

# Henri Cartier-Bresson



**I**n this series, our goal at LoFiMode, is to introduce you to some of the most influential and essential photographers that shaped photography over the past 100 years.

We believe that it is very important to acknowledge these true pioneers of photography by sharing their insightful thoughts and extraordinary images.

The goal of these tutorials is to hopefully help you open your mind to the so called, "rules" of photography that helped us develop a more critical eye when it comes to light, composition and geometry as well as story telling.

We hope that our thoughts, ideas and insights will help you develop that "critical eye" and as Henri Cartier-Bresson said once, to enjoy the "JOY OF COMPOSITION!"

# Henri Cartier-Bresson

(August 22, 1908 – August 3, 2004) was a French photographer considered to be the father of modern photojournalism. He was an early adopter of 35 mm format and the master of candid photography. He helped develop the "street photography" or "real life reportage" style that has influenced generations of photographers who followed.

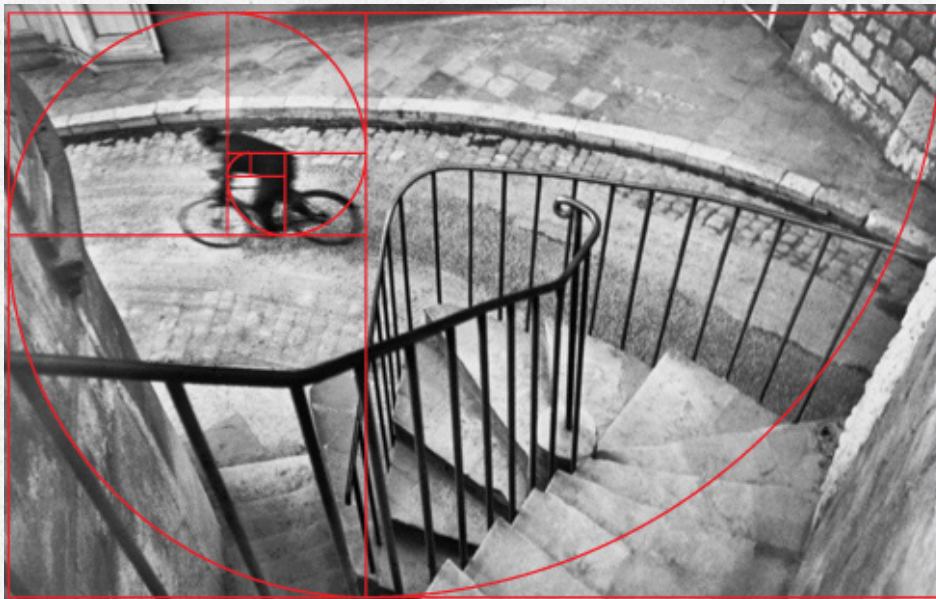


*To learn more about Henri Cartier-Bresson,  
x marks the spot X*

## Geometry & composition

Without a single doubt, HCB main focus was first and foremost, geometry. All of his work was based around the golden mean or golden proportions if you prefer. Studying his images, I've quickly realized that everything he would photograph had a great sense of rhythm and proportions.

To explain further, I will show some of his photographs by overlaying the Golden Mean over his images to give you a better idea of how he always had this thought in the back of his mind while shooting.



In the picture above, you will notice how both the subject and geometry of the environment works within the picture. Henri often used to say *"you must sense it, quick!"*. Photography is not always about thinking as much as it is about reacting.

Don't think, Paul Cezanne said; *"Once you start thinking, it all goes to hell!"* React!

The whole idea of the golden proportions is based on the fact that your eyes must flow through a photo/page. It is a subconscious act, that through time and a lot of practice it becomes second nature.

*"Poetry is the essence of everything. The relationship between elements within the frame."*

*"Everything is impermanent, never lasting, in constant change."* HCB



*"It is an intellectual pleasure to have everything in the right place"*

*"It's a recognition of an order that sits right in front of you"*

*"Combine the motion of the subject and the pleasure of composition"*

*"Try to take a picture which concretizes everything and has very strong relations of shapes."*

HCB



Notice how the eye constantly travels across the picture (above). At first glance, it may be seen as a very busy image but you quickly find yourself flowing through.

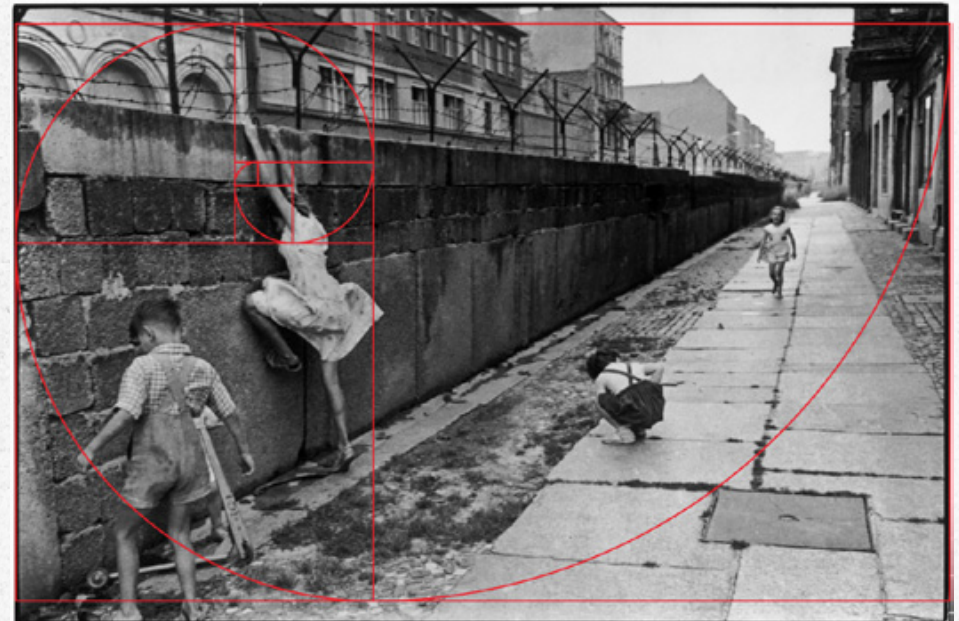
One very important thing to keep in mind is that the focal point of your shot doesn't always have to be dead center.

By doing so, you create a symmetry that often overshadows the rest of the composition. Asymmetry creates dynamics and allows the viewer to see the context.

When you type on a keyboard, you must sense where the letters are in order to create a word/phrase/sentence. Same thing with composition, you must feel that it is right, wait for the decisive moment and then...Snap!

*"You have to lose yourself in it, to let the subject imprint in your memory."*

*"Curiosity is VERY important! Your mind must be open like radar, searching, and examining things constantly." HCB*



**“Only the instant counts!”** *HCB*

A well composed image wouldn't be much if it did not have a good story behind it. Every time I stumble upon a HCB photograph, I'm instantly captivated by his seismic eye. He was able not only to capture great composition but also evoke a powerful moment in time within a fraction of a second.

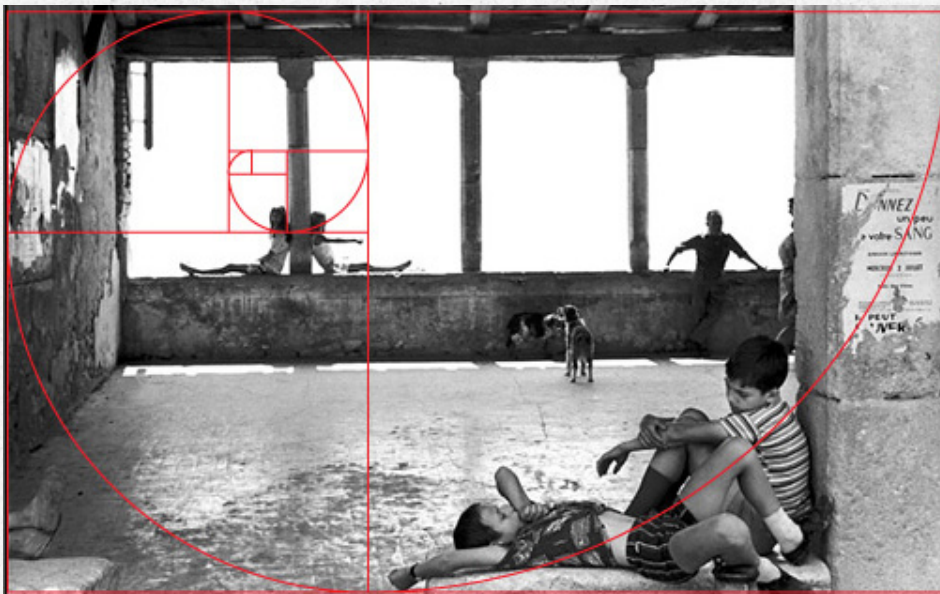
The purpose of an image is to evoke a feeling, capture a moment and tell a story. They say “a picture is worth 1000 words” in this case a single image is worth chapters if not books.

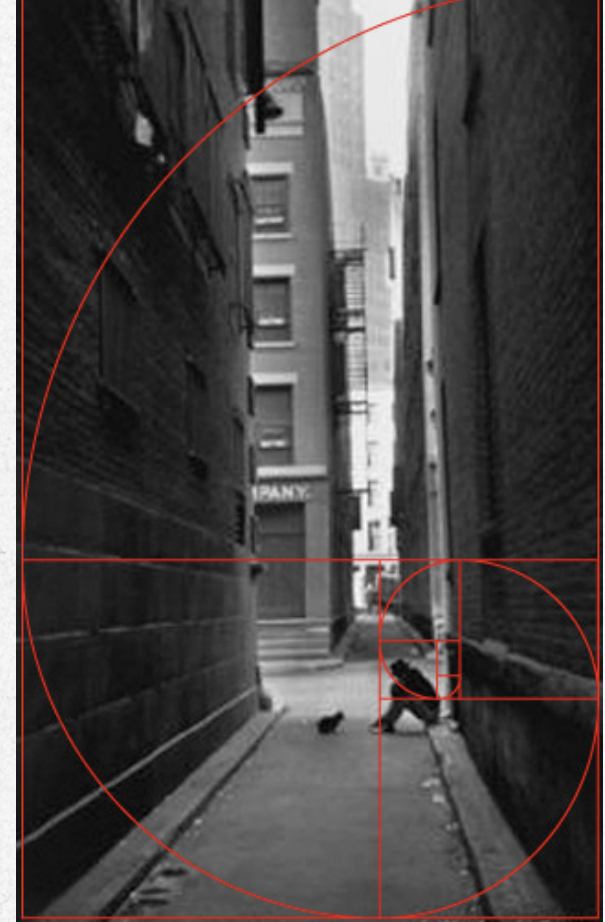
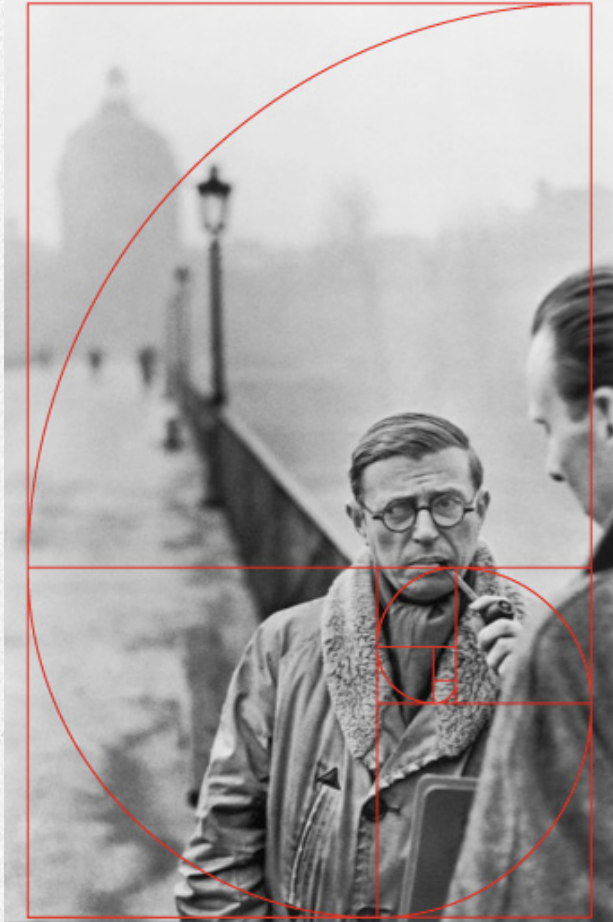
*“Like a chef, he knows exactly how much salt you need to add to the food you are cooking. You don't need to measure with a spoon...you feel it.”*

*“That's why photography is about feeling not thinking, because beauty resides in the core of that.”*

*“Life is once...Forever!”*  
*HCB*

**“The first glance is the most important one!”** *HCB*





There's a great joy in the art of street photography. It is a playground where all the elements of composition collapse into one single capture. All your senses are instantly put into a big question. It is the place where your comprehension of geometry, light, and body language are ultimately challenged. This brings us to the next topic that I would like to talk about, body language. *The mysterious link of people and the things around them*

Coming from an artistic background, I have long studied human anatomy and the way the body moves. When you observe the reactions of the people in the environment you will always find a "determining moment". Henri used to say that the first glance is essential. The first glance determines if your capture will be good or not. There's always a body movement more interesting than another, whether it be a shadow, a patter or the way a head falls into the light. Photography doesn't take too much brain...it take sensitivity, a finger and two legs. Your eye, brain and heart must be on the same axis as he used to say; a camera is just an extension of your eye. Unfortunately, sensitivity cannot be explained, you have to feel it with all your senses at once. We photograph things that we like and dislike, that's for sure. Anybody can get 10 good photographs in their life, but the thing is consistency, to keep ON with good photographs is the real secret.



*“There are no new ideas in the world ...there are only a new arrangement of things”*

*“Photography is nothing--it's life that interests me.”*

*“There are two types of pictures:  
Some for instance, you need to wait for them, let them come to you, the other ones you cannot wait.”*

*“The details must be alive, just!”*

*It's that moment, that moment inside of you that said, NOW!*

*“When we want for something to happen, when you anticipate, it does happen.”*

*“Forget yourself and be yourself. It comes by itself.”*

*“Catch the animal in his den!”*



## Food for thought

Photography is a way of drawing, a way of keeping a journal of your day/ life. It's this idea that strikes me more than anything. It doesn't make a difference if you prefer photographing people or landscapes. As a photographer you have the duty to try and evoke that which really matters.

There are no excuse for lack of inspiration, it is everywhere. We always nourish the mind with art or the things around us. For example, if you are into painting, then you will be influenced in your photography, your understanding of light and composition, colors, tones, everything that you OBSERVE influences you. It's that sensitivity that you have to train your mind to be alert at all times. You don't have to know too much you just have to look, period.

They say that it takes about 10 000 hours to master your craft before you are able to be somehow be comfortable with what you do. Believe it or not, it is true! All good things take a lot of time in order to materialize and from my personal knowledge, there's no other way than to produce a huge amount of work if you are serious about it. There's a beautiful metaphor that Henri used to say all the time:

*"You have to milk the cow quite a lot to get a little piece of cheese!"*

To take photographs all your senses must feel alive at once, like a cold rush through the body were everything you know collapses in front of you so that you can seize that moment in time. It is a great joy to be able to do so but it requires patience, persistence and ultimately, perseverance!

Allow yourself to make mistakes and don't deny bad pictures because they truly show your path and where you come from. Re-examining yourself is essential at all times. These are the things that I have learned from Henri's work and still do, constantly.

There's no end to learning and I stand strong about this idea. I hope that these concepts I've put together for you will help to open your eyes to things that we sometimes overlook. I know that it helps me and still does.

Dan Cristea

**"Nothing is original. Steal from anywhere that resonates with inspiration or fuels your imagination. Devour old films, new films, music, books, paintings, photographs, poems, dreams, random conversations, architecture, bridges, street signs, trees, clouds, bodies of water, light and shadows. Select only things to steal from that speak directly to your soul. If you do this, your work (and theft) will be authentic. Authenticity is invaluable; originality is non-existent. And don't bother concealing your thievery—celebrate it if you feel like it. In any case, always remember what Jean-Luc Godard said: "It's not where you take things from—it's where you take them to."**

**— Jim Jarmusch**