prints, and either pinning or taping them to a corkboard or a wall. Many famous photographers have done this technique with great success. They will put up their favorite shots on the wall, and over time, start to re-arrange their shots, take down certain shots, or put up different shots (they didn't consider before). They sometimes put these walls next to their bed, so the first thing they see when waking up is their photos (and also the last thing before they see before going to sleep). This is truly "living" with your images.

Another strategy (down the line) is to print out your 4x6 photos and put them on a table or on the ground. Sometimes by mixing them up randomly, you can start to pair and sequence your images based on similarities or hidden connections. If you plan to do a photography book that has opposing pages for pairing images— I think the only way to do this is with physical prints (not on an iPad or a computer).

When editing, sequencing, and pairing images— there is a strength to the physicality of dealing with prints. Even when you're getting feedback and critique from other photographers, it is easier to make two piles of photos (keeps and ditches) rather than fumbling around on an iPad.

Furthermore, you can have other photographers make a sequence of

images with prints that they like, and have them spread it on the table or the ground. Once they do that, you can take a photograph (with your phone or camera) of their sequence to memorize it.

Make a book dummy

Also another good strategy to putting together a photography book is to make a maquette (book dummy). You can just buy a cheap notebook at the store (or a Moleskin if you feel more artsy) and then paste/tape in small 4x6 photos in the book. You can use this to see how the images will feel, and how you sequence and put the images together. You can carry this book with you in your bag everywhere you go– so you can continue to look at your images when you're on the bus, waiting at the grocery store in line, or when you're meeting friends.

How to edit your shots

When it comes to editing images, I always ask myself the following two questions:

1. “What emotion does this evoke out of me?”
2. “Does it fit the theme of my project?”

I ask myself these two questions because it helps me have focus when editing and sequencing my project.

I first of all **focus on emotion**– because I feel that is what makes a good image and a good story. I don't want any of my photographs to just be boring or dull with my viewer.

Secondly, I have to be very critical and **ask myself whether the photo fits the theme**. For example, there are a lot of photographs I make that I think are great images (but have nothing to do with my project). So rather than sneaking in some of my strongest images (for the sake of it)– I need to have the discipline to edit them out (for the sake of the larger project). For example, in Trent Parke’s “Minutes to Midnight” – he edited out 3–5 of his favorite photos from the book because they didn’t fit the story and narrative of his project.

The editing and sequencing process can also take a long time (sometimes as long as it takes to shoot a project). It seems that most photographers (when working on a book) work on the edit and sequencing of their project for at least 1–2 years. You really want your final edit and sequence to be solid, because once you finally publish your book or your project, you don’t want to go back and re-edit or re-sequence it. And when you publish a book, you cannot physically go back and re-edit or re-sequence your work.

How to sequence your images

When you’re sequencing your images, think of the story you are trying to tell. See if the flow of images makes sense to you.

Sometimes when you’re sequencing, you can do it by color, by time of day, by subject matter, by location, or by the year it was photographed.

Sometimes you want the sequence of images to be really similar (each photograph is really similar to the next photograph). In other cases, you might want each image to be strongly contrasted from the next photograph.

One of the best sequencing tips I got from Todd Hido was that your photos should tell a good story in terms of the sequence– but then you should also surprise your viewers by putting in an image that is deliberately out of the sequence (to shock them, and intrigue them).

In Jason Eskenazi’s “[Wonderland](#)” book– his sequencing follows a fairy-tale. To better sequence his images, he studied the structure of fairy-tales (the academic literature) – and in his photo-book, he tries to follow that same structure. In the book you can see there is a female protagonist, who you see over and over again (being challenged by trials and tribulations) who is embodied in different female subjects (sometimes she is a ballet dancer, sometimes she is a young woman looking out of the window, sometimes she is a girl in a boat with other young men).

In Trent Parke’s “[Minutes to Midnight](#)” – he sequences the book as a post-apocalyptic story, starting off by setting the stage, by showing a dark and dreary setting, by showing action shots, and by ending the birth with symbolisms of “death” and “rebirth” (towards the end of the book his wife Narelle gives birth to his son).

My biggest tip in terms of sequencing the photos for your project is to **study films and great stories**. Think of the stories you want to tell through your photography project, and then watch (or read) similar stories in books or film. See how the story starts, how the characters are established, how the characters have good and bad times, the climax of the story, and how it ends.

Chapter 5 summary:

The editing and sequencing part of working on a project is one of the most difficult parts. I honestly think that editing and sequencing is actually more difficult than taking photos.

Much of the story, meaning, and theme of your project happen during the editing and sequencing phase. You can imagine your photographs as little puzzle pieces or Lego bricks. The way you manipulate, move, and put together your images will change the final outcome and feel of your project.

Like all the other parts of working on a photography project– **don't rush the editing and sequencing phase.** Take your time. Get a lot of feedback and ask as many other photographers, editors, curators and artists to be brutally honest with you as possible. I don't think any photographer can truly edit/sequence a project totally on his/her own– because we are biased. We love all of our photos like they are our babies– and it is hard to “kill our babies” (ditch our weak shots). We need the more objective vision of an outside viewer to help us gain deeper insights about our photos.

But know that ultimately the final editing and sequencing decision lies with you. If you have a certain story that you want to say– you need a certain edit/sequence that fits you. Don't let others manipulate what you are trying to say as a photographer and artist. Stay true to your vision, while being open-minded to the suggestions of others.

Chapter 6: How to publish your photography project

Congratulations, you have now finally finished shooting, editing, and sequencing your project. Now what?

There are many different ways you can publish your photography project. For me, this is the order in which I think it is best to show and present a photography project:

1. Printing a book (or magazine)
2. Exhibition
3. Website portfolio gallery
4. Social media galleries (Facebook, Tumblr, Google+)

Here are some more thoughts on the different ways you can publish your images:

1. Printing a book

First of all, I think making a photography book (or magazine) is the best because it is a physical object that can last for a really long time. It also allows you to be creative with the pairing of images (having a certain image on one side of the page, and another image on the other side of the page).

Publishing and printing into a book or a magazine doesn't need to be grand either. You don't need a huge publisher to print your work. With print-on-demand services like Blurb, you can easily print a one-off copy of your book for yourself, close friends, fellow photographers, and relatives. If you want to save money, you can also publish them as magazines (or commonly called "zines").

2. An exhibition

I think exhibitions are also great, because there is something wonderful about arranging a physical space to show and display your images. While it is true that the reach of an exhibition is limited (people overseas won't generally fly out to see your exhibition) – it is much more intimate.

With an exhibition, you can see how people look, analyze, and interact with your photographs. Also I think that exhibitions allow us to have fun with the printing in terms of how big to print your photos, how to frame your photos, how to pair or sequence your images, what walls to put your photos on, and also what kind of lighting to use.

3. Website portfolio gallery

I also think it is great to publish your final project on your website portfolio. Whenever I meet other photographers, I am mostly interested in seeing their projects and bodies of work. It is a lot more professional as well– I don't mind looking at Flickr or Instagram streams– but tightly edited and thoughtfully sequenced website galleries are a lot more interesting and meaningful to me.

4. Social media galleries

The problem with a lot of social media platforms (like Instagram for example) is that it is too focused on the single-image. It is really hard to show a “gallery” of images on Instagram (unless you add a #hashtag with the title of your project in the images).

So therefore I think Facebook, Tumblr, and Google+ are ideal for photo-galleries, as you can go through the project in a certain order and sequence.

Do what feels right to you

Every project has a different intended audience, and a way you want to publish it.

Do you want your project to be seen by famous galleries and famous editors and curators? Then probably try to print your book as a high-quality book (either try to get a publisher, or you can self-publish with a reputable company).

Do you want your project to simply reach as many people as possible? If you want it to be printed, you can use a cheap medium like newspaper or magazine to distribute as many copies as you can.

If you are limited on funds, a website portfolio is also a great way to share your work with a large audience.

You can also contact certain photography magazines and blogs to publish your work. I honestly think it is overrated to get “paid” to share your work. If you don’t make a full-time living as a photographer and aren’t super-strapped on cash (if photography is your hobby) – I think your goal is to have your photos shared and seen as much as possible.

There is a general snobbery in terms of prestige of presenting your way in different ways. If you tell people that you exhibited your photos in a reputable gallery – they will think it is more impressive than if you just

upload them on your website. If you tell people you got published by a big photography book publisher, they will think it is more impressive than you self-published it on Blurb.

But ultimately, follow your own heart– and think to yourself the purpose of your photography project. Are you working on your photography project to be respected and admired by others? Are you working on your photography project to become rich and famous? Are you working on your photography project to make social change? Are you working on your photography project to please yourself, and inspire your close friends and family?

Think deeply about the motives behind your photography– and pursue the appropriate way of presenting your work.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Working on and pursuing a photography project is a lot of hard work, dedication, and love. A strong and memorable project also takes a long time– in which you need to get honest and critical feedback.

But despite the difficulties, working a photography project will give you more direction, energy, and purpose in your photography. Working on a photography project will give you a reason to shoot– and the process of shooting, editing, sequencing, and publishing your project is an enjoyable and challenging one.

But enjoy the process. Make everyday a small step towards completing your project. Don't get overwhelmed with the idea of working for several

years on your project.

Rather– take it one day at a time.

Everyday shoot a little bit, everyday edit a little bit, everyday get a little bit of feedback, and everyday think a little of how you will publish your work.

At the end, this small accumulation of effort and energy will snowball in a great and positive way, and help you create a memorable and powerful body of work that you will be proud of.

Continue learning about street photography projects

If you're feeling dissatisfied with your street photography and want to learn how to pursue projects that are more personally fulfilling and meaningful to you, join me at one of [my upcoming street photography workshops](#).

Follow me

If you want to learn more about street photography, or just say hello you can connect with me below:

- [Blog](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)

- [Instagram](#)

Share this e-book

This e-book is “open-source” (meaning you can share it with anybody you want, you can translate this, remix this, or edit this as you see fit).

If you enjoyed the e-book, share or email it with a friend! I hope you enjoyed this, more stuff to come :)