

STREET PHOTOGRAPHY AS MENTAL THERAPY

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One of the reasons why I love street photography: it is the ultimate form of self-therapy-- for my mind, my well-being, my mental health, and my overall optimism and positivity towards life.

These are my theories:

1. You make art

Street photography is one of the most open and democratic forms of making art. You can just walk around the block, and photograph anything you see.

My theory is that it is somehow wired into our human DNA to have the desire to create and make stuff. We need to exercise the mental-creative-artistic faculties and functions of our mind, or else our mind starts to think depressive thoughts, and becomes restless.

Therefore, to be happier in life, we must make more art. And this can easily be achieved through street photography.

2. You interact with people

My other idea:

Humans are social creatures, and we are hardwired to be social creatures. If we aren't social (enough), we also start to think depressive thoughts.

In ancient times, one of the worst things that could happen to you (even worse than death) was being exiled from your own home country, or being expelled from your social group.

I think anything that we do that allows us to be more social is better for our mental health.

Street photography allows you to interact with people. You talk and engage and interact with strangers and people, if you ask for permission to make their portrait.

Also even if you shoot candid photos of strangers without their permission, I think it is good — because we feel more connected with other people.

Street photography helps us connect emotionally, physically, and verbally with strangers and other people. And the more we connect with other humans, the less miserable we feel.

3. Walking and mental health

The philosopher Nassim Taleb has a theory that walking might be as necessary for humans as eating or sleeping. I think he's onto something.

To explore this theory —first ask yourself, why do humans have brains? And what differentiates organisms that have brains versus organisms that don't have brains?

Organisms that don't have brains don't need to move. Organisms that have brains must move to obtain food.

Thus, perhaps humans have evolved to have brains, to coordinate movement, specifically walking long distances for long periods of time (the benefit of being a biped is that while we walk slower, we can walk for longer distances with less fatigue, when compared to our four legged animal cousins).

Also an interesting organism to study is the “sea squirt”—who apparently eats its own brain when it no longer needs to move.

Therefore, if a human doesn't move —why would we need a brain?

Thus, the more we walk, the better our mental and brain functioning. Because we are able to coordinate the mental processing power necessary for movement.

Sometimes walking by itself can be boring. Street photography makes walking more interesting, because we can also walk and take photos, and make art.

Thus, Street photography encourages us to walk, and the more we walk, the better our mental health.

4. Appreciation of beauty in the mundane, and of everyday life

I think a lot of us are miserable and suffer mental pain because we aren't "happy".

But the interesting thing about happiness is that it is all relative.

I think a large component of happiness comes from appreciation. Appreciation of being alive, appreciation of having the loved ones in our lives, and appreciation to share this beautiful life with others.

Street photography helps us find more joy and happiness in our everyday lives. I know when I walk around the block with my camera around my neck, I smile more. I notice more things —like the grandfather walking around with his grand daughter, or the kids playing on swings at the playground, or the couples enjoying a nice espresso at the cafe.

The easiest (and free) way to find more joy in our everyday lives is to make photographs of beautiful, mundane, everyday moments we encounter —either on the streets, or even at home.

When I'm at home, I practice "personal photography"— making personally meaningful photos of my loved ones, friends, and family. I also like shooting selfies of myself.

When I'm walking on the streets, it is a reminder to myself:

What a joy it is to be alive, and surrounded by all these people – and to be part of society. To have other humans to enjoy this festival of life with.

Thus, Street photography helps us slow down, and appreciate the beauty in the mundane. Whenever we click the shutter, we are blowing a kiss, or acknowledging something as beautiful and important. We can find joy even in the smallest things.

Street photography mood-boosting assignments

If you want to use street photography as a tool to empower yourself, subtract negative thoughts, and increase your joy and mood in life –try these assignments.

1. **Compliment a stranger and ask for permission to make their portrait:** Who doesn't like a free compliment? Even if your subject says "no", simply smile, thank them, and move on.
2. **Walk around the block for 15 minutes with your camera:** Whenever I'm stuck at home and thinking depressive thoughts, or feeling shitty, I just go on a brief walk around the block with the camera around my neck. I usually end up snapping a few photos which puts a smile on my face, and the simple act of walking improves my mood.
3. Just photograph random details of stuff you find on the streets – cracks in the pavement, rust or mold on a wall, or look for hidden smiley faces in buildings or objects. Treat yourself like a kid – and treat street photography like a treasure hunt. This will help you find more beauty in the mundane.

Of course street photography won't fix all your life problems– but it certainly is an effective way to boost your mood, interact with others, and just enjoy a nice little walk.

Life is beautiful, and being alive is the greatest joy. Let us celebrate this gift of life with Street photography.

Smile, ERIC