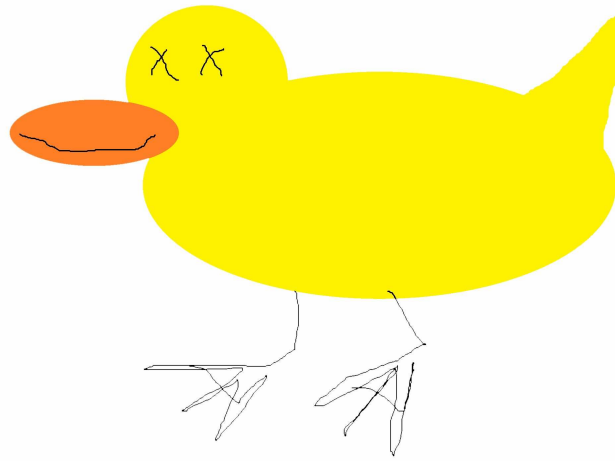


FUP DUCK PHOTOGRAPHY



The Blog Papers - 2023

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The original posts can be found at www.theostry.com

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2023

Taking me up the alley

5 Jan 2023

I live near York, or perhaps we should call it Old York or York Original? Anyway, it's a medieval city that, due to arguments over ownership, kept its stone walls and gates instead of using them as building materials. Quick diversion - local humour: 'welcome to York where the roads are gates, the gates are bars and the bars are pubs'. And it was the latter that drew me here on this day: we were taking part in a pub crawl. In particular, we were crawling the pubs using York's alleys and passageways, collectively known as [snickelways](#)¹, a combination of three Yorkshire words: snicket, ginnel and alleyway. Take a camera, I thought, it will look interesting and what could possibly go wrong?

Nine pubs, for a start. Better plan to imbibe just a half in each one unless I fancied sleeping in one of those alleys. Pickled in a snickel. Not as cute as it sounds.



Thankfully nobody coming the other way

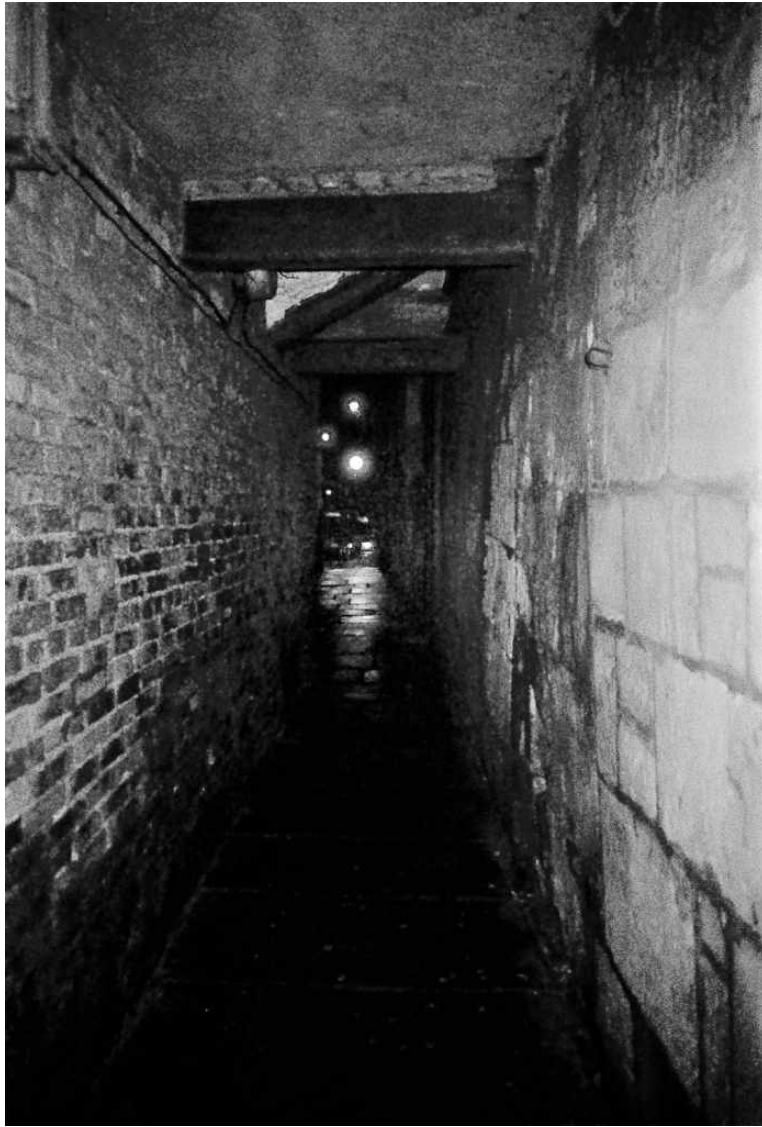
1 <https://www.wob.com/en-gb/category/all>

And which camera? Do I go splashproof or widest-angle lens? Or just something small and light? I could really do with a wide-angle lens in the tight passages and my digital compacts stop at a 35mm equivalent (54 degrees). I could take an SLR with my 15mm lens but do I want to carry it? How about my Espio, as it has a 28mm lens? I could load it with some Delta 3200 and develop that in 510 Pyro. The Espio recognises DX coding for ISO up to 3200, so that works. And of course I'll throw my Canon digital compact in the bag for colour shots and the ability to stretch my ISO if needed. The die is cast.

Now, as we all know, in theory, theory and practice are the same, but in practice the difference between theory and practice is greater than theory predicts. (Try saying that at the end of the pub crawl). So how did I get on?

Well, the first thing was that I'd not shot the Espio for a while but I had been using the Canon digital compact. So each time I went to use the Espio I held it out in front of me and looked at the back. Then I did a puzzled face, as there was no screen on the camera. I was definitely right to bring a compact rather than an SLR though, as speed of use and ease of carry were important. There was even space in my small bag for a bottle of water, to drink between beers to be sure I could find my bus home later.

Diving up the back passages was by far the best way to get between pubs. York gets busy on a Saturday night, even when it's raining. But most people stay on the main streets, so slipping down a snicket was like a private bypass. Some of the back ways were no more than shoulder width, which would have been interesting if anyone had come the other way. Our host and guide produces the definitive map to all the pubs (128 so far) and he had produced the route and plan for this event. It couldn't have been easier, which is just as well when there are a dozen of us, with a bit of a glow on and distracted by the sights or lost in chat and not paying attention. Herding cats is easier, as you can use gaffer tape.



Gritty

The camera /film /developer combination was not that good, though. It looks like the Espio was underexposing the film. Where the lighting was even, the film had plenty of detail amongst the grain. The shots taken in the dark though, where the lighting was uneven, had featureless shadows. Perhaps it's the film - I know the camera was working ok from previous shots. The development should have been ok - I was using 510-Pyro and it has worked well for everything else. My money is on the camera doing a bad job of metering when there are a few bright lights and a lot of dark space. The Canon G9 though, worked just fine. It's a good workhorse. But I think the Espio could be leaving me. It's not that compact and my Olympus XA seems to do a better job of metering. Film is getting expensive, so I need to use cameras that handle it well. Perhaps I'll give the Espio a last chance to do what it was really meant for, and shoot some colour negative film with fill-in flash.



The irregulars

On the other hand, the negatives look better than the scans. I'm sure I have one of those slide copier things somewhere around. It's a lens in a tube with a slide and negative mount on the end. Mount it on the camera and you have a device for making 1:1 copies. If I can find it I will have a go at making digital photo copies of the negs to see if the problem is with my (old) film scanner.

Anyway - much fun was had. And a sorry - I just enjoyed the silly innuendos. And in this context, even *innuendo* sounds like an innuendo.

The Pentax SV was launched in 1963 along with a range of Super Takumar lenses. It brought the heady technology of an automatic aperture and a self timer. The automatic aperture is a little metal plate in the throat of the lens mount that pushes a pin on the back of the lens to close the aperture down as the picture was taken. This eliminated having to focus with closed-down aperture, or to remember to use some form of pre-set [mechanism](#)². But it had no built-in light meter, and may have been the last model in the range to lack one. Even so, it was used by the Beatles in the Hard Day's Night film. Now that's a product endorsement.



In groovy hipster guise with a wrist strap

There was an update to the camera in 1964 to work with the new Super Takumar 50mm f/1.4 lens, as it protruded back into the mirror box and needed more clearance. The revised camera has an orange R on the rewind knob. My camera lacks this, so is a 1963 model. Speaking of which, the SV had a fold-out winding handle to rewind the film, which was not a common feature at the time. Nor was the single-stroke film wind-on lever, instead of a knob. The Pentax SV introduced what became the default layout for 35mm SLRs.

² <https://35hunter.blog/2017/03/16/preset-aperture-lenses-how-they-work-and-why-you-need-at-least-one/>



Dwarfed by the lens. You can see that the R is not orange. The red dot means the shutter is cocked.

It also has one rare feature in having a T position amongst the shutter speeds. This opens the shutter on the first press of the shutter and keeps it open until the button is pressed again. It's useful for long exposures as you don't need a locking cable release or to sit and hold the cable release down. I admit to only ever using the T setting once, on a different camera, to try some star photography. The feature worked but my pictures were rubbish.



Connections for both flash and bulb.

It has one old-fashioned feature in the release catch to open the back. This is a catch on the side of the camera. The Spotmatic, which came later, had the now-standard method of pulling up the rewind crank.



Look, no meter!

The other thing you'll notice is the flash hot shoe. Or rather, its absence. The shoe is a separate item that clips onto the viewfinder eyepiece. Since I have far better cameras to use with flash, I leave it off to avoid losing it.

So there you are: good, solid, unpretentious and with a huge range of lenses. Works just like a modern camera, as it set the design for them. It's up there with the Praktica³ as a post-apocalyptic snapper⁴ that will probably outlive the cockroaches.

3 2022: Praktica LTL

4 2022: Come the zombie apocalypse

Unlike King [Louis](#)⁵ though, I do care about what happens next. The story starts with me arriving at the end of the queue to get into a diving [site](#)⁶. The camera and housing were in a tool tray on the passenger seat. I poured myself a hot drink from the flask and began to assemble the camera into its underwater housing. Then the queue started moving. So I dumped the camera into the tray, threw the tea out of the window and made my way in.

The usual business then ensued with getting scuba gear assembled, getting my drysuit on and sorting out what we were doing and who we were doing it with. I threw the camera into the housing and pressed the rear door closed. It was a little more resistant than normal, but the O ring seal is always a bit tight. And off we went diving.

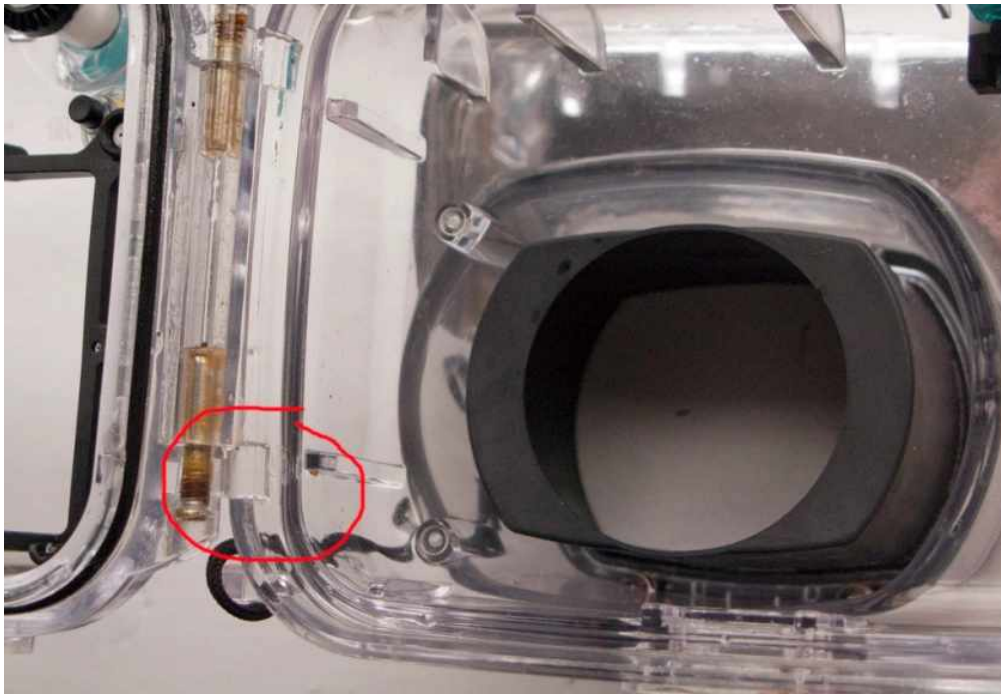
I was trying-out something new with the camera and its external flashgun, to try and eliminate backscatter from silt in the water. This meant that, as soon as I was back from the dive I had a look at the screen on the back of the camera to review the pictures I'd taken. And then noticed there were beads of water on the inside of the housing. And then noticed there was a puddle of water in the bottom of the housing. It didn't dry up, even with the names I was calling it. (This level of invective will usually scorch paper)

So out of the housing came the camera and out of the camera came its battery. The camera was wrapped in my towel with the battery door open. Luckily we were diving in fresh water, so there was a chance the camera might survive once it dried-out.

At the end of the day I got home and put the camera on a radiator to dry. I then had a good look at the housing. Trapped in the groove that the O ring seals into was a tiny black machine screw – the kind that holds cameras together. It was small enough to allow the housing to close, but large enough to cause a leak. It was a small leak: the housing took on perhaps an eggcup full of water after 45 minutes under three times normal atmospheric pressure. It did the fateful job of killing my camera, though.

5 https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apr%C3%A8s_moi,_le_d%C3%A9luge

6 <https://www.dive-site.co.uk/diving/>



The screw was trapped here, by the hinge

A quick check showed that the camera wasn't completely dead, but it was badly injured. It would power-up enough to extend the lens, but the rear screen wouldn't work and neither would the zoom controls. So, big decision – do I wait and see if the camera will revive, or buy a replacement if I can find one cheap enough? The check also found the source of the screw. There were actually two missing; one from either side of the tripod socket. Perhaps what I should do in future is give the camera a good shake before I put it in the housing, or at least check the O ring seal all the way round.



This is the screw, compared with an SD card for size

I've also got yet another dead copy of this camera that could be an organ donor. This was my first copy of this camera, and died with a common fault when an internal screw came loose⁷. If the drowned camera doesn't revive I might try swapping-in some components from the donor. Not that I have any way of telling which parts might have broken, but I can have a go and see what happens. Curiously, the loose internal screws that killed the first camera are different to the one jammed in the housing, so it's not a repeat of the first problem.



Drying...

But... repair or replace? I have one working copy of this camera and it would be useful to have two. The whole reason I had two was for just this situation. So off to eBay I shall go. The Canon G9 fetches a wide range of prices, but scruffy ones that lack a charger or case can be quite reasonable. The drowned camera shows no signs of getting better so I'll leave it on the radiator, but replace it is. Lo and behold, eBay spits out a very reasonably priced and tidy G9 with the original camera case. So we're back up and running. The next thing, of course, will be to dive the housing to see if I've fixed the leak. What I'll do is put the dead camera in it to stop it being too buoyant. I'll pack the housing with tissues, which will be a good indicator of leakiness or success. Sounds like a plan.

This is also why I dive with a camera that is good, but not expensive⁸. I may have had a bad day, but my broken camera was replaced for less than my buddy spent on one of his new fins. (He bought two obviously, or he'd swim in circles). The joy of cheap – the G9 is not the very best camera, but I can buy replacements at a reasonable cost, so I don't mind putting them into situations where they might break.

Let's call this *gaining experience*.

⁷ 2021: Mending digital cameras

⁸ 2018: The joy of cheap

Chilly dip

26 Jan 2023

Having flooded⁹ my camera while diving, I thought I'd try it again. And what could possibly go wrong when you go diving in sub-zero temperatures?

It was a spur-of-the-moment thing. Someone mentioned on Thursday that they were diving on the Saturday, if anyone else fancied a dip. Ok, so it's January and has been freezing all week. How hard could it be? Pretty frosty, as it happens.

I'd been diving back in mid December and the air temperature then was a bit lower – it was -3 in the car park and our wet kit kept freezing to the bench. The water was surprisingly warm – 7 to 8 degrees. This time the car park was a bit warmer at around zero, but the water had dropped to 5 to 6 degrees. It made a difference.



For a start, the camera battery kept fading. I'd take three or four shots and get a low battery warning. Turn the camera off for a few minutes, then back on and I'd get another few shots before it complained again. The camera wasn't the only one complaining. When I got in, the water creeping into my neoprene hood was painful. All the shock of a brain freeze without the fun of a [Cornetto](#)¹⁰. We all got very cold hands despite thick gloves – so cold that my fingers felt like they were burning. It was difficult to work the controls on the flash and camera because my fingers were numb. On the plus side, the cold had taken most of the algae out of the water and the lack of other divers meant there wasn't the usual stirred-up silt. I've dived here before when you could barely see your mask. This was good conditions for UK diving, with visibility of perhaps 15 meters.

⁹ 2023: Après moi, le déluge

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold-stimulus_headache



On a murky day

The fish were as frisky as ever. Odd when you think that their bodies must be at, or close to, water temperature. We were diving in fresh water in a flooded quarry, and it had been stocked with fish probably when it first opened. The trout are now big and partly tame. They get fed so often by divers with little bags of fish food that they approach any diver on the chance of a meal. We found one old trout that was blind – it swam slowly along the bottom and didn't recoil at movement. In fact it bumped into my dive buddy. There are usually sturgeon, but they'd gone off somewhere to be replaced by some large carp. The fish hang around in a shallow part of the site, so they are striped with bands of sunlight refracted into rainbows.



The good news though is that the camera didn't flood. I was worried that the O ring seal might have been damaged by the screw that was stuck against it and caused the previous flood. It looked OK, but there's only one way to find out.



Blind trout

I was also trying-out a new way to reduce the backscatter in my pictures. My camera is a digital compact, so it has a small built-in flash. There is a big diffuser panel to soften the light, but it's close to the lens axis so lights up all the silt in the water. The way to reduce this is to use an external flash on an arm, so the light beam is off the lens axis. But I need the internal flash to trigger the external one. I'd tried reducing the power of the internal flash to its minimum but it still made every shot a snow scene. So I bought some adhesive plastic mirror film and stuck a piece to the back of the diffuser. So the internal flash is blocked from lighting the subject, but still triggers the sensor on the external flash. Did it work? Yes, once I'd moved the external flash forwards enough that the sensor that controls its light output couldn't see the reflection in the diffuser. I got my best photos to date, in terms of clarity and lack of silt.



The diving itself was ... an experience. It was the coldest water I've been in, to date. But all my kit worked, my body core stayed warm and we had a couple of nice dives. I'm not sure what I could do to make the camera warmer – there's very little free space in the housing that could fit a hand-warmer. I'm not sure I want to chance getting iron oxide dust inside the camera, either. Perhaps I could warm-up the camera itself before I put it in the housing? That's probably a better idea. I could even get the camera warm, but make sure that battery was hot. As it was I just swapped for a fresh battery between dives. Oh what fun we have trying to keep cameras working¹¹ in the cold.

We had a great day though, and I got some good pictures. It has to be the most fun you can have in a [rubber](#)¹² suit.

11 2022: Foul weather

12 <https://movieweb.com/pulp-fiction-gimp-backstory-quentin-tarantino/>

Do you ever feel bored with photography? It's easy to be bored with the process of photography – the cameras, lenses and all that jazz. But do you ever get bored with the results? Turning out yet another set of similar pictures that nobody else will ever see.

I have found myself becoming jaded. I fell out of love with landscapes first. Yet another static shot vacant of any human interest or involvement that nobody will care about, least of all me. And then with the pictures that I took because I had a loaded camera in my hands. To be fair though, some of these improve with age. A picture of something that no longer exists can be an interesting record. My first car or motorbike became interesting to look back at, both because of how young I looked but also the strange old styles. Want to see how odd historic engineering could be? Go and look at an Ariel [Arrow](#)¹³. Thankfully I never owned an Austin [Allegro](#)¹⁴, though I sometimes cadged a lift to work in one. Actually, my propensity for taking pictures of the odd and curious¹⁵ has been useful in illustrating this blog. Who knew that a fragment of gravestone¹⁶ or an upside-down harbour¹⁷ would ever be useful? But those are just a symptom of my curiosity; they are not my muse.



Not impressed

I'm bored with cameras too. Yes, it has been fun to play with different types, but all I really wanted was pictures. Really, once a camera can deliver the minimum viable requirement of holding a sensor up to the light, it's done its job. People who form tribes around brands

13 <https://www.real-classic.co.uk/2015/08/31/ariel03090500/>

14 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austin_Allegro

15 2021: What are you looking at?

16 2022: New Year

17 2022: Flipping pictures

seem strange, although it is preferable to actual witch-hunting¹⁸. The best antidote is something I [heard](#)¹⁹ from Shit my Dad says – “you bought it, you didn’t invent it”.

So what am I to do? I’m definitely not bored with underwater photography, so perhaps that tells me something? We’ve had a couple of years of the Covid blues (with a ‘reform the band’ world tour always a future option). I’ve been pretty busy with a crumbly new (to me) house this last year so it feels like my photographic opportunities have been limited to when I’m walking the dog. This is about as boring as it gets, as I’m taking a camera for a walk and taking pictures of dull and empty scenes to justify carrying it. One real highlight was a challenge set by Bill Ward on the [Photowalk](#)²⁰ podcast: to use intentional camera movement. I enjoyed²¹ that – it was adding a bit of thought and creativity to walking the dog. I also enjoyed seeing some drag racing²². What I want is more of the fun I get from those and from underwater photography – I like action and people in action. So I don’t necessarily need to get out more, just go to places where things are happening. I’m sure I’ll get out more as the days lengthen.



Looking forward to Summer

What will be interesting is how my feelings change between writing and posting this article. I started writing this around the winter solstice when northern England barely gets light. By the time I post this whinge the days will be getting longer, I may not be towing a cloud on a leash and I’ll be a happy snapper once more. But, SAD aside, I really am bored with some aspects of photography. Am I using film cameras because of a specific quality they have,

18 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witch-hunt>

19 <https://bookquoters.com/book/shit-my-dad-says>

20 <https://photowalk.show/episodes/bill-ward-photographer-podcast>

21 2023: Did you take your photo today?

22 2022: Drag racing

because I'm unwilling to move on, or because I want to play with them like toys? I'd like to think it was a unique quality but I fear that I'm just a fiddler.

So perhaps I need to introduce some constraints? Use just one camera. Make that two: one compact that also does my underwater stuff and one 'better' camera that can use my collection of odd lenses. No more playing with stuff that I then leave in the cupboard with part-used film loaded. Maybe sell off a few more of the remaining relics? I did an exercise²³ before where I looked at what each camera or lens did and where I had overlaps or duplicates. Perhaps it's time to be even more specific. Do I really need four screw-mount 35mm cameras? Or four 35mm rangefinders? If I don't have a thing then I can't fret about not using it. I also really don't want to be a collector. The kit I do have is absolutely not out on display. I can appreciate a shelf-full of exotica just as much as the next nerd, but the things I own are (as far as I can) things I use. That's why I sold a load of stuff in the first place. It's also how I came to recognise²⁴ what drove my acquisitions: a mixture of curiosity and wanting to have a capability on the off-chance that I needed it.

So what does a photographer who is bored with photography do? I think I need to stop playing with cameras, stop taking pictures of things that bore me, and concentrate on going to interesting events or doing interesting things. I know there's a group organising a trip to do a bit of bird photography soon. Previously I would have declined, but I've never done this before so why not? It might also get some use out of my long lenses. And if it helps me get over myself, let's give it a go.

23 2021: Does gear matter?

24 2022: Gear Addiction Syndrome



It's always better after you've had your coffee. Not too much, though.

Pentax Spotmatic SP II

9 Feb 2023

This is one of the iconic cameras, or rather range of cameras. The Spotmatics had through-the-lens light metering and a set of excellent lenses with good coating on the glass. The same basic body went on to gain a K mount for the lenses and became the widely-loved K1000.



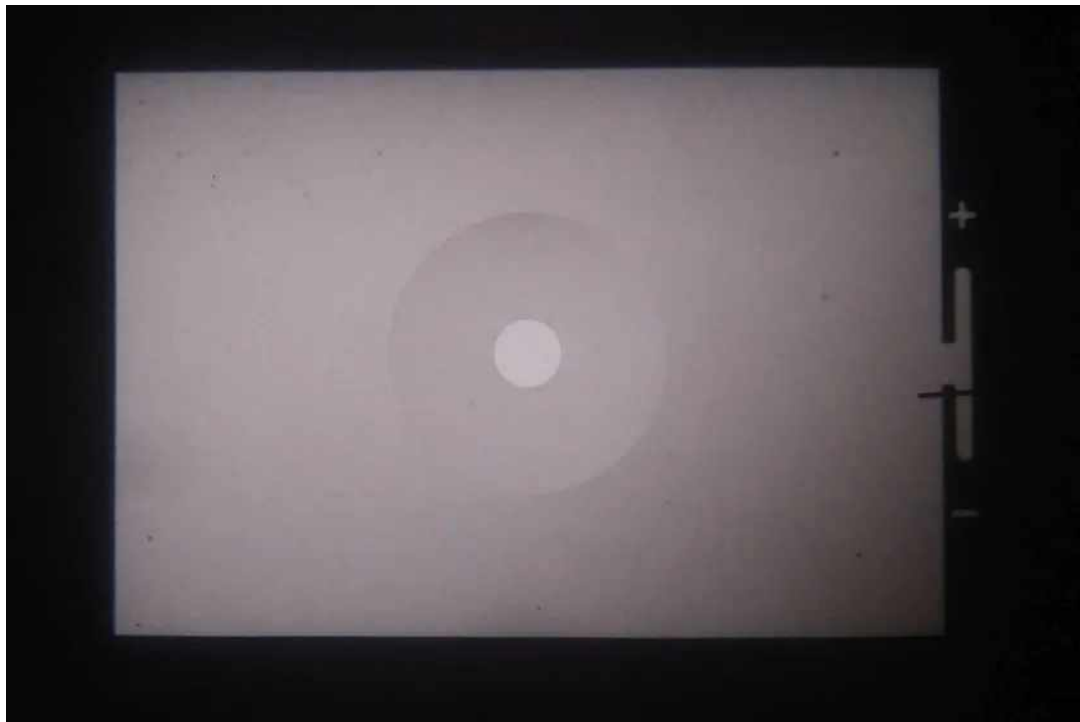
Mine is a Spotmatic II. It was launched in 1971 and gained a few improvements from the previous model in the film transport, higher sensitivity in the meter and a fixed hot shoe. The meter now works up to 3200 ISO. The lenses were also improved with full multicoating to become the SMC range. Because flashbulbs were still a thing, the flash sync for the hotshoe can be switched between X and FP and the camera also has separate PC sockets for each. A nice feature is that there is a film length reminder (or you could use tape²⁵).

²⁵ 2019: What's my name?



The switch controls the meter. Or it would.

In use I struggle a bit with focusing darker lenses. I've got a 35mm f3.5 lens that makes the focusing screen a bit dark, even in good light. But put a fast 50mm or the lovely Pentax 85mm f1.8 on and it snaps beautifully into focus.



The wind-on lever feels a bit thin, almost sharp, and takes a bit more force than I was expecting. Not that it feels like I'm forcing the camera, more that it feels a touch tighter than I was expecting. This may be just my camera, as my other Pentax cameras are buttery smooth. It still feels more smoothly mechanical than a Praktica²⁶.

Of course, the light meter on mine doesn't work. It's fine, as I have other unmetred cameras so I'm used to using a separate meter and tweaking the settings on the camera to keep it ready as the light changes.

It's about as well-packaged as a camera can be, though. Not too big, simple design, all the key parts exactly where you would expect. It's small and light enough for an easy and discrete carry on a shoulder strap. Indeed, with a 35mm lens on it was small enough to fit inside a spare poo bag (we have a dog) when I was caught out in the rain.

The M42 mount is about as ubiquitous as you can get, with access to a large range of lenses. And of course my screw-mount lenses also fit my more modern Pentax K-mount cameras. So why not use the K-mount cameras and ditch the old M42 camera body? Mostly because of its mechanical simplicity. This camera is probably as simple to fix as they come, so could probably outlast²⁷ anything with electronics. Indeed, it has already outlasted my Ricoh²⁸, which died after only 40 years. I guess that what the Pentax doesn't have (features etc) can't break.

I bought the Spotmatic because of the lens it had on it: a Super Takumar 85mm f1.8. It's a well-regarded [lens](#)²⁹, but was under-priced. This lens has the special tab that would allow the later Pentax ES to do open-aperture metering. It also has a tiny pin on the base that pops-out slightly when the lens is removed and disables the switch between auto and manual aperture control. An odd feature – I wonder if this was why it was cheap? Perhaps someone took it off the camera and thought the aperture switch was jammed?

So how well does an old meterless camera work? Pretty well, as it happens. The frames are evenly spaced on the film, meaning that the stiffness in the wind-on was not due to mechanical problems. Probably lack of use. The frames are well exposed, so the camera's settings are accurate. It earns the highest accolade for a camera, in that it just worked. Changing screw-mount lenses is more of a chore than bayonet-fit ones, but that's it. There's not much more to say. The experience of using it was all about taking pictures and nothing to do with fighting the camera or searching for a setting. Simple. I can see why they were (and are) popular.

26 2022: Praktica LTL

27 2022: Come the zombie apocalypse

28 2022: The passing of a trouper

29 <https://www.pentaxforums.com/lensreviews/Super-Multi-Coated-TAKUMAR-Auto-Takumar-85mm-F1.8.html>

Best picture?

16 Feb 2023

I heard an interesting question. Rather than the usual “what’s the best picture you’ve ever taken?” Or “what’s your favourite camera?” It was “which camera has given you your best pictures?”.



None of these

It could be that you have just the one camera, so all of your pictures were taken with it. But it could also be that the pictures that mean the most³⁰ to you were taken with quite modest kit. Friends, family, children and holidays may have been snapped on something small and unsophisticated, while your big camera was only used for ‘serious’ photographs which you have never looked at since.

I suppose there will be two definitions of best though. The one above is what means the most to you. The other version is what you want to show other people. Or perhaps I stop the sophistry and accept that you will have some pictures you like the most, whatever the reason.

I’ve been taking pictures for a long time though, so my best pictures were taken on a variety of kit. First, and for a long time, my best camera was my only camera. My humble Ricoh³¹ took pictures that I still like. The pictures of friends and family become increasingly precious as the subjects fade. But the camera itself had little to do with it, other than exposing correctly and allowing me to use different³² lenses.

With the kids growing up I went through a phase of using a 35mm compact point and shoot. For a while I had one of Canon’s waterproof cameras. This made great pictures because it used flash by default, and colour print film loves lots of fill-in light. Then it broke and was replaced with something that could switch between a 35 and 70mm lens. This was swapped as soon as possible for a little Canon digital compact (yes, I do like Canon

30 2022: Stories as memories

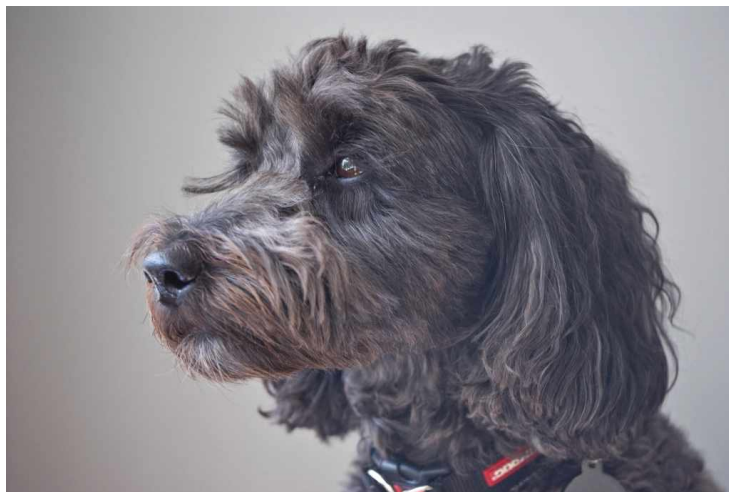
31 2022: The passing of a trouper

32 2020: Ars longer

compact cameras). The joy of digital, of course, is that you are not constrained by the size of a film or the costs of developing. You can snap³³ away, grab shots, try things and simply delete the junk. This camera was reincarnated several times as bits broke³⁴ and was eventually morphed into a better model in the range. (And reading this, I do seem to have broken³⁵ some cameras over the years)

If I think about the pictures that I'm most pleased to have taken (being the ones I would show other people), then very much the same rules apply: an SLR or some form of point and shoot are the choices. I don't think I've ever had a special camera though, in the sense of one camera that I prize for giving me the best pictures. It's more that various cameras have come and gone, serving in a particular role. It's almost Trigger's [broom](#)³⁶: I've always had an SLR but the make and model has varied as they wore out or broke. Same with the compact – many actors have played the role, some better than others.

I might actually favour some lenses more than the cameras that carry them. I've got a very humble Industar³⁷ 50mm lens that renders very smoothly as a mild telephoto on an APS-C camera. Longer lenses are very nice³⁸ for pictures of people, and my wide-angles are good for action³⁹.



So, to answer the original question, do I have a special camera that has produced my best pictures – the camera I would save from a house fire? The answer has to be no. What mattered more than the make or model of camera was the type of camera. I took good pictures with an SLR⁴⁰ because of its capabilities. I took good pictures with a compact⁴¹ camera because it was easy to carry and have it with me. Some cameras were easier⁴² to use than others, which would make me favour them, but that's it. There are some lenses that I like, but none of them rate as the magic lens.

33 2022: A sketch pad

34 2021: Mending digital cameras

35 2018: Going off piste

36 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ship_of_Theseus

37 2019: Thrifty fifties

38 2020: Ars longer

39 2018: Shooting bikes

40 2022: SLR – the perfect camera

41 2019: PaS or PoS?

42 2022: Ricoh KR-10 Super



There is no magic camera for me either. What about you though – do you have a special camera that makes the best pictures?

I've seen some explorations on podcasts of the links between photography and music. Is there also a connection between photography and writing? Is there any relationship between drawing with light and with letters?



You don't often see this at galleries

Lots (if you ignore that the group is self-selecting) of photographers seem to be also musical. Why not? If you are artistic then you may have more than one outlet for your expression. I feel though, based on the smallest of samples, that there are fewer photographers who also write. I know there are blogs, but I am thinking more of writing as a separate activity in itself. It would be writing about things other than photography, just as the people who can make music probably don't make tunes about photography. (And even as I write it, a series of photo [songs](#)⁴³ pop up from the subconscious.)



Singing them Cost of Portra Blues.

I know I can't play an instrument or 'do' music though. I have tried, but can't seem to pick it up at all. At school I got thrown out of the recorder class. Just about the easiest instrument

⁴³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girls_on_Film

to learn and all I could do was make random noises. But as soon as I bought a camera I thrived on it. I took pictures of everything, learned every feature (both) of the camera and every photographic method I could. And while I couldn't play a note at school, I did write a bawdy tale in the style and meter of a Canterbury Tale that made the teacher laugh (and then confiscate it).

Perhaps a better comparison though would be with poetry, as poetry is to prose what I suppose music is to humming a song. Just as music has a strange power over our emotions from a set of sounds, so poetry pulls our strings with words.

That changes the question to 'is there a link between poetry and photography, and are there any rhyming snappers?'. Not me, for sure. I can string words together but I am more at the explaining end of the scale than the triggering of emotions. Unless it's annoyance – I can do that one. Perhaps I can't do music or art but I can do words because I can't really see pictures in my mind's eye⁴⁴. I have more of a mind's steno pad.

I'm just curious. Once the overlap of people with skills in both photography and music was [pointed](#)⁴⁵ out my little grey cell got to wondering if there was a written analogue? (Thank you, I'll be here all week.) There may not be, or it might be more rare. We evolved to see and speak, so pictures, sounds and music are pretty much innate. But we have to teach our brains to [read](#)⁴⁶, which involves re-programming or re-purposing parts of the brain. So perhaps the venn diagram crossover of photography and writing is smaller than the one for music?

It's just me being curious. If anyone has good examples of a wordy-piccie crossover, do let me know.

And just to prove that comment about being annoying:

On his darkslide, by [Miltish](#)⁴⁷.

When I consider how my life is spent
Counting seconds in this shed, so dark inside,
Or juggling lenses, both long and wide,
Lugging them all, though my back be bent
To serve therewith my muses, and present
My true account, writ in silvery halide;
"Did that take a whole day?" they ask, so snide.
I bite my lip, more bitter banter to prevent,
But mutter "I need neither chip nor chimp for aid
To assist my eye, I have it best
From rule of thumb and circumstance of fate
Of stochastic influence my art is made.
You can keep your digital pleasures with the rest;
They too expose who only stand and wait."

44 2022: Aphantasia

45 <https://sunny16presents.podbean.com/>

46 <https://www.maryannewolf.com/proust-and-the-squid>

47 <https://www.poetry.com/poem/23807/on-his-blindness>

Sorry about that.

PS – I should have looked harder. Not long after posting this an actual good photographer [turns](#)⁴⁸ up, talking about poetry and photography.

48 <https://photowalk.show/episodes/paul-sanders-discover-still-photowalk>

Shooting the breeze

2 Mar 2023

March in England is supposed to be the windy month. It's an opportunity to take pictures of something that can only be seen by its effects.

What do you do? You can take pictures of what happens when the wind is blowing, or how it has shaped things by its force, or even things that use the power of wind. What says *wind* to you?



There was a sailing club when I was at school. My pal was good at it – he could make a small boat zip along and go where he intended. I spent my time headbutting the boom. As this blog's strapline has it: percussive learning. I did try windsurfing, but I spent most of my time swimming after the board. Me and wind don't get along.



Photographing in the wind can be difficult, particularly if it's blowing sand or snow. You need to take precautions⁴⁹ or use windproof⁵⁰ kit. It's a lot easier to photograph what the wind has done and where it's been.

49 2022: Foul weather

50 2019: Rufty-tufty film camera review



Why not photograph the wind? There are plenty of people who photograph water, clouds or stars. Besides the obvious wind-powered machines of boats and windmills there are turbines sweeping the skies (clear of birds). Photographing the wind means taking pictures of something that exists but can't be seen, compared to something that can be seen but has no physical existence, like shadows.



It's something to do while we wait for the weather to improve. Besides, you might find the [answer](https://youtu.be/fjaZTJkwLRs)⁵¹.

⁵¹ <https://youtu.be/fjaZTJkwLRs>

This is the Cosmic Symbol or Smena 8m. Mine was made in 1977, which is when Star Wars was released. So this is the camera that came from a long time ago in a country far, far away.

Mine was also made in the same year that Olympus stopped making the EE-2⁵². What a difference. But what a difference in the markets they were selling into.

I can't remember how I came by this camera, but it must have been very cheap judging by the rust. I think it was in a job lot that had been stored in someone's garage.



That paddle at the side of the lens is the shutter release

It is supposed to have a sharp and contrasty 40mm lens. I've got to say that my first experience with it was underwhelming. The pictures were low contrast and muddy-looking. It feels a bit like the LC-A⁵³ in that people rave about the lens, but what they show is the effects of contrasty cross-processed film. I can get the same punchy results with a Konica⁵⁴ site foreman's camera that won't rust. Anyhoo, what do you get for your money?

You get a basic plastic zone-focus⁵⁵ 35mm camera with fully manual controls. Where the Olympus Pen EE-2 had clever automation, the Symbol is purely manual. It's probably easier and cheaper to provide manual adjustments than to create reliable automation. The shutter speeds are hidden on the bottom side of the lens and you have to turn a ring on the front of the lens to set the aperture. I suppose having manual controls doesn't mean they also have to be ergonomic⁵⁶. There are cut-out windows on the side of the lens that

52 2020: The Olympus Pen EE

53 2020: Lomo LC-A

54 2020: Konica genba kantoku wide 28

55 2019: Awkward focus

56 2020: The beauty of good design

show a white marker to indicate which combination of speed and aperture are right for the weather. Basically, the camera will do a sunny-16 (or dull 8⁵⁷) estimation for you. No substitute for a meter but better than guessing.



The white square below the striped cloud shows that the camera is set for light cloud/ haze conditions.

The focussing is by zone, or estimation. There are symbols on the lens for portrait, group and distant view settings.



Even without a meter it can still be used for knight photography

And that's it. There are no other features or gadgets. But what it doesn't have can't break. There are no batteries included and none needed. The shutter is only cocked by winding on, so there is protection against double exposures. The lens is a modest triplet design, so should be OK if stopped down a bit. Basically it's a manual point-and-shoot that will work well enough and was produced in huge quantities.

57 2021: I'm going to dull 8 it



Or even action, if you are careful

One nice feature is that it has a film speed reminder on the back, although I prefer to use tape⁵⁸ as it can't be knocked to a different setting.



If you find one, it may come with its case. This is an awful affair made of a thick vinyl material with a shiny surface. It looks like patent leather and feels thick and stiff. But it does provide a strap to carry the camera around with.

⁵⁸ 2019: What's my name?



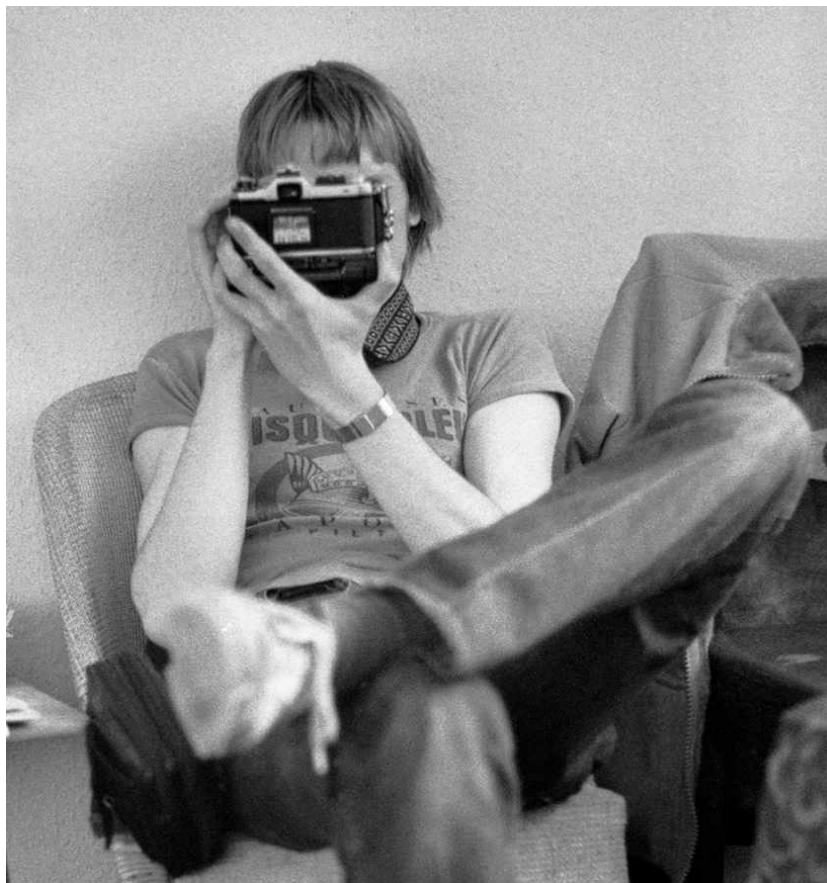
If you are looking for one on that auction site, try searching for Nomo as well – the case has the Cyrillic script for Lomo stamped on it.

Наслаждаться!

Or, Zen and the art of manual adjustment.

Which might be puzzling, but there is a link (trust me). There seem to be a lot of people who take pictures but have little or no idea how the camera works. They just want the outcome. There are also a lot (but probably fewer) of people who want to know exactly how their camera or the method works. They enjoy the process. Robert Pirsig [argued](#)⁵⁹ for a happy medium (that you can [strike](#)⁶⁰ with a spanner). The question is how much you need to know about how something works to be able to use it well?

Pirsig's view is that some people are aesthetes (in his words, romantics). They don't want to know the details or workings. They see and value the outcome, not the process. He said that other people were technicians (classical). They study and learn how things work. They may actually be less interested in the outcome than the process. Part of his argument, apart from the real meaning of [quality](#)⁶¹, was that the ideal is to combine the two. It meant having an outcome in mind but also knowing how to achieve it technically. Automation⁶² is a great assistant, but I wonder if there is value in knowing how the manual process or machine works, and where the point of best value lies?



59 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zen_and_the_Art_of_Motorcycle_Maintenance

60 <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/strike+a+happy+medium>

61 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirsig%27s_Metaphysics_of_Quality

62 2019: Automatic for the people

The other aspect to this is your level of competence. When you set out to learn something, say photography or driving a car, everything is strange and nothing makes sense. Some of the basic controls have to be mastered before you can operate the machine well enough to get the result you want. To drive, for example, you may have no idea why you change gear, but you need to learn to do it to get the car to move. In photography you may have no idea why there are aperture numbers, but you need to learn that big numbers mean a small hole and what effect⁶³ that small hole has. Or in both cases you can use an automatic. You'll get results, but you will never learn the relationship between the settings and those results. The basics will get you started, but perhaps you should progress beyond them?

This ties into how we learn, or rather how we are taught. It was quite explicit in the subject I followed, which was chemistry. We first learned how things worked. Then we moved up to the next level of study and were told that everything previous was a simplification and this was how it really worked. Then we moved up a level... etc. But that is a path I chose to follow: I chose to become a technician or *classical*. The other extreme is the view that chemistry is akin to magic in that nobody understands it and it has no real place in our everyday lives. And then you mix chlorine and ammonia based cleaners and wonder why your eyes [sting](#)⁶⁴.

While the extreme of *romantic* might be to use a thing with no idea how it works, the extreme of *technician* might be to concentrate entirely on making it work without having a real use for it. If I may be so bold as to give some examples (knowing what would happen if I did this on a more social medium)... look at the number of pictures you see taken by people who have a new camera or lens. They say they are testing it. But basically, if it works, just use it. Taking straight uninterpreted record shots may be part of your testing⁶⁵, but I don't need to see them. Perhaps if the picture showed something unique to that lens or camera it would be interesting, but "hurrah, it works" brings me no joy. The counterpart is the pictures people show that contain an effect or result that is interesting or expressive but can't be repeated as the maker doesn't know how they got it. These are just puzzles. I also think that while it's great to get an effect by accident, you should then put some study into understanding how you got it. Otherwise it's not art, it's chance. (Or Dadaist [poetry](#)⁶⁶)

I'm also reminded, when I see plain record shots taken with a new camera or lens, of the people I see at tractor shows. I've seen whole fields full of people sat next to their restored and working pumping engine or circular saw. While it's interesting to see what sort of stuff farmers had to cope with, it's not being used for anything useful. Their whole point and joy seems to be that it works and they own it. The photographic equivalent is probably GAS⁶⁷.

I'm being unfair. Straight record shots taken with a particular lens will give the viewer an idea of the effects it provides, particularly if it's compared with an alternative. I've done it myself. Better still is if you can compare lenses or results under similar realistic conditions. The Canny Cameras [site](#)⁶⁸, for example, shows what you can expect from various old compacts using the same subjects each time. Here it makes sense to use straight record pictures to show blurring, fringing or distortion and get a sense of what a charity-shop find

63 2018: How to photo goodly

64 <https://sciencetrends.com/bleach-and-ammonia-a-deadly-combination/>

65 2020: Testing a camera

66 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dada>

67 2022: Gear addiction syndrome

68 <https://austerityphoto.co.uk/>

is capable of. What I don't want though are pictures of resolution charts. If you want to go down that rabbit hole I'll get my technician mode on and ask what the variation is between items and what the sample size should be for meaningful testing. Testing a sample of one is not as useful as understanding [variation](#)⁶⁹. </nerd>.

I really don't need the camera settings provided with a photograph, either. Show me something interesting and I will work out how it was done (or have fun trying). By all means tell me that you got the effect by tilting the lens or something else, but I don't need to know your shutter speed or worse, what camera you used. The photograph – the outcome – should stand alone. The settings you used to get it are useful to you, so that you can recreate or improve your method, but not to me.



A lack of settings meant I had to take multiple exposures, hence the overlapping pattern.

So where am I going with this? I err on the side of technician, as I am deeply curious about how things work. But for me the purpose of photography is not to use a camera, it's to take pictures. I just want to know how my camera works so that I can make it do what I want (or find the menu option I want). Although, in the case of some of the Russian cameras, it's useful to know how to avoid breaking them too. I like to be able to use a camera well, just as I like to be able to drive competently. But the aim is not how well I can change a film or a gear, but to try and get the best out of the machine in support of its purpose.

To be fair though, digital cameras are complicated and laden with features while mechanical cameras rely on you knowing how to use them. Automation is a wonderful thing, but I can see how multiple options or complexity leads to anxiety. And if you are learning something new, it's much more encouraging to get an early result even if you are not sure how it happened. In chemistry I was able to distil our home-brewed wine long before I was able to make my own incendiaries, oops – firelighters. Speaking of which, I accidentally triggered the speed limiter on my car and was stuck at 20mph for a couple of hundred yards until I could pull-in and find the off switch. Like all good design fails⁷⁰, it was controlled by a lever that is normally hidden to the driver but can be hit and triggered if you run your hand around the steering wheel. Perhaps the photo equivalent is the [pin](#)⁷¹ on

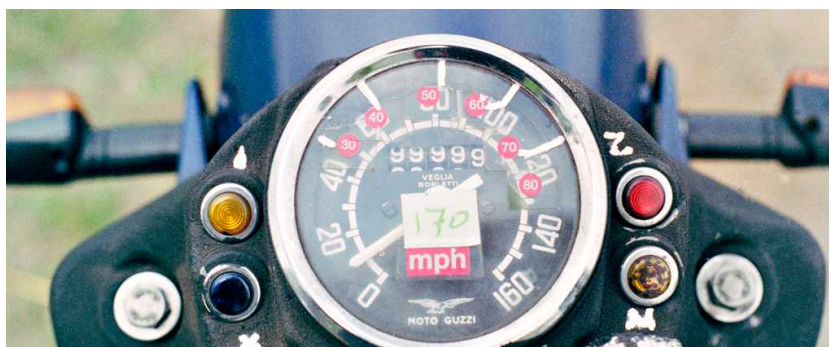
69 <https://deming.org/understanding-variation-the-key-to-managing-chaos/>

70 2020: The beauty of good design

71 <https://www.theatreofnoise.com/2008/05/ricoh-lenses-on-pentax-cameras-ricoh.html>

some Ricoh lenses that fouls the autofocus drive on Pentax cameras and locks the lens onto the camera body. I bought a nice 20mm lens that had the bad pin, but knew enough to spot it and sort it out. This is where a little technical savvy is useful.

So I think what I'm arguing for is a balance. It's useful to have some level of understanding of the process or the machine so that you know how to get the result you want, or why you got the results you did. I don't need to understand how a carburetor works to be able to drive an old car, but knowing that the car has one and some idea of what it does can be useful (when the car wouldn't start, or when the cable froze). I'm also not arguing that I stand at the point of perfect balance. I love to find out how things work, well past the stage where I know enough to use it. When I had my old motorbike it was quite rare in the UK. So I started an internet owner's club and uploaded the manual and parts list. For a while I was the Oracle for technical information. The underlying reason though was to build a network of people and resources who could help keep me on the road. And on the road it was – I commuted to work on it, did the National Rally⁷² and wore out tyres, brakes and chains just like a regular bike. I even fitted indicators, as I'd rather be alive than historically accurate. Along the way I learned a lot about how some components of the bike worked, but I didn't set out to be an expert mechanic, just mechanically mobile.



Speedo about to roll over to zeros. It's in KM, hence the MPH stickers. The 170 is the reading at which to next fill the tank. Nerdy, or what?

So yes, I'm arguing to strike a balance between the romantic and classical approach, recognising that we will move from one to the other as we learn. But being at the extreme position of 'I don't care to know how it works' or 'I don't care what I could do with it' might be missing-out on getting the best results.

What do you think?

⁷² <https://www.nationalroadrally.co.uk/nrr/index.php>

There are some lenses that seem to always make clear, bright pictures and this camera has one of them. It may be that it has good contrast, I'm not sure, but the pictures taken with this camera have a pleasing level of clarity. I had a Canon Sureshot A1 – the waterproof job – that had the same clarity, but I think that was due to it using the flash for most shots as fill-in.

This model of the Silette was introduced in 1955. In many ways it's similar to the Zeiss Contessa LKE⁷³. The Zeiss gains with a built-in light meter but the Agfa is easier to use, with a focusing tab on the lens. The film rewind is a knob rather than a crank, so it's slower to use but simpler to make and probably more likely to still be working.



The lens is slightly wide, at 45mm and with a modest f3.5 aperture. But, like I said, it's good. The between-the-lens shutter is very quiet. This would make an excellent street photography tool. Not that I do that kind of thing⁷⁴, but I'm sure it would. The focus on mine is a little stiff due to the age of the lubricant, but the focussing tab on the lens makes easy work of it. It also means that it doesn't get knocked off the set distance while I'm carrying it.

I did try converting this camera to shoot IR, using an opaque filter behind the lens. That didn't work⁷⁵, so I took the filter out again. Besides, I have since converted⁷⁶ a digital compact to take infrared, which works much better. I think the idea was good, but I was using extended range film rather than 'real' infrared. With a full visual cut-off filter, I think I wasn't giving the film anywhere near enough exposure.

73 2022: Zeiss ikon contessa lke

74 2019: Taking it from the streets

75 2020: Infrared conversions

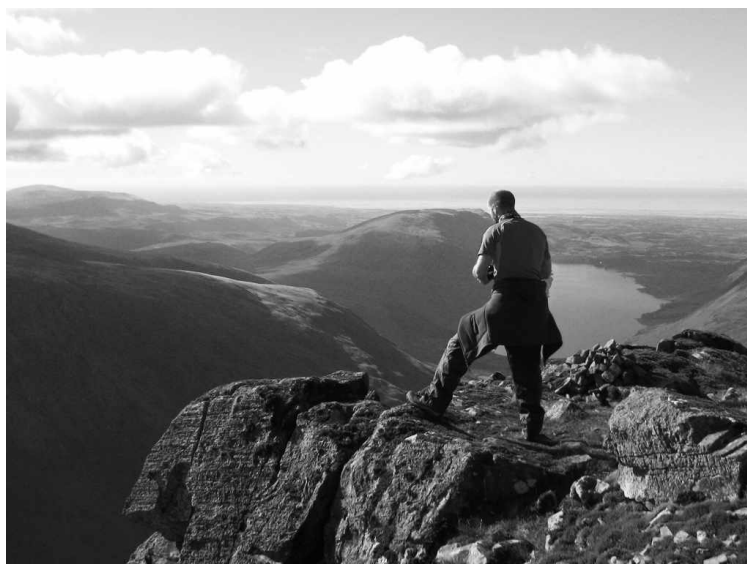
76 2020: Update on shooting IR



With the IR cutoff filter removed from behind the lens.

So what I'm left with is a nice, functional rangefinder camera with a good lens. I'll take that.

You could spend all your time exploring new things, or stick entirely with what you know and look no further. But perhaps there is a good working balance between exploring and exploiting?



Look! Over there - new stuff!

There is a mathematical calculation of the ideal balance that uses the Gittins [Index](#)⁷⁷, but it's complicated. Or you can focus on minimising regret, meaning "if I look back at myself from the future, will I regret not doing this?". This is why it is always worth learning something: the future you will have the benefit of what the current you learns. But you can't learn everything, just as you can't try everything. Plus you get a lot of benefit from using what you already know. So this brings me back to working out the best balance between finding new stuff and using what I've already got.

All very theoretical, but what has it got to do with photography? My balance has always been more to explore than exploit. I have tried different cameras, lenses, film and methods because I could, and because I was curious⁷⁸. I could instead have settled on a single useful combination and worked it hard. There is a lot of value in sticking with something you know and working the arse off it. You will know exactly how your lens, film or sensor will record the subject; you will know how every feature and option works. But you'll never have a new [trick](#)⁷⁹ in the bag. The alternative would be to chase every new thing, but this means you will never have a body of competence.

The [research](#)⁸⁰ says that the more time you have, the more you should explore the new. The depressing down side to this says that the less time you have (the older you are), the more you should stick with the known and ignore the new. The antidotes to this stagnation

⁷⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gittins_index

⁷⁸ 2022: What does photography mean to me?

⁷⁹ <https://youtu.be/amGbBFsiuzc>

⁸⁰ https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/aw/d/0007547994/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?ie=UTF8&qid=1667656966&sr=8-1

are things I have written about before: how to introduce chance⁸¹ and trigger new directions; how to recognise you are repeating⁸² yourself and break out. But aside from that, I do appreciate that I have accumulated a lot of files and negatives and a lot of notes and records on how to do things. Many years ago I had a copy of Photoshop Elements – probably version 4 or 5. I upgraded it gradually, I think I'm now on 7, and made notes of how to achieve effects. This cookbook has turned into a useful resource. I am still exploring, in the sense of adding to it when I find or learn something new, but the collected notes are very useful to exploit.



I could put some effort into learning Lightroom (or more likely, [Darktable](https://www.darktable.org/)⁸³ and [GIMP](https://www.gimp.org/)⁸⁴), but I'm not sure the eventual benefits are worth the investment. GIMP would be worth it for when I hit the limits of Elements, but I don't have to process large batches of images, so I don't really need a workflow. It's the same with video: I have a copy of [Kdenlive](https://kdenlive.org/en/)⁸⁵ that I use to edit together video clips into a short film. I've learned it well enough to do what I need, but I'm not a video maker. And yes, I did explore shooting video. Of course I did.

There is another point of view that's relevant, and it came from some writings of Glenn Gould⁸⁶. He [drew](https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/glenn Gould/028010-4020.06-e.html)⁸⁷ some interesting parallels between known knowledge and the unknown. His view was that the known was a basis for exploration and we should avoid freezing it into *The Method*. He also wrote about the liberty of performing (music, in his case) in the recording studio rather than in public. He felt that public performances led to safety and the avoidance of risk, while in the studio he could take risks and do difficult work, knowing that he could combine the best parts and drop the mistakes. So he was combining the exploitation of his abilities and learning with the exploration of the new. Did he get the balance right? Probably, but he was quite exceptional.

I think the best I can do is to turn down my curiosity dial a little and turn up the wick on exploiting more of the work I have already done. Or perhaps I let it match the seasons, and do my exploring when the days are longer? What do you do?

81 2018: Out of the rut.

82 2022: Diversifying.

83 <https://www.darktable.org/>

84 <https://www.gimp.org/>

85 <https://kdenlive.org/en/>

86 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glenn_Gould

87 <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/glenn Gould/028010-4020.06-e.html>

This is a very interesting [article](#)⁸⁸ on searching for the locations of old pictures. The exercise itself is fascinating, but so are the tools for doing a reverse image search. It's easy to type red apple into a search engine and get pictures of red apples. Putting up a picture of a red apple and having the search find similar pictures is much more difficult. What's even more interesting is putting up one of your own pictures and [searching](#)⁸⁹ to see if it turns up in places you weren't [expecting](#)⁹⁰. Not that anyone would ever steal or [copy](#)⁹¹ one of my pictures. Why would they? My pictures only have value to me and are probably of no interest or use to anyone else. Unless they are the before in a before and after comparison. Even so, the reverse search is an interesting tool.

What would be awkward though, would be to find a near-duplicate of one of your images and then find that the copy pre-dates yours. Then you have to either be honest and admit you copied something you'd seen, be amused at the [synchronicity](#)⁹², or recognise you had taken the same tourist shot as everyone else. (If you want more synchronicity, try the *insta_repeat* account on Instagram.)



My go at luminosity masking

So where is this going? Obviously, don't copy other people's work. Or rather, don't try to pass off other people's work as your own. By all means copy, but do it to learn, not to earn. I definitely copied a certain look I had seen for infrared pictures, in order to learn how the method worked. I have no intention of pretending to be Pierre-Louis [Ferrer](#)⁹³; what I wanted was to learn how to do luminosity masks. But that's not the point and you don't need my virtue-signalling. The main thing is that there are some powerful tools out there for doing reverse image search and they can be used to locate an old photograph or to

88 <https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/2022/08/09/using-new-tech-to-investigate-old-photographs/>

89 <https://tineye.com/>

90 <https://www.diyphotography.net/how-richard-prince-sells-other-peoples-instagram-photos-for-100000/>

91 <https://www.diyphotography.net/a-student-plagiarized-an-african-artist-then-his-work-was-exhibited-at-the-milan-photo-festival/>

92 <https://www.livescience.com/61970-photo-wave-coincidence.html>

93 <https://www.plferrer.photos/series/paris-invisible/>

find similar images. I'm also currently playing with an image searching [utility](#)⁹⁴ on my computer (rather than the internet) that should be able to find pictures based on content. This could be a useful addition to my filing system⁹⁵ for when I have an idea what the picture was like but I'm not using the right key words to find it.

Anyway, have a go and see what you can find.

94 <https://sourceforge.net/projects/imgseek/>

95 2019: Catting logs

Did you take your photo today?

13 Apr 2023

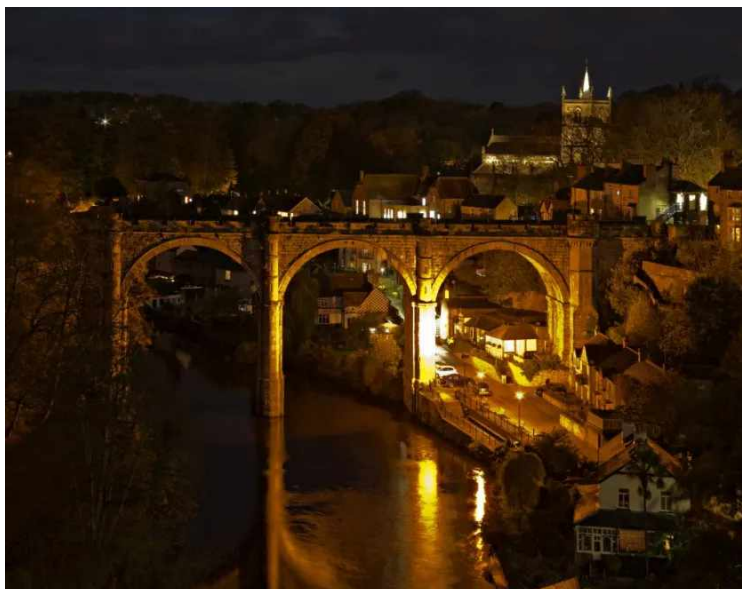
As the story goes, a tourist in New York asked a passer-by how to get to Carnegie Hall. The answer was “practice”. I think Gladwell’s idea of 10,000 hours of practice has been [debunked](#)⁹⁶ though, as hours alone won’t do it. As proof, I’m sure I smile at someone at least once a day, but in all these years it’s not made me a nicer person.

So what I’m talking about is mindful or reflective practice. And while it’s possible to get all Zen about the meaning of mindfulness, what it really means is trying things, looking at your results and picking out the good stuff. The thing about the good stuff though, is that it doesn’t happen without the other stuff. You may have to kiss a lot of frogs to find that prince, but you’ll never find the prince without some froggy-snoggy action.

This is where digital beats film. Your snaps are essentially free, and the camera usually records in the picture file what its settings were. So there is no excuse against trying variations to see what works best. The mindfulness bit comes in when you pick which shot you like most, then look at what settings made it happen.

If you do this at every opportunity, you should begin to learn what you like and how to get that sort of picture. It’s a lot less stressful to know what sort of shutter speeds you need or how high you can push the ISO before you are doing it for real. Always dig your well before you are thirsty, [Grasshopper](#)⁹⁷.

This ties-in with the idea of journaling or keeping a notebook⁹⁸. Jot down ideas for or about pictures as they occur to you. Then try those ideas out and see what works. Or do it the other way round: take lots of pictures at any time, then make notes about the ones that worked so that you can do more of it.



Possibly the most-photographed viaduct in Yorkshire

96 <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20121114-gladwells-10000-hour-rule-myth>

97 <https://youtu.be/gbNCBVzPYak>

98 2022: A sketch pad

There is also the benefit that the more you use your camera, and the more often you use some of the obscure features it has, the better you will be able to use the camera. As an example, I went out to do a bit of night photography. It took me a while to find out how to dim the rear screen. I did remember that it could do in-camera HDR though, so I tried that on a few things. What did I learn? That I need to set a wider range of exposures to get the full range. I also had a go, while out for a walk, at some ICM. My Canon G9 has a built-in ND filter function. Couple that to its lowest ISO setting and shutter-priority mode so that I can dial the speed right down and I might get some nice blurries. Save the configuration to one of the user profiles and I can have this ready to use when needed.



The Ouse, oozing

Except it seems the G9 can't have both the ND filter and aperture priority at the same time. No worries, and better I found that out when I'm playing than when I try to use it. This is where the notebook comes in useful again.

So what did I learn? Well, I dragged the dog out on a couple of walks around previously boring landscapes so that I could play with some ICM. I learned that there is a knack to using old manual lenses on my dSLR that is not obvious but works perfectly, and I will now remember. I made a couple of impressionistic autumn landscapes that I actually like. I didn't take any of it too seriously, so there was no pressure to be a Real Photographer. I had some fun, and having reviewed the results I'll be out to try this again. But better.



So the frog had read everything and was bored. He went to library in the hope of finding something new. The librarian, a chicken, took him round the shelves. The chicken walked along the shelves, pointed and said “book, book, book”. The frog said ” read it, read it, read it”...

But seriously, photobook or ‘zine, yes or no? Should you publish, and how do you do it?

The first thing to realise is that you probably won’t get a publisher interested in making your photobook, not unless you are already famous. The economics just don’t work for them: it will need expensive printing on expensive paper and it won’t sell enough copies to make a decent return. You could always self-publish, but you don’t have the publishers’ distribution and access to bookshops. Of course you could sell online, but you don’t have their marketing reach either. It all sounds grim. But just supposing you wanted to have a go, how could you do it?



Actually, the first question is why, not how. You need an audience, so who is this work for? You may have some lovely pictures, but who will want to look at them? Why would they want to look at your pictures and not someone else’s? So the very first question is to identify your audience. Next will be why they want to read or look at this work? If you have identified your audience, the reason may be as simple as curiosity. People will look at things that interest them.

You might intend to use your publication as a form of business card: a show-piece for your work. In that case the design and production needs to be excellent and relevant to the work or your style. Be prepared to spend money on both the physical object and on getting advice and help on the design. If you think your pictures are better than random snaps or

selfies, then just imagine how a publishing or design professional might view your attempt at a book.

This prompts the next question – why a physical book? A printed book or ‘zine requires an initial investment to print and deliver to you a number of copies. The more you print, the lower the unit price but the bigger the investment. And then, when your garage or spare room is stacked with boxes, you have to market, sell and post every copy. Oh, and deal with complaints, postal damage or loss and returns. So why not make a virtual book? An Acrobat PDF file (or epub or one of the reading app formats) is easy to distribute, takes no space and costs nothing for additional copies. Think of all the carbon you will save. What you lose is the chance of profit and the control of your print quality. It may make it much easier to reach an audience though, as people can download a copy to try with no risk or expense and no time-lag before fulfilment. As we know, what everyone wants is for everything to be free, perfect and [now](#)⁹⁹.

What about print on demand though? This is where you lodge a copy of your book with an online printer. Your audience can then use a link to the work to order a printed copy. You will still need to make a pleasing design and to choose suitable paper and covers. It’s worth a look, if you know what you want (or can get help to design it) and can reach your audience. I can’t see it beating a PDF version for a speculative audience though – why would someone pay for a printed and posted book unless they are sure they will like it? Richard Osman can sell books because his name is on the cover. People will buy it because they know they will like it (and it’s on the shelf in the supermarket at a discount). A book on Fup Duck Photography by some unknown hopeful that you have order online and costs £15 posted is less of a tantalising proposition. But a downloadable PDF – why not give it a try? It may also help you build an audience that will eventually buy a ‘real’ book.

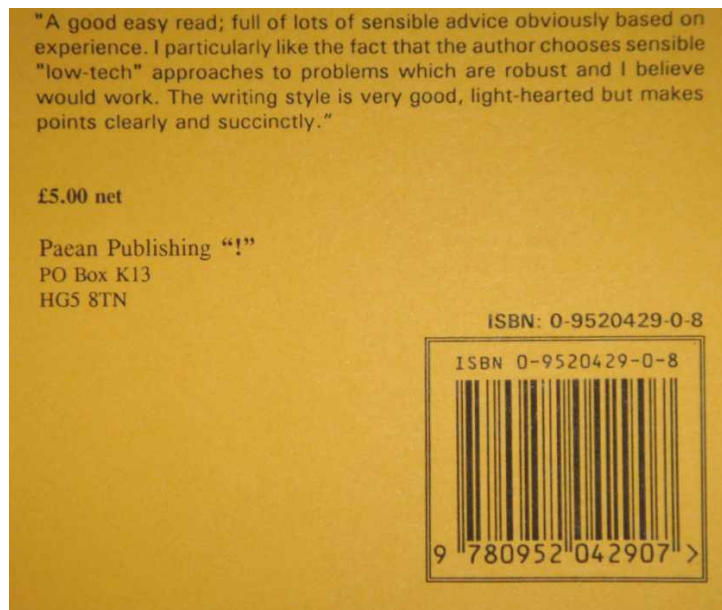
Speaking of which, if you photograph events, your audience is self-identifying. If you regularly attend a sport or activity, how about printing some slim ‘zines with recent pictures in and offering them at cost? If your contact details are included, you could get orders for prints or more work from it. That’s more useful than an unread coffee-table book that your mum will display for a year and then quietly lose.

Or even go guerilla. Print your tome, put an ISBN [number](#)¹⁰⁰ on the back and mark it clearly as *free promotional copy*. Then slip it onto the shelves at bookshops. Actually, don’t do that – it’s annoying. It’s also been done [before](#)¹⁰¹, and better.

99 https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/510422.Free_Perfect_and_Now

100 <https://buybarcodes.co.uk/isbn-barcodes>

101 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steal_This_Book



The magic code that makes a book visible.

I'll come back to one of the basics though – your book or 'zine needs a narrative¹⁰². It must have a reason to be and a story to tell¹⁰³, or it's just a bound copy of your photo album. You may love your pictures, but your readers want a story. If you can't describe briefly what your book or 'zine is about then you don't have a story and won't have an audience.

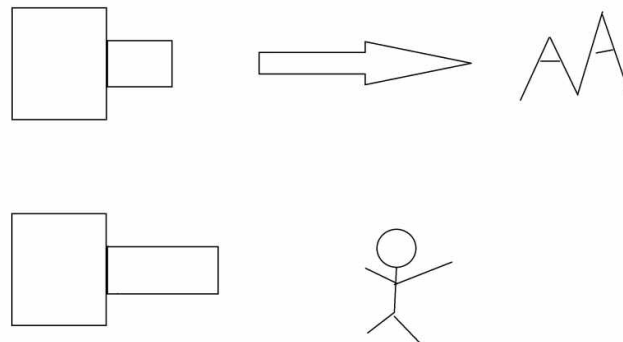
102 2019: Are you sitting comfortably?

103 2018: Pictures at an exhibition

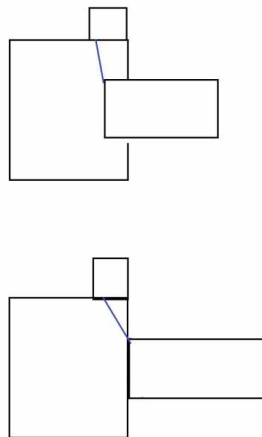
Fed 5b rangefinder adjustment

27 Apr 2023

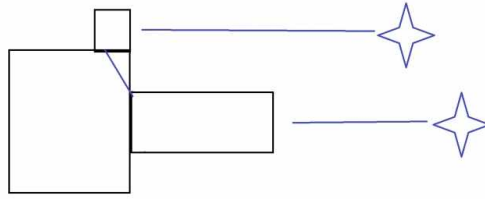
I've written¹⁰⁴ about picking up a battered but working Fed 5b body. When I put a lens on it I found that the focus was off at closer distances. The point of actual focus was further away than the rangefinder focus point, meaning that the lens was not as far out on its helical thread as it should be. So the rangefinder mechanism needs to be adjusted so that it thinks the lens is closer, so that I then have to wind it out a bit further, which brings the point of focus closer. That's a lot to digest. A diagram might help.



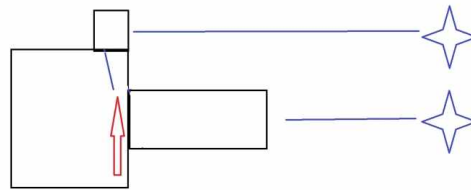
The lens is moved further out to focus closer.



The rangefinder mechanism has a little lever that feels how far out the lens has moved.



The rangefinder thinks the lens is further out than it is, so thinks the point of focus is closer.



So the solution is to move the lens further out to focus closer, and fill the gap so that the rangefinder agrees with the lens.

What I need to do is compare the actual point of focus of the lens with what the rangefinder mechanism thinks it is. (Now you see why SLRs¹⁰⁵ are such a good idea.) The ideal way to do this is to put a ground glass plate over the film gate to be able to see the actual focusing point of the lens. The back of the Fed comes off, so access to the film gate is easy. Only, I don't have any ground glass. What I do have is a thread magnifier. Basically a small magnifier with a clear plastic plate at the point of focus. The plate is engraved with 1/10mm lines to allow small flat objects to be counted or measured. I had it from when I worked in a paper mill. So perhaps a bit of translucent tape or tracing paper fixed over the plate might give me both a focusing screen and a focus magnifier? I do also have a small sheet of clear 2mm plastic that is an off-cut from another job. I will try cutting a piece of the right size and matting it with some emery paper. And the winner is ... the thread magnifier with some tape on it.



105 2022: SLR – the perfect camera

For my next challenge I had to get access to the rangefinder adjusters. They are under the faceplate around the viewfinder. Online sources say to slide the metal plate to the left. So I gave the protruding nameplate a push to the left but it wouldn't budge, even with harsh language. So I took a closer look at what I might be missing, and found that there is a metal decorative plate on the front of the eyepiece that can be slid sideways. And there were the adjusters.



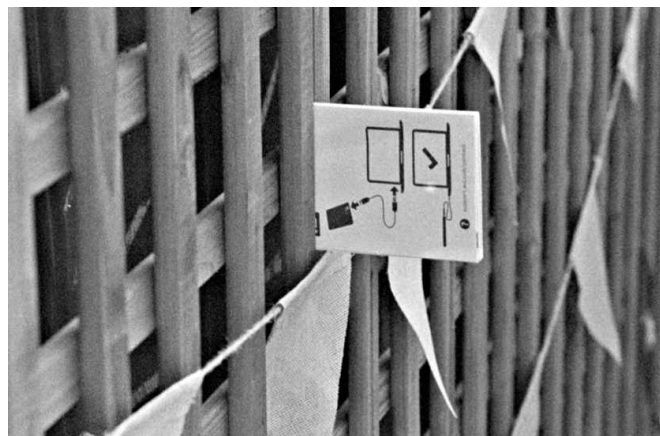
The method for adjusting the focus of the Fed is two-stage. Infinity focus and vertical alignment are adjusted with the main rangefinder controls (see my initial tweaks here¹⁰⁶). As the lens is screwed out away from the camera body to focus closer, a spring-loaded metal finger bears on the rear of the lens and moves out with it. The tip of the metal finger has a small cam, which is a tight press-fit onto the end of the finger. Twisting this cam makes the contact point with the lens move further in or out on the end of the metal finger.

So the method is to get infinity focus right, then focus closer and adjust the cam so that the image in the rangefinder concedes with what you can see in focus at the film gate, then check and adjust infinity focus again. You repeat these to hone-in on the best settings that

work both far and near. I picked 2m as my close distance test as it's easily achieved indoors and also suits the sort of distance you might shoot pictures of people.



And did it work? Well, it's a faff juggling the camera with the shutter held open on B and holding the thread magnifier I'm using to check focus. Until I remembered I have a locking cable release. That held the shutter open and gave me back a free hand to focus the lens. I was wary of how much force to use to twist the cam on the end of the rangefinder arm. And the screw for the rangefinder adjustment was locked with dab of paint which needed some initial force to break its seal. But then, I used to maintain my own motorbikes. When the manual says to drift out the spindle, you might think it's a gentle nudge. What it means is to put a piece of metal rod against the end of the spindle and belt it with a hammer. You know you've drifted it when you hear the spindle hit the far wall of the garage. So it was 'just' a case of offering a suitable level of violence to the camera. Once I thought it was adjusted, I took some test shots.



Right on the spot. Previously it was focussing behind the target.

The other thing I thought about was whether the focus worked with different lenses. The lens I'm using on the Fed is (I think) a [Tessar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tessar)¹⁰⁷ design. I have another lens on my other rangefinder that has a [Sonnar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeiss_Sonnar)¹⁰⁸ design. I'd heard that Sonnar lenses can [shift](#)¹⁰⁹ their focus point depending on aperture. But the only way to do this would be to put the camera

107 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tessar>

108 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeiss_Sonnar

on a tripod, focus it and then take a series of shots at differing apertures. One day perhaps, when I have nothing better to do. Until then, the Fed 5b is back in business.

109 <https://photo.stackexchange.com/questions/126913/is-focus-shift-inherent-in-the-zeiss-sonnar-lens-designs-more-so-than-other-len>

I heard it said (I'm sorry, I can't remember where) that amateurs are interested in cameras, enthusiasts in lenses and photographers in light. It makes a nice pithy aphorism but does nobody any favours.

So 'real photographers' can't be interested in cameras? And anyone who knows how their camera works can't be a photographer? I think the phrase we need here is *bollocks*. I've argued elsewhere¹¹⁰ that technical aptitude is on a scale and that we should ideally try to combine an interest in both outcomes and methods.

What is more useful to think about is not camera, lens or light, but camera, lens and light. They are three variables that can be combined to make a result. You could think of them as another exposure triangle¹¹¹.

The camera makes the picture possible and dictates the type of picture you can make. I wouldn't use a large format camera to shoot sports or action, for example. I know it's been done, but so has Morris Dancing. There are better ways, unless the difficulty is part of the intended¹¹² process. So the camera should be selected according to the job it has to do.



The lens makes the camera work and controls the type of picture. It lets you compress everything into the frame or isolate a detail¹¹³. Without a lens of some kind you can't form a picture. That light won't just focus itself, you know. So the lens should be selected to frame the subject and to achieve an effect in the image.

110 2023: Technical aptitude

111 2022: Stretching my exposure triangle

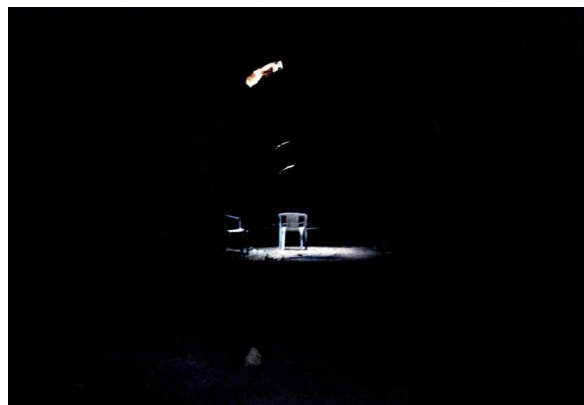
112 https://wiki.lspace.org/Dark_Morris

113 2021: Going to extremes



Ooh, that's a big Canon

And neither the camera nor the lens have any point without some light. But I think it's useful to also distinguish light as the subject from a subject which is lit. It's possible to make pictures where the subject or purpose is the beauty and placement of the light. It's also possible to make pictures where the purpose is the subject and the light serves to make the subject visible – think of photojournalism.



Interrogation time

Perhaps the ideal, and the art, is to be able to see and combine a good subject with the best lighting. Then to use the best lens to render the subject and lighting in the way you want. Then to use a camera that allows you to capture what you intended.

So I don't think the camera, lens, light axes are exclusive: you need to combine them. But perhaps what the original claim really means, and which I believe, is that your picture

starts with a lit subject. You then work back to the equipment and settings needed to capture what you saw. If you start at the other end, say with the camera, then you are led to find things to put in front of it. I think this is why I have some cameras and lenses I seldom use. Taking a camera for a walk feels boring and restrictive. What I prefer is to go for a walk and take a camera plus lens that suits the conditions, the things I might find and the type of pictures I have in mind. But, saying that, I have used the constraint of a particular combination¹¹⁴ of camera and lens as a method of getting out of a rut and trying something new. It was never meant to be the starting point though, just a way of taking constraints to an extreme. It does make the point though, that starting with the camera is the wrong way round.

Fiat lux, as the Romans used to say.

114 2020: The Konstruktor challenge

Can you, or should you, separate the artist from their art? If someone made fantastic pictures but was a complete rissole (as we say in front of the kids), could you continue to like what they produced? Would that change if your appreciation gave them money, perhaps from buying their work?

I'm thinking of a [cartoonist](#)¹¹⁵ I used to like. Initially I liked his work so much I bought some of his books, that were collections of his cartoon strips. Then a couple of his books had writing in, which the author used to express his ideas on management and physics. The first was misguided and the second was crazy. Or to use [Murray](#)¹¹⁶ Gell-Man's phrase: 'not even wrong'. Then the author became a supporter of Trump. And then made some racist comments. I had stopped reading his stuff when he went off the rails with his written ideas and had given his books away to a charity shop. I'd stopped following his cartoons after I heard his paean to Trump, but I was still disappointed that he followed-through as a racist. I should have listened to a [real](#)¹¹⁷ artist – "when someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time".

In this case it was easy to drop the art with the artist. But there are other artists whose work is better, but who are also rissoles of the first degree. Racist and anti-vax musicians, violent and misogynistic painters, Nazi photographers¹¹⁸. So is it possible, or even morally right, to appreciate the art while disliking the artist? The problem is of course, that appreciating the art often sends money to the artist. There is also an odd halo effect that people who are good at one thing are thought to be good in general. Why else do artists or actors get asked their views on current affairs? The same effect makes us think that people who are beautiful or rich are also good. So a talented artist who looks nice and has a bit of cash is assumed to be both clever and correct. And when we pay for the art, our money makes the artist famous and virtuous. This confirms to them that their beliefs must be correct. Unfortunately, we give them [status](#)¹¹⁹.

Imagine a picture here. I have the picture but I'm not sharing it. I was walking on a beach and found a cardboard figure stuck in the sand. From the back of the beach it looked like a person coming in from the sea and up the small dunes. The figure was a caricature of one of the Black and White [Minstrels](#)¹²⁰. I can hope that the figure was planted in the sand as a protest and to make fun of our Home [Secretary](#)¹²¹. But I have no wish for anyone to have access to this picture and potentially cause harm or distress. Private [Eye](#)¹²² maybe, but nobody else.

115 <https://boingboing.net/2023/02/27/magabert.html>

116 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murray_Gell-Mann

117 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_Angelou

118 2021: Who do you follow?

119 <https://www.wob.com/en-gb/books/will-storr/status-game/9780008354671>

120 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Black_and_White_Minstrel_Show

121 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/nov/01/bravermans-invasion-claim-not-backed-by-facts-say-experts>

122 <https://private-eye.co.uk/>



Equally contentious, in many places

Which leads to another question: can nice people make good art? Do you have to be at odds with society or yourself to be creative? Probably not – there are [people](#)¹²³ who are or were very creative but who also seem to be decent and normal. Let me reinforce that: I don't think there is any justification for being bad, no matter what art you produce. Being a bad or nasty person detracts from your art, because it makes me question the value of it (plus being nasty is bad in itself, whether you make art or not). I might like what you have produced but I will always worry that liking it validates your views or behaviour. I believe it is true though that to make art you must be vulnerable, in the sense of being open to the world. But perhaps I've shot down my own argument, in that bad people can also make good art? So I'm back to trying to separate the art from the artist, or wondering if I should.

Of course there is a counter-argument that people with unpopular views are unfairly repressed in what John Stuart [Mill](#)¹²⁴ called the tyranny of the majority. But I think we are generally smart enough to tell the difference between hate and dissent. If you seek or cause harm or deficit to others, you are hateful. I think this solves what is being called cancel culture – the way filtering should work is that we do not support anyone calling for harm or deficit to others, but we should listen to anyone wanting to challenge our ideas or beliefs.



So I think I need to vote with my morals and try not to fund or support people who are bad (as I defined it). Of course they have a right to free speech (as long as they don't try to

¹²³ <https://www.alanfletcherarchive.com/home>

¹²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Stuart_Mill

harm others and take responsibility for their views), but I have the right to not pay them attention. In debating it is considered bad form to make an ad hominem attack: to criticise the person and not their ideas, but that is in an artificial environment where it is only the ideas that should be argued. If we separate the art from the artist, I think we can legitimately criticise a person's behaviour independently of their work.

I agree totally with John Stuart Mill's set of basic [liberties](#)¹²⁵, and these mean that the artist of whom I disapprove is free to do as they wish (causing no harm), but I don't have to pay them any money or time. Actually, I have an example of just that thing. I went to a talk by a famous photographer who turned-out to be a rather unpleasant character. I'd been uneasy about his work, but the talk was an opportunity to hear the photographer's intentions. What he did was to clarify my dislike. His attitude to his subjects means that I can't now look at his work without remembering his views, so I won't be following his work or recommending it. As the motto has it *brevior vita es quam pro futumentibus negotiam agendo*.

125 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On_Liberty

If good means perfect then we have seen the rise of the good, followed by the return of the imperfect. Digital killed analogue, then analogue rose from the grave, but digital is winding-up a super double-[punch](#)¹²⁶ to be launched by AI.

What got me thinking was an (old) [essay](#)¹²⁷ by Glenn [Gould](#)¹²⁸ on the rise of recorded classical music and the possible demise of live concerts. He wrote about the heinous crime of splicing tape recordings together to make a perfect performance from multiple takes. He also wrote about how recordings had changed the sound of classical music. With a recording the sound is not at the mercy of the concert hall's acoustics and even solo instruments could be made audible.

Compare that with digital photography and tools like Photoshop. The analogy would be a change from something like slide film, where everything had to be right first time¹²⁹, to digital where 'fix it in post' became a thing. I've written before about how older analogue pictures weren't technically very good. But now we praise pictures for their sharpness and employ software to make them [sharper](#)¹³⁰ or reduce the appearance of [noise](#)¹³¹.

And then, just as we were putting on our shades because the future was so bright, analogue awoke. I never thought I'd see cassette tapes again. I thought the same of vinyl records, but even Ikea is selling a record player. Film is making a gradual revival, even though we've lost a lot of the ability¹³² to make it (or the cameras to use it in). But where there is a demand there will be someone to take money for it, such as the Leica [M6](#)¹³³. I doubt we'll ever see an Ikea camera, but there may yet be something that fills the gap between Lomo and Loco.

126 https://www.mariowiki.com/Double_Punch

127 <https://worldradiohistory.com/Archive-All-Audio/High-Fidelity-Magazine.htm>

128 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glenn_Gould

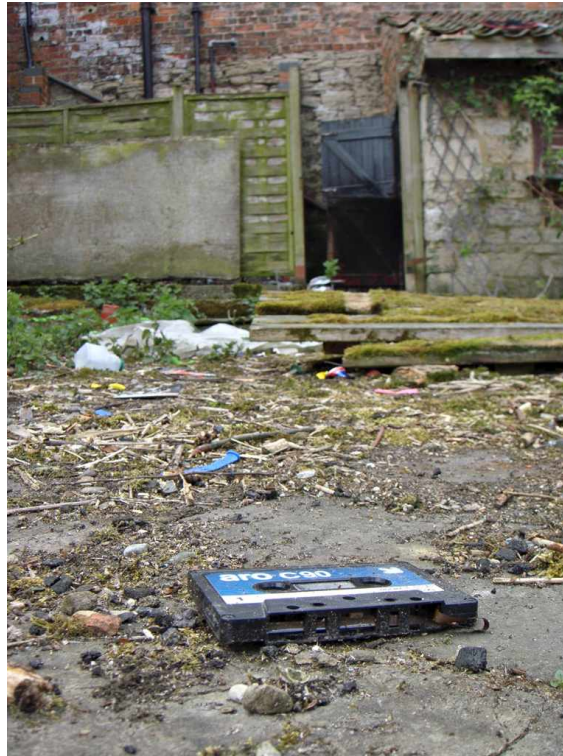
129 2021: The commitments

130 <https://www.diyphotography.net/the-best-ai-photo-sharpening-in-2022-compared/>

131 <https://www.diyphotography.net/noise-removal-comparison-adobe-photoshop-vs-luminar-neo-vs-topaz-sharpen-ai-vs-on1-nonnoise-ai/>

132 2022: Come the zombie apocalypse

133 https://www.photographyblog.com/news/legendary_leica_m6_rangefinder_returns_for_new_generation



Forgotten, but not gone

But then there is the Rise of the [Machines](#)¹³⁴. AI-based utilities can generate pictures from a description. This can remove the need for any craft skill and allow anyone to be creative. I still expect the best pictures will be created by the most creative people though, as it's their imagination that counts, not their tools. So where companies once hired people who were good with Photoshop, they will be hiring people who can imagine the best descriptions or can train the AIs on the best sources.



Perhaps I need a better description? This was 'elephant riding a bus'.

¹³⁴ https://m.imdb.com/title/tt0181852/?ref_=ext_shr_lnk



So was this

Give it a few years though and we could be seeing the resurgence of darkroom printing or the use of live models in reaction to (what will be thought of as) effortless automation. Grant [Morrison](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grant_Morrison)¹³⁵ dealt with the waves of changing approach as style superseded style. He invoked the Sekhmet [Hypothesis](https://www.wob.com/en-gb/category/all)¹³⁶, which says that there is an 11 year cycle of solar magnetism that moves us between hippy and punk, or introspective to explorative. Not that I can even pretend to understand the theory, but I can see how styles or movements break out, dominate and then fade as they are seen to be establishment, ready to be crushed by the New Wave. Indeed, if you want to know how this works with art, read *What are you looking at?* by Will [Gompertz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bell-bottoms)¹³⁷.

What shall we do then? If you are an artist, then I expect you will be either exploiting the potential of the new or creating it. As new tools arise we can use them, but we will be guided by what we want to be able to do. I suppose this is a plea to use the tools rather than let the tools use us. Just because I can shoot sharp pictures doesn't mean that all my pictures must be sharp. Just because I can ask an AI to make me a [picture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bell-bottoms)¹³⁸ of hamsters doing the dance of the seven veils, doesn't mean I wouldn't have more fun and reward from making a picture of which I'm capable. I might take a look at the clever noise reduction tools to see if I can rescue some old pictures, but I'm not going to make a career out of it.

But apart from all the wittering, it looks like we're living in interesting times. But I think we always have. What about you though? Surfing the AI wave, making mix tapes or looking for a new [stacked](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bell-bottoms)¹³⁹ stereo system? Or waiting for the next sunspot cycle to bring back [flares](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bell-bottoms)¹⁴⁰?

135 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grant_Morrison

136 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sekhmet_Hypothesis

137 <https://www.wob.com/en-gb/category/all>

138 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_34

139 <https://www.cambridgeaudio.com/usa/en/blog/how-should-you-stack-your-hi-fi-units>

140 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bell-bottoms>



Not even funny

Seth Godin has a [view](#)¹⁴¹ on this that may resonate: “If your work isn’t more useful or insightful or urgent than [GPT](#)¹⁴² can create in 12 seconds, don’t interrupt people with it. Technology begins by making old work easier, but then it requires that new work be better.”

Or there is always [XKCD](#)¹⁴³.

Just before going to press, I saw that the Canny Man has done a good piece on [promptography](#)¹⁴⁴.

141 <https://seths.blog/2022/12/attention-trust-and-gpt3/>

142 <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-63861322>

143 <https://xkcd.com/1289>

144 <https://austerityphoto.co.uk/wake-up-and-smell-the-virtual-coffee-the-rapid-rise-of-ai-photorealistic-images/#more-6903>

How much time do you spend organising your picture files or negatives? How about documents or files? Compare that with how much time you spend looking for them.

I worked at a place where one department in the business made large efforts to properly file their shared documents. They built trees of folders within folders (within... you get the idea). They made recursion into an art form. This meant that some files could rightly be saved in more than one place. So they did. So they lost track of which version of the file was the most recent, or they edited one copy and caused the others to be inaccurate. And unless you completely understood the filing system, you couldn't find anything or you saved your files somewhere that made sense to you. Then they hit the next wall – that Windows needs the name of a folder tree to be unique within the first 256 characters. As the folders became ever more nested they hit the limit. Files could be seen but not saved or moved. There was a sense of humour crisis and an outbreak of tetchyness.

What's this got to do with you? Because sometimes the appearance of organisation causes harm and frustration.

There are some simple¹⁴⁵ methods of filing and finding pictures that go wide rather than deep. Search tools are very good. I use Agent [Ransack](https://www.mythicsoft.com/agentransack/)¹⁴⁶ but if you are at the commercial level of filing and storage, go for the full version (File [Locator](https://www.mythicsoft.com/filelocatorpro/) Pro¹⁴⁷). It can find just about anything, anywhere. If you think you may have duplicate copies of files, try Duplicate File [Detective](https://www.duplicatedetective.com/features/whatsnew)¹⁴⁸. If, like me, you may have several copies of the same picture in different places, use something like Duplicate Photos [Finder](https://www.duplicate-finder.com/photo.html)¹⁴⁹. Another tool that is a charm for files spread across multiple drives is a utility from the Sith [Lords](https://www.microsoft.com/en-gb/store/top-free/apps/pc?category=Utilities+%26+tools)¹⁵⁰ of computing themselves. SyncToy can compare pairs of folders or folder trees and move the most recent copy of each file into one of them. Basically, grab the most recent versions of files from a bunch of drives or storage cards and put them all into one place. I also use it to make backups, as it can copy only new or newer files and so saves time.

145 2019: Catting logs

146 <https://www.mythicsoft.com/agentransack/>

147 <https://www.mythicsoft.com/filelocatorpro/>

148 <https://www.duplicatedetective.com/features/whatsnew>

149 <https://www.duplicate-finder.com/photo.html>

150 <https://www.microsoft.com/en-gb/store/top-free/apps/pc?category=Utilities+%26+tools>



Was it under B for bird or L for lunch?

... And a brief diversion – before we moved house I had a lot of books; around 750. They were spread across multiple shelves and rooms. I catalogued them using a phone application that scans the barcode and uses the [ISBN](https://www.isbn-international.org/content/international-isbn-agency-1)¹⁵¹ to get the book's details. I recorded which shelf each book was on and saved myself wandering about the house. It also meant that if I found some pre-loved treasure in a charity shop I could tell at once if I already had a copy. The key thing though was that the location had no finer detail than which set of shelves a book was on. That was good enough to find it, and resilient to putting the book back in a different place on the shelf. The lesson learned was from the Department mentioned above, where perfection failed to survive reality.

You could also try an organisational tip that comes from caching theory, called [LRU](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cache_replacement_policies)¹⁵² or least recently used. Whenever you take a physical file or folder out of a filing drawer, put it back at the front of the drawer. Very soon the things you use most will be at the front. If it's a stack or pile, put things back on the top and the things you want most will be where they are easiest to find. For files on a computer, see if you can change the view to put the most recently used or changed items at the top.



151 <https://www.isbn-international.org/content/international-isbn-agency-1>

152 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cache_replacement_policies

Why do you care? Because as the number of files and folders increases (like 1,000 picture shoots¹⁵³) things get harder to find. And as even [Obama](#)¹⁵⁴ said, life is too short to bubble-sort.

153 2021: Winning

154 <https://youtu.be/koMpGeZpu4Q>

I hear the *nouveaux filmistas* talking of ‘the look of film’, but what is it? Is there a magic or secret sauce that film has and digital can’t do?

From looking at old Photography Year Books¹⁵⁵ or magazines¹⁵⁶ I could say that the traditional film look is low dynamic range, odd colours, grain and [blur](#)¹⁵⁷. But equally, I’ve got digital pictures that look like I doodled them in crayon while blindfolded.

I know in the early days of digital it was easy to tell them apart. Digital had a visual smoothness – a lack of fine detail or grain. Not so much the grain though – it was perfectly possible to make smooth and grainless film images (if only I’d learned how). I think it was the lack of fine detail. And then digital got more pixels and a wider dynamic range and it could be as fine or as gnarly as film. So what now is the film look?



Film or digital, and why?

I can add grain to a digital picture if I want to. I can emulate¹⁵⁸ the colours of Kodak or Fuji or almost any brand or age of film. Crush the shadows to black? Put a halo around the highlights? All easy enough. Double exposures? I used to think this was only possible on film, but then I learned how to do it with digital. So what is the magic that only film has?

155 2018: Fuzzy Duck

156 2020: National Geographic

157 <https://www.diyphotography.net/how-to-create-a-realistic-vintage-lens-effect-in-adobe-photoshop/>

158 2021: The great pretender



Film or digital, and why?

I wonder if the look of film is actually the rendering of the older lenses we used? If I put an old film-era [lens](#)¹⁵⁹ onto a digital sensor, would I get the magical look of film without the inconvenience? Maybe what people call the look of film is the look of older lenses? And what happens if I use a modern digital-era highly corrected lens on a film camera? Do I get the *look of digital*?

I think film has a couple of unique things, but you won't see them in the final image. One is longevity: film is a physical medium and if you hold it up to the light you will understand that it contains pictures. This is less obvious with a memory card. So even if we can no longer read an [old](#)¹⁶⁰ storage medium, we can scan or project film. The other is that you can revisit film with newer technology and get more out of it. I upgraded my scanner some years back and got better scans. Then I learned to use my scanner and got even better scans. My digital files will never reveal more detail than they already have. Actually, there's a third thing – I can tell my analogue images apart from my digital by the scratches, dust and hairs.

But am I missing something? Is there a *film look* that only film has?

159 <https://www.cinemablend.com/news/2567675/how-zack-snyder-captured-those-dreamlike-out-of-focus-images-for-army-of-the-dead>

160 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Floppy_disk

“Take your photography to the next level” the article said. My first thought was “there are levels?” I know that education is stratified to match levels of qualification, but photography is basically a craft skill used to make art. The article (and similar articles) treat it more like a computer game. They are not saying that you could develop from [GCSE](#)¹⁶¹ photography to [HNC](#)¹⁶², more that you can vanquish the troll, find the ruby and start a more difficult stage. So, in the absence of formal steps in qualification, what are these levels of clever?

I’m also wondering how to recognise a level. I’ve got an alphabetti-spaghetti of qualifications gained over the centuries. Some relate to levels of learning, others to levels of skill. My diving qualifications show that I can be trusted to do certain things but I don’t have the experience to do some others. That makes us all safer. I have no formal qualifications in photography, but I do have some experience. This puts me at an undefined level of skill. The odd thing though is that we can all usually discern competence – we can usually tell who is good and can put a set of people in order of skill (Dunning-Kruger [aside](#)¹⁶³). But computer games often have a scoreboard that shows the highest-scoring players. So I wonder if using the ‘next level’ phrase is meant to make the reader think of moving themselves up the ranking? And since there is no scoreboard, it has to be the one in the reader’s head where they imagine themselves in a line-up of beginner to best.



One thing I have learned though, is that there is always someone better at a thing, so no matter what I learn there will always be someone better. No-one has my mix of qualities though, which saves me from feeling totally inadequate. But for any one area of skill, there will be someone better (and worse). It’s not a bad thing, it’s just the way it is. I don’t think of it as separate levels though, more as a continuum. There is also this T-shaped [profile](#)¹⁶⁴

161 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Certificate_of_Secondary_Education

162 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higher_National_Certificate

163 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunning%E2%80%93Kruger_effect

164 <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/management/t-shaped-skills/>

that the business people talk about. This is used for someone who has deep technical skills in one area combined with wider skills in collaboration. Of course, no idea can be left unmolested, so we also have X-shaped skills, I-shaped skills and whatever else you can imagine. I'm going to tell people my skills are coffee-shaped.



Is that a sign of too much or too little?

But shaped skills has nothing to do with levels. And because this idea of 'taking it to the next level' seems to have no connection to a measurable or definable change in competence, I will assume that it's using the language of gaming. So it's an enticement to move up the scoreboard in your head and take pleasure in having some secret knowledge that makes you better than others. When you put it like that it doesn't sound so nice, does it? And if other people read the same article, what are you going to do next to go up yet another level?



The nice thing about knowledge though, is that it is not diminished by sharing. If you pass-on your knowledge to someone, you don't reduce the amount you have. Indeed, if you try to explain something, it tests and increases your own [understanding](https://e-student.org/feynman-technique/)¹⁶⁵. It's also true that you won't retain a skill that you don't practice. Or perhaps we say that there's no point in trying to learn a skill that you won't use. So instead of moving up the scoreboard we would be better learning things as we need them, and then explaining them to someone else to improve our understanding.

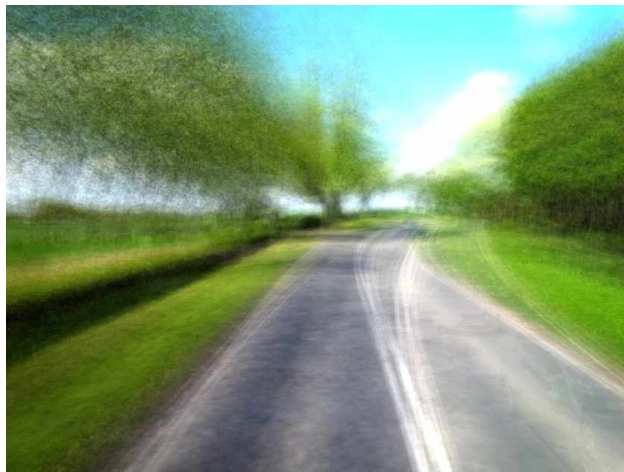
¹⁶⁵ <https://e-student.org/feynman-technique/>



But perhaps I'm over-thinking it. Perhaps every one of these articles is about improving a specific skill, but the headline uses an idea from gaming to make it sound more exciting and competitive? I'm just as bad: I title these posts with puns because it amuses me. A camera review needs little more than the make and model, but an article like this uses the same phrase that I'm moaning about. I'm off to sit on the [naughty](#)¹⁶⁶ step, but I still think that describing an improved skill as moving up a level sounds odd.

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.supernanny.co.uk/Advice/-/Parenting-Skills/-/Discipline-and-Reward/The-Naughty-Step--what-is-it-and-how-does-it-work.aspx>

I've had some fun taking blurred pictures. I'd taken some in years past¹⁶⁷, but my interest was reawakened listening to a podcast [interview](#)¹⁶⁸ with Bill Ward. So I thought I'd take my camera out for a shake. And I liked it.



I tend to go walking in places that are good for a stroll with the dog, rather than with any photographic merit. So not the sort of places that give me the itch to make pictures. It was Bill's description of waving his lens about that made me remember it as a method. Like I say, I'd done this before but the change from listening to Bill was to use intentional camera movement for every shot rather than the odd one or two.



This was liberating. Sometimes I take a camera for a walk and either feel pressured to use it or anxious that I didn't. Or I take trite record shots that I never want to see again. Instead I was looking for areas of tone or contrast that could be smudged into impressionist renderings. The joy of doing this with digital is the immediate feedback on how well my waving worked. And being able to have another go for free.

167 2021: ICM

168 <https://photowalk.show/episodes/bill-ward-photo-assignment>



Perhaps the best measure was a visiting judge at the photo club, who saw one of my fragmented multiple exposures and said he had no idea what it was but he didn't like it. That feels like listening to bands that your parents hate.

So what I have learned so far:

- Move the camera in the direction of the subject. Vertical movements for trees and grass, horizontal for waves or landscapes.
- Underexpose a bit, as the highlights can burn out.
- Sweeping into the highlight area seems to work best.
- You may have to find out how to get a slow enough shutter speed. Low ISO and aperture-priority (with the smallest aperture) will help. I haven't resorted to an ND filter yet, but I probably will once winter withdraws.
- Multiple exposures work well with repeating patterns or with [motion](#)¹⁶⁹.

Do have a go, if only to get back to the joy of playing. I do know that it's cheering me up and has brought some mojo to my moping.



¹⁶⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nude_Descending_a_Staircase,_No._2

This is a 500 ISO aerial reconnaissance film. It's on a very thin base, probably to get as many shots as possible from the film canister. You don't want to break-off from flying the plane to reload the camera. The Washi data [sheet](#)¹⁷⁰ says it's panchromatic, high contrast and medium grain. The thin backing can also light-pipe, so it needs to be loaded and unloaded in dim light. To try it I loaded it first into an Olympus XA and then swapped to a Praktica to finish the roll.

The first impression is that it is indeed very thin. The leader feels almost flimsy but don't be fooled – I believe polyester based films are strong enough to break the camera before they will tear. The Washi data sheet says to wind three frames at the beginning of the film because of the risk of light piping. It looks like there is at least 36 frames worth of film after the first three, as it went well past the 36 counter on the camera. Thanks Washi – no skimping.

Loading the film onto a Paterson reel was ... challenging. The film is very thin and has to be coaxed into the start of the reel. The slightest sweat from your hands and it starts to stick in the grooves and ratchets. But channel your Zen calmness or wear surgical gloves, and it will load.

Having got it on the reel, what should I develop it with? I'm using 510-Pyro these days, but there are no times for this film on the Zone Imaging website and no times for this developer on the Washi site. But the Washi data sheet does say to use times for Ilford Pan F in other developers, and the 510-Pyro sheet says 7:30 at 1:100 dilution. So seven and a half minutes it is, with Ilford-pattern agitation.

Hurrah! A long strip of negatives arose from the developing tank. At first glance they do look quite contrasty, but the staining effect of the 510-Pyro may have calmed that a bit. The seven and a half minutes looks about right. There are no edge markings or frame numbers. Why bother when the film was probably bulk-loaded into large magazines?

The first few frames did show some evidence of light-piping at the edges, so the guidance is correct.

When it came to scanning I was reminded again that the film was thin. It's not as aggressively curly as some films, but it does bend as there is nothing to stop it. It doesn't cup like Tri-X or curl like Rollei 80s, but it does twist. But, saying that, it lies flat in the negative holder and doesn't fight back. I've had some other films I thought I'd have to use tape to get them to stay put. This stuff is tame but delicate.

¹⁷⁰ https://filmwashi.com/en/products/specialty_films/



And the verdict? It's OK. It can hold some shadow detail and it does show some grain. It's fine, but it is not different enough to become a regular film for me. If it really stood out in one area I would cope with handling it, but its thin base means I'll stick to Kentmere 400 as my fast film of choice. Full credit to Mr [Perrotin](https://filmwashi.com/en/about/)¹⁷¹ for producing it though.

¹⁷¹ <https://filmwashi.com/en/about/>



Who knew that German philosophical ideas of art and play would resonate with my feelings about photography? Lots of people I expect, as I do seem to stumble into things that are widely known. Many times I've gone all swivel-eyed and wavey-armed to my wife with the latest thing I have discovered, to be told that everyone knows this and I should just calm down. But let me play this one past you, as it made a little lightbulb switch on over my head.

First up is Karl Groos. He [wrote](#)¹⁷² about the reason and need for play. One of his observations was the delight of an infant in discovering that an action like a waving arm could have an effect, like moving something. And it can be repeated, which makes it better. This is the idea of finding pleasure at being the cause: discovering you have agency in the world. It resonated with me because I still get great satisfaction from doing things or making things work. This is part of my love of photography: I can record¹⁷³ what I see in a way that captures how I saw it. It's the pleasure in turning vision into image. To me it really does feel like playing, and playing of the best sort, which is exercising one's abilities for the joy of doing so.



Next up is someone whose ideas Karl Groos may have built on – Friedrich Schiller. He [wrote](#)¹⁷⁴ that the desire to create art is a manifestation of the urge to play as the exercise of freedom for its own sake. So art comes from play and the freedom to play. Who said that German philosophers were a dour bunch? They may have been known for *sturm und drang*¹⁷⁵, but they also played *topfschlagen*¹⁷⁶.

172 <https://archive.org/details/playofman00groouoft>

173 2022: What does photography mean to me?

174 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Schiller

175 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sturm_und_Drang

176 <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topfschlagen>

This brightened my little lightbulb even more. Creativity does feel to me like the best sort of playing. I could just point a camera at something and record it, but that is dull. Or I could use what I know and what I fancy experimenting with to see if I can make something that pleases me more. This is one of the reasons I like fuzzygrams¹⁷⁷: I'm giving up precision for play. It's the same sense that led me to make a reflective diffuser¹⁷⁸ to see if I could improve my underwater pictures. I could probably have bought something clever and purpose-made, but it pleased me more to try solving a problem with almost nothing. It can also go wrong – like when I checked into a hotel carrying a cardboard box instead of a suitcase. The circumstances made it practical, but the embarrassment nearly did for the wife. It's also probably why I'm useless at games. I love playing, but I don't care who wins and have no inclination to win myself. So not only am I denied cardboard boxes, but the family only play card and board games with me to remind themselves why they shouldn't. Or to get an easy win.



But getting back to photography, the idea of creativity as play resonates strongly with me. It's not because I want to be able to say I'm playing, but because it's the best description I've met of how I feel. I think it also explains why I use weird or difficult¹⁷⁹ cameras – it's part of the game. Of course, I've no idea what creativity feels like to other people, but I'd be interested to know if it feels like playing.

177 2023: Fuzzygrams

178 2023: Chilly dip

179 2020: The Konstruktor challenge

Every-day carry: the collective name for a panoply of multi-functional gadgets meant to save you from the zombie apocalypse or to open beer bottles in the woods. But I find that my compact digital camera is becoming my EDC, even though it has neither a screwdriver nor scissors. The reason is that it combines good enough with small enough.



Great for opening things, rubbish for taking pictures.

There are many times I go out for reasons other than photography. If I am going out to take pictures I'll take the right kit but often the pictures are a side effect rather than the reason. For example, I recently walked a chunk of the Pembrokeshire coastal path. The reason was to walk it and enjoy it, not to document it. But I took a camera (er... four) along for the walk. What I wanted as my main camera was one that was good enough, but not an anchor. My chosen EDC job lived happily in a pouch around my neck and could be used as the urge took me without shedding the rucksack to get a bigger camera out (then swap lenses, take a light reading...). So I used it more often than the recluse in the rucksack.

It's not particularly slim and tiny. That award goes to the Sony¹⁸⁰ that is genuinely pocket sized. But where the Sony is small enough to carry all the time, this camera has just enough features to make it a viable alternative to the 'big camera'. If I'm going out to take pictures, the big camera¹⁸¹ is the one to take. It has every feature¹⁸² and works with every lens I own. But if I am not sure that I might take pictures then I want something that could still do a reasonable job but will sit in the background until needed. It's also useful to have a camera that can actually be carried every day. An SLR might be the perfect¹⁸³ camera, but it's a bit of a brick to carry everywhere on the off-chance I might need it.

I'm not the first to do this. Back when the world was young and I was but a lad, my best friend and I were keen amateur photographers. We each used to carry at least one

180 2020: Sony cybershot t77 the new Pen

181 2022: Second cheapest

182 2022: Stretching my exposure triangle

183 2022: SLR – the perfect camera

camera body and three lenses everywhere we went. Then one day he turned up with an Olympus Trip. He used his legs to zoom and was very happy with the results. I resisted for a while and then ended-up with an Olympus¹⁸⁴ XA, and I can still remember the freedom of a camera I could carry in a pocket.

So my every-day *carry this so that I have a camera if I need one* camera is a bit bigger than the XA but far more useful. There is a built-in ND filter (probably just a way of dropping the sensitivity of the sensor) so that I can do ICM when I feel like it. I can change the ISO and exposure and have more control than with something that is fully automatic. It saves raw files so that I can tweak the images later. Best of all, it fits in a coat pocket. It matches the idea of the EDC gadget, if you think of something like a Swiss Army Knife. You wouldn't use one to put shelves up – there are proper tools for that – but it's immediately available and mostly useful.



I won this for being best Scout on camp. I should explain that the pale streak is luminous paint and the red tape is reflective.

I suppose bridge cameras were meant to do this. The idea, I assume, was that they were better than a compact camera but smaller and less intimidating than an SLR. But they are not that much smaller than an SLR and have an awkward shape with a protruding lens. The intention of the original Barnack Leica [cameras](https://mrleica.com/barnack-leica-comparison/)¹⁸⁵ was that they were pocket sized, with a retracting lens. That concept still works, but not with a bridge camera.

Perhaps mirrorless cameras are the thing? They are very capable and the camera body is quite small. They do seem to eat batteries though and depending on the lens fitted they can be as big as a bridge camera. My compact camera has a retracting lens (so you could say it's like a Leica) which makes it easier to carry around. I guess that's what compact means.

So I think I'm settled on my EDC. It's an older model compact digital camera with a zoom lens. The prices were pretty reasonable on the usual online bazaar, but seem to have increased sharply recently. The zoom lens goes quite long, and it does have some image stabilisation. It doesn't go really wide at the other end. This isn't too bad most of the time but is a bit restrictive where I intended the camera to mainly be used: underwater. On the other hand, when I was looking for a better underwater camera one of these came along at

184 2022: Olympus XA

185 <https://mrleica.com/barnack-leica-comparison/>

the right price. The lens retracts back into the body, so the package is not too large to carry around casually. I also like that once I develop a good configuration of settings, I can save them as a profile.



If you don't mind that the lens cover doesn't shut properly, the price is much lower.

But, if you've been reading my chunterings you'll know that I've already broken two of these cameras. One failed due to loose screws inside the camera, the other when I flooded it with water. I've got another two that work, as they were cheap enough at the time. That's not a good recommendation, but they do get a hard life. And the camera was at a good balance point between price and features, which is also the measure of everyday use. There do seem to be a lot of "spares or repair" ones (broken, but let's see if someone will buy it) on eBay though. That may be a warning.

Of course there are alternatives. For film I have my original Olympus XA, but that has a fixed focal length. Perhaps a better comparison is the Pentax Espio¹⁸⁶. This has a wide zoom, clever exposure and flash modes and does a good job. It's actually bigger than the Canon though, and noisier in use. The XA wins here by being almost silent.

So while I appear to be extolling the virtues of the Canon G9, it's more the concept I like than the specific camera. The Canon is one example of a set of well-packaged and useful cameras that are good enough for "serious" photography, and small enough to fit into the set of *keys, wallet, phone* when you go out. And a decent camera is much more useful than some combined fire lighter, bone saw and fish hook that usually passes for everyday necessity.

Do it now

13 July 2023

This idea came from someone who was also describing a bout¹⁸⁷ of the *can't be bothered blues*. Their remedy was to get their images processed and viewed on the same day they were made. The idea was to retain the excitement of making the images and to get

186 2020: Pentax Espio 928

187 2023: Bored of the things

immediate feedback. If you were excited enough to fire the shutter, then you should be excited to see the result. Leave it too long and you won't remember why you took the picture, which feeds back into the feeling that you shouldn't have bothered.

This sounds like it should be simpler with digital as there is no development or processing to be done. But you still need the discipline to pull the images out of the camera, look at them, label them and (in my case) delete the flops. Even if it seems simple it still needs to be done, and the temptation with simple jobs is to put them off because they are simple. And then you end-up with a mountain of simple.



Following the job right through immediately also avoids the problem where the backlog of delayed processing becomes a chore, so you put it off. And since it is the nature of backlogs to grow, the anticipated pain increases too, until you can't be bothered again. So pause now to count: how many undeveloped films or unread memory cards do you have, watching you silently and remorsefully? I know that cataloguing the pictures can be an admin arse-ache, but it's the only way you will find them again or make use of them. That's why I use the quickest and simplest¹⁸⁸ system I can – the only useful [filing](#)¹⁸⁹ is escaping from jail.



So having brought your pictures to visibility, what do you do next? Mull. Put the ones you like in a place where you will see them. Small prints are good, but I've also previously set them up as a screensaver slideshow. Anything that puts the pictures in front of your eyes is what you need. You will then work out which ones you like, which ones could use some improvement and which ones don't work at all. If you are thinking of putting a set of pictures together this also lets you test the order. As an example, I put together a photobook of pictures for my mum. The centre pages had portraits of mum and dad on left

188 2019: Catting logs

189 <https://silverscreenings.org/2017/02/15/buster-keaton-and-the-important-things-in-life/>

and right pages facing in to each other. The rest of the pages flowed out from that pair. It may sound trite, but it was better than having them face apart or be on separate pages.



Early version, seen in Rome

The idea of letting a picture soak for a while works for me in checking the tone or look of the image. I tend to do my tweaks and then wait a while. After I have seen the image a few times, I will often (usually) go back and change the contrast or colour saturation. Usually these are to make the picture less startling, but sometime to push an aspect of the picture even harder. I have some infrared pictures that I often go back to, to push the contrast even harder. What's the point of dramatic lighting if it isn't dramatic?



So I guess the message is to process the images quickly after making them, to maintain the excitement. Then to live with the results for a while to make them more like what you intended and to get them in the right order. Then do something with them.

Start now.

There's one thing about Prakticas – they made a lot of them and they seem to last. Actually, that's two things, and I'm not going to start a Spanish [Inquisition](#)¹⁹⁰ routine. That aside, they do seem to be the VW Beetle of cameras.

I came across this one as a camera body in a box of '£5 per item' bits at a camera fair. The shutter speeds seemed to run in progression and it focused with a borrowed lens, so why not? The light seal material at one end of the film door was perished, but it was a quick job to replace. The cover of the battery chamber was seized, usually a sign that the battery has leaked. Take the bottom plate off the camera and the battery holder lifts out. Fit a new battery, refit the bottom plate and ... no meter. Oh well, I'll have another go at cleaning the battery contacts and if that doesn't work, I have a light meter¹⁹¹.

This model is the Super TL 1000 which [dates](#)¹⁹² it to 1979-86. It's the fourth generation of these cameras, with through-lens metering (or not) and a vertically-run metal shutter. It has their weird take-up spool arrangement which I have struggled with, but I'll have another go with it. I've not got on well with it before¹⁹³, but they made enough of these cameras that the fault is probably me not having the knack.



So I had a tweak of the battery contacts and the meter needle now moves. Unfortunately it completely over-reads, so something in the electronics was possibly damaged by the leaking battery. More likely though is that I'm using the wrong voltage battery. This camera may have been set-up to use a 1.35v mercury cell. I'll try using a zinc-air battery and see if that works better. I also had a go at loading the camera and the take-up spool caught and worked first time. It must have been my awkwardness in the past, so I take back most of what I've said about Praktica's odd bit of wire. And now it's loaded, I might as well use it.

So yes, it works just like a camera. The focusing screen has a split image and microprism and seems to work well enough. It has a pop-up flag in the viewfinder to show that the shutter has been fired and the camera needs winding. The film advance is a short stroke. Because it came as a body it got taken out to play with a Helios 58mm and a Pentax

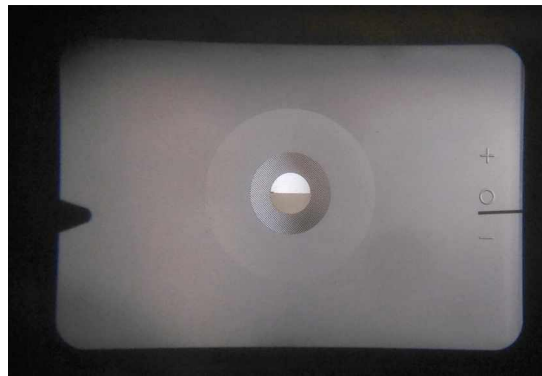
190 <https://youtu.be/T2ncJ6ciGyM>

191 2020: A cheap digital light meter

192 http://camera-wiki.org/wiki/Praktica_super_TL_1000

193 2022: Praktica LTL

35mm lenses. There's nothing wrong with screw-mount lenses and there's plenty to choose from. Their only downside is that they are slow to swap. But Prakticas are cheap enough to fit one to each lens.



The results on the film were encouraging. The frames are evenly spaced¹⁹⁴ and the exposure looks OK across the speeds and apertures I was using. Not bad for a camera that's at least 37 years old and was rattling around in a box of bits.



So what we've got is a boxy camera that will take a huge range of cheap lenses and will probably work just fine. If you were thinking to recommend a beginner's film camera, this could be it. Or maybe not – the beginner would be straight into apertures and shutter speeds with no soft introduction. But perhaps that really is the best way to learn? Load this thing with some [Kentmere](https://www.discountfilmsdirect.co.uk/kentmere-pan-cheap-black--white-film-88-c.asp)¹⁹⁵ 100 or 400 and go take some pictures. Learn by doing and enjoy a camera that is cheap and effective.

194 2020: Testing a camera

195 <https://www.discountfilmsdirect.co.uk/kentmere-pan-cheap-black--white-film-88-c.asp>

This came about because I kept thinking about colour and the use¹⁹⁶ of colour. I was also told by a colleague that I should set-up my camera to use the same colour [space](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color_space)¹⁹⁷ as Photoshop and my printer. Not that I print many pictures, as my printer is knackered, but doing this is intended to make sure that the colours in the original photograph don't change unexpectedly during processing. Specifically, I should be using Adobe RGB rather than sRGB as it's bigger and allows more colours. Probably good advice, and no harm done in following it.

On the other hand, all the effort I put into my pictures is lost if they are viewed under different [lighting](#)¹⁹⁸. A dull print can sparkle on a computer screen. Colours can merge or change depending on the lighting. If you have ever tried to paint-over old white paint with new under incandescent light, you will see the effect (try it under blue light). For a more dramatic effect, go diving. Water absorbs colours unevenly, so objects seen underwater change apparent colour with depth.

I'm old enough to remember selecting film for its specific colour rendition: some was good for greens, some for reds, some had neutral tones with no bias. But the thinking bit I mentioned was that we don't all see colours the same way, and we don't even see the same colours.

Just as an aside, dogs are red/ green colour blind, but they can probably see into the UV spectrum a bit so they will see more shades of blue than we do. I expect that's why dogs are happy at the beach. Mice can also see just two colours rather than our three. I wonder if that makes ginger cats invisible? The winner is the mantis shrimp though, which can [see](#)¹⁹⁹ into the IR and UV ends of our visible spectrum and can also see the polarisation of light. Why the aside? Because there is a small proportion of people, all women, who have [four](#)²⁰⁰ colour sensors in their eyes rather than the usual three. They can possibly see more colours. You could say that they have a bigger colour space. But how would they describe them? I struggle with names like taupe, and that's a colour I can actually see.



If you could see into the infrared

196 2021: Colour in your camera

197 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color_space

198 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-31656935>

199 <https://www.discovermagazine.com/planet-earth/freaky-shrimp-species-has-singular-sight>

200 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetrachromacy>

Which brings me to the idea that we may not even describe colours the same way. There has been some [research](#)²⁰¹ on Basic Colour Terms: the words that a language has to describe basic colours. For example, English has eleven – red, yellow, green, blue, black, white, grey, orange, brown, pink and purple. But speakers of Slavic languages have twelve, as they have separate terms for light blue and [dark](#)²⁰² blue. (Strangely though, we agree that a rainbow comprises seven colours.) There are other languages spoken in Papua New Guinea, Namibia or Angola where there may be only two or three BCTs. The speakers of those languages can discriminate between as many colours as anyone else, but can't name them. If you read something like *Through the Language Glass*²⁰³ you'll find that our language – what we are able to say – is shaped by our culture and thinking. So one outcome is that dogs shouldn't drive cars, as they wouldn't understand traffic lights. But seriously, in a language that has very few colour names, the difference between some colours must not be important enough to make the distinction. If a speaker of Berinmo merges green and blue together into the single name of *nol*, then the difference between green and blue must not be important to them. I suppose the other extreme is the apocryphal [tale](#)²⁰⁴ of how many words the Inuit have for snow.

In everyday life I can feel the effect of lacking words to describe colours. I've got the basic eleven down just fine, but then I look at a paint chart and there are colours that are somewhere between green and blue or grey and red. I can see the differences between all the shades, but I have no way of describing them. That may be because it's never been important to me to be able to do so, so I've never learned how to describe colours. And if you think I'm odd, take a look at a Robin (the bird, not the crime-fighting chum) – their chests are orange, not red.

And yet... I think it was Anil Seth who [said](#)²⁰⁵ that limited perception is favoured by evolution. You only need to be able to sense enough to get by, and any finer perception is a waste and a disadvantage. So my eleven basic colours and my limited span of the EM spectrum would make me a poor mantis shrimp but is no disadvantage at all as a human.

I started my photography using black and white film, so I used to carry and use a set of colour filters. These changed the tonal relationships between colours, so I could darken skies or lighten grass and trees. I use an equivalent process²⁰⁶ when I convert a colour image to mono in Photoshop, as it lets me change the tonal values of colours just like the old days with bits of coloured glass over the lens. Digital photography has recreated the controls I used to have from using different film types or from filtering mono film.

201 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basic_Color_Terms

202 <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80103>

203 https://archive.org/details/throughlanguage00deut_0

204 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eskimo_words_for_snow

205 <https://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/577087/neuroscience-perception>

206 2019: Through a glass, darkly



You can buy film that sees the world like this

So where I've got to is that we don't all see the same colours. We may merge colours together under a single name or split a single colour into two. There are limited ranges of colour that can be printed or displayed and some sets have more colours in than others. If you choose to convert a colour picture to mono, then you can change the way colours are mapped to tones. But there is no guarantee that what you make is what I see.

The one set of colours that every living creature seems to agree on though, is black/ white or light/ dark. This seems to be the first-evolved visual sense and all the colours were added later. So if I continue to shoot a lot of black and white, I can be reassured that even molluscs can see them. So I can share my work and not be shellfish. (Sorry).

I think my conclusion is that I'll use the biggest available colour space for my camera as it retains as much information as possible. I can always choose to reduce it later, but as a deliberate choice rather than a constraint. I am happy that I can see lots of colours, even though I can't name most of them. I'd love to be able to see like a mantis shrimp, but I'm happier at my end of the food chain. And dogs shouldn't drive cars.

PS – there's a more technical description [here](#)²⁰⁷ and an essay about the Greeks [here](#)²⁰⁸.

207 <https://www.diyphotography.net/color-theory-raw-files-and-raw-developers/>

208 <https://aeon.co/essays/can-we-hope-to-understand-how-the-greeks-saw-their-world>

I've got several²⁰⁹ old manual cameras with no (or no working) light meter. That shouldn't be a problem, as I also have some old light meters. And that's how it begins: you buy an old light meter and use it. Then you buy another one that might look or work better. But they give different readings. So you try a third meter to see if two of them agree. And then you have a box full of meters that all give different readings. So what's a poor nerd to do?

I know there is a movement to not use meters at all and to guess²¹⁰ the exposure. That feels to me like guessing how much fuel is in your car. Or I could buy one of these new clip-on meters, but where's the fun in that? I think my entire collection of meters cost less than a new one. And part of the joy of using old kit is getting it to work.

So what I need is an objective standard to compare my meters against and show me how (in)accurate they are. Some can be adjusted and some can be compensated. But where do I find my gold standard?

Luckily I bought my standard years ago when I was going down the Zone²¹¹ System mineshaft. I have a very good Sekonic incident²¹² meter and a sheet of Kodak grey card. I know – I should just carry the Sekonic meter around with me, but I don't. It's a bit big and my ideal would be one of my other meters that switches easily between incident and reflective readings and is also smaller.

As an aside, I also have a number of [Weston](http://www.westonmeter.org.uk/index.html)²¹³ meters. These are things of mechanical beauty and reputed accuracy. But did everyone in the past have amazing eyesight? The aperture and speed scales on a Weston Master II are tiny. It's like the Mercury²¹⁴ camera I used to have – I needed reading specs and good lighting to set the lens aperture. I have a Weston Master III though, which is more legible.

209 2019: How many damn cameras do you need?

210 2021: I'm going to dull-8 it

211 2019: Zoned out

212 2022: How to expose

213 <http://www.westonmeter.org.uk/index.html>

214 2019: The Universal Mercury II



Drop the “1/” from the shutter speeds and the numbers can be bigger

Make sure that the pointer is reading zero with the cell covered. If not, adjust with the screw on the front. Point the meter to a clear north sky at any time between 10 A.M and 2 P.M. There must not be any clouds or haze. An accurate meter will give a reading of approximately 320 Lumens – the scale used before the Euromaster series. That’s just over half way across the dial with the baffle closed. This should translate to f/16 at 1/100, with film speed set to ASA/ISO 100.

<http://www.westonmeter.org.uk>

So I did the 'north sky test' with the Weston meters and surprisingly some of them were good. I'd formed the opinion that they were incorrect because I was comparing them with my phone app (but see below). Right then, here's the plan:

- Set up my 'good' Sekonic meter and a grey card under steady daylight.
- Compare my incident meters with the Sekonic.
- Once I have a dual-type meter that agrees with the Sekonic, use it to get the same reading off the grey card by moving the grey card around.
- Point my reflection meters at the grey card and see if they agree with the Sekonic.
- If a meter consistently misreads, make a note of how I need to adjust the ISO setting to compensate.

The first and most interesting finding was that the light meter [app](#)²¹⁵ in my phone was off. I suppose it's more accurate to say that my phone was off. Luckily I had paid for the full licence, which meant I could adjust it. I suppose the lesson in this is not to blindly trust something new until you have tested it.

So how did my tests work out? Far better than I expected. All of the meters bar one worked. The Leningrad²¹⁶ meter confirmed my suspicions by over-exposing by one stop. I'd been given a second Leningrad, and that over-exposed by a stop too.

The various Weston meters all seemed to work. The film speed rating they use is slightly different to ISO, but only by a third of a stop. For the sort of cameras I'll be using, I can ignore this.

One meter, a Danubia, has a design flaw that makes it easy to take wrong readings. Since I have plenty of working meters, this one can go.



Set the meter reading using the little window at the bottom, NOT the EV scale above it.

215 <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.dq.fotometroNa>

216 2018: A quantum of sunrise

One surprise was an ancient Ilford meter. Once I'd cleaned the glass over the light cell and figured out what the modern equivalent of its film speeds were, it worked.





The Lydia Bousfield Trio



Richard Halma

So now I have a boxful of meters I can trust. Not a bad result for an hour's work.

Kodak No.1 Pocket Camera

10 August 2023

I didn't need another camera, but then I came across this stately centenarian for a fiver. What are you going to do?



Well, check it over first. The lens and bellows looked clean and in good condition. The little pen that was used to write on the film was still present. Let's just pop the back open... or not. The back doesn't open; instead the entire lens and bellows block comes out. The film spool is dropped into one side of the camera back, laid across the pressure plate and the take-up spool is hooked-up to a winder. The lens block has rollers on each side that support the two spools and lead the film across the back of the lens. It's a faff to load at first, but then it's as simple as taking a turn of the paper leader around the take-up spool to make sure it has caught, then pushing the pair of spools into the corners of the camera back.

It made me think of the Argus²¹⁸ C3. That was built for ease of assembly, and this Kodak looks the same. The clever bits – the lens and bellows – could be assembled as a block. There would be no need to reach inside the camera back to attach things or tighten screws, as it could all be done in the open. The camera body had no vulnerable and large opening door, so it would stay light-tight even with a bit of 'handling'. There was no need to

218 2022: The Argus C3

have pivots for the film spools. It was easy to offer a range of lens and shutter combinations, as it was a simple choice of lens panel at assembly. You can see why America became the manufacturing giant it was. German or Swiss engineering may have been more exacting, but the Americans could build *good* fast. See the [story](#)²¹⁹ of Liberty Ships for example.



Lens block and back. The rollers (marked) guide the spool and film. The spool can be seen hiding in the end of the camera back.

The lens on this version of the camera is basic – a simple meniscus. But like the model 616²²⁰ the large negative means there will be little if any enlargement, so it's probably good enough. The apertures were a bit of a mystery though, being simply numbered 1 to 4. I expect Kodak would have provided instructions like 'use 1 for normal scenes, 2 for landscapes' and so on. Luckily the lens is set behind the shutter and aperture, so you can see the hole as you move the aperture lever. Reckoning that most 6×9 format cameras use a 105mm lens and doing some careful work with a vernier caliper gauge, I reckon the apertures are 1 = f16, 2 = f22, 3 = f32 and 4 = f45. Or close enough. These seem to agree with other [opinion](#)²²¹ too, so that's what I'll go with.

To use the camera you have to open the flap and draw the lens forward to extend the bellows. Many, perhaps most, folding bellows cameras have a self-extending mechanism that pulls the lens forward as you open the flap. This Kodak isn't one of them. But with the lens out there is a little threaded rod where your right thumb falls that focuses the lens. The whole lens panel moves in and out, with a small pointer to show the distance set.

219 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberty_ship

220 2022: Kodak 616

221 <https://photo.stackexchange.com/questions/108358/no1-pocket-kodak-aperture-1-to-4-f-stop-equivalent#108362>



Lens deployed. The roller on the left focuses the lens, with the distance scale and pointer on the right (as you view it).

The film counter window on the back was a pale orange colour, so I used a bit of tape to cover the window when I wasn't winding-on. The bellows looked pretty good with a torch test, so not bad for its age.

And then the moment of truth: I loaded it and shot some pictures. I used a roll of Fomapan 100 film which meant I could use the top speed of 1/50 and aperture 2 (f22) on a sunny day. The bellows were stiff at first when pulling the lens out but got easier as we went along. Probably stiff from years of being stored tightly folded. It kept them in good condition though. The viewfinder is one of the barely useable little things with a mirror in the back. This gives you the same fun as a TLR in trying to get verticals right, with the added joy that you can't be that sure of the framing.

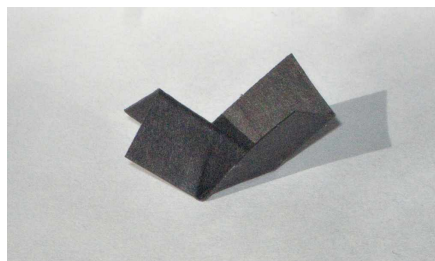


But for all its weight and solidity, it really is an easy carry. There's a useful handle on one end and it will fit into the back pocket of your jeans (arse permitting). It's slow to set up and use though. My Balda²²² is much quicker, as the lens and bellows snap out when the door is opened and the lens can be left pre-focused.

And when I pulled my first film out of the developer, there were eight good negatives on it (I should point out that the camera shoots 6×9 on 120 film, so there were supposed to be eight negatives). There was a light leak appearing to radiate from the top right of the image, making the leak the bottom left of the film gate. This is at the end where the lens block latches into the camera back, so has much less overlap than at the other side. So I added a bit of modern light seal foam to the area and I'll shoot another film to see if it worked.

How much detail was there on the negatives from the little meniscus lens? Surprisingly good, which shows the benefit of a huge negative over even a simple lens. So what we have here is a very basic camera that would have been ideal for snaps of groups and scenery to be enlarged to perhaps postcard size. Even contact prints would have been useable. It could travel in a bag or large pocket with little risk of damage. And a hundred years later, it still works.

Or I thought it did. I went back to have a look at the bellows just in case there was a light leak I'd missed. But this time I used a proper torch (a diving torch, that is bright enough to have a recoil when you switch it on). Pinhole? More like mouse hole. Some of the corners of the bellows are thin. I did try patching them with small folds of black paper, but they didn't sit well or hold. So I made up a paste of [Airfix](#)²²³ glue and black paint and gave the corners several coats inside and out. That seemed to fix it.



Folded paper patch

OK, so not as perfect as I thought at first, but still pretty good for a hundred year-old camera.

²²² 2018: The tale of a camera

²²³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airfix>

What do you call a picture? Do you even need to name a picture? Many pictures that are entered in competitions or shown in exhibitions have titles, but what is the title for? Isn't the content of the picture what it should be called? It all feels a little weird.

I can understand descriptive titles for things that need to be described. Context can be useful: reportage needs the context²²⁴ to make sense of the image, for example. [Most](#)²²⁵ books have titles to give you some sense of what the book is about. Indeed, many non-fiction books also have a subtitle to explain the title. But do pictures need the same level of explanation?

I joined a photo club²²⁶ during the pandemic. It's fun and interesting. There are frequent showings of pictures, which is great. But it seems that pictures get a title to explain the image. If you have a lovely landscape shot of Windermere it might be sensible to call it Windermere so that the viewer knows where it is and doesn't mistake it for say, Hartlepool. But you don't need to call it *Light over Windermere*. I can see by the picture that Windermere had light. On the other hand, what should I make of a picture called Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico? It is precisely [labelled](#)²²⁷. I suppose you might not need the moonrise, but it does explain what the white spot is for anyone who was uncertain. It's also not called evening mood or something equally trite. Calling a picture *Study in light* or *Study in form* is tautologous and open to error: it is either what you called it or it is not. And if Study of ... is just an excuse to take pictures of nudes, then the title becomes a pretence. You want to take a figure study? Here's two [fingers](#)²²⁸ you can start with.

Perhaps worse than the faux-artistic are the humorous titles. If the picture is good, it shouldn't need a punchline. And if it needs a punchline, why not do it properly and add a speech balloon?



The Treachery of Imaging. (I'm allowed to give it a title as it's part of the joke.)

224 2018: Pictures at an exhibition

225 <https://www.wob.com/en-gb/category/all>

226 2021: Clubbing together

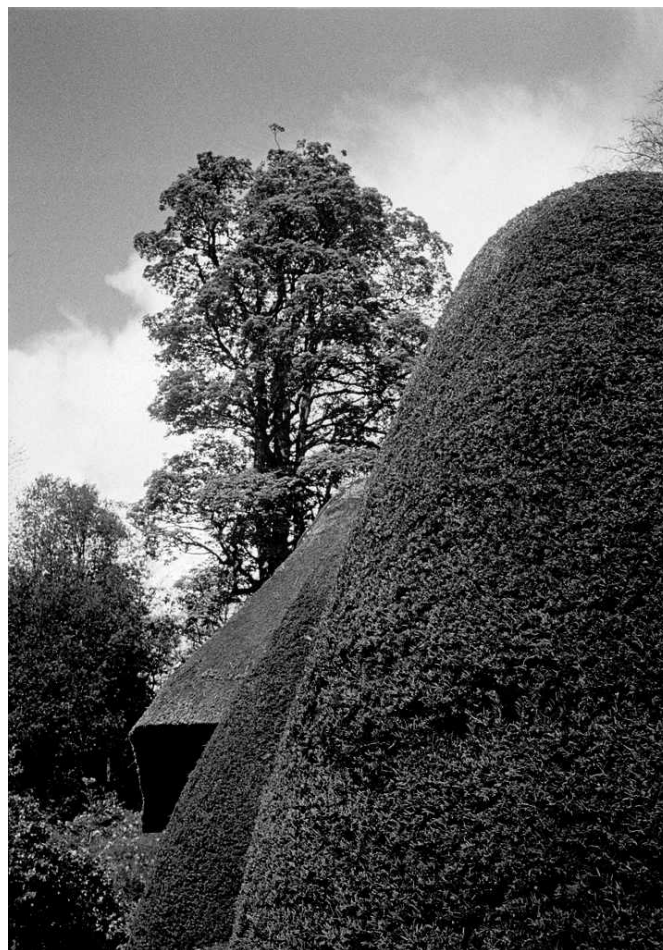
227 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moonrise,_Hernandez,_New_Mexico

228 <https://www.usingenglish.com/articles/offensive-insulting-aggressive-gestures-in-uk.html>

I can appreciate paintings, for example, without knowing what they are called. The title is only useful for referring to it in conversation – it's more accurate than saying something like *the big blue one*. You might argue that similar titles imply the artist saw them as a set²²⁹, but good curation can also put a set together, and so can the pictures looking like they belonged together. So perhaps the purpose of a title for art is to allow cataloguing?

I do have some of my own pictures up on the walls, if only to cover the damp and cracks, but none of them are titled. There's no need: the picture either looks nice or it doesn't and that won't change with what I call it.

Photo club competitions and exhibitions though, they are the home of the name. Every image does need a name, for the same reason a painting does: to be able to identify a specific image. But the specific has given way to the poetic. This is where you will find a picture of converging verticals called *converging verticals*. Or a landscape taken at dawn called *dawn light*. I confess, I did once put in a landscape shot of a formal wooded garden called something like *Crick Castle*. The judge queried the title, as the castle was not visible. So I said it was behind the tree. Nul [points](#)²³⁰.



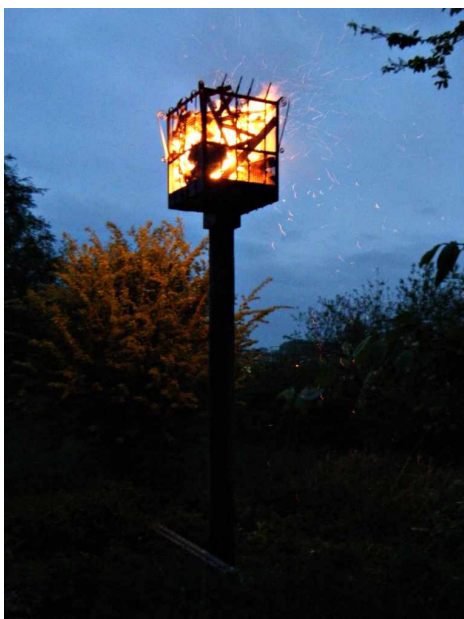
So I guess what I am arguing against is tautology and florid titling. Call it what it is, because if you have to tell people what to see, you haven't shown them clearly enough.

229 2023: Project, series or singles?

230 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-65311418>

There was an interesting conversation the other night at my photography club²³¹ about the demise of this very club. The argument was that photo clubs have nothing to offer or interest young people, so the membership would grow increasingly old until we all stopped clicking. Actually, the conversation was a bit sad, but the idea was interesting. Are the days of the club declining? Or is it pointless to worry about a younger membership, as nobody joins a club until they pass thirty? Or is it just a sad indictment that photo clubs are the realm of the wrinkly with a chronic hardening of the opinions?

We did try to discuss what would tempt younger people (say, in their twenties) to join a photo club, but I don't think we have anything to offer them. Why would you want someone to tell you how a camera works, when what they are explaining is how they used to work? And what benefit has this expertise to you? As cameras and phones get more clever²³² and capable you can spend less time learning to use it and more time using it to get results. I was at a beacon-lighting bash recently to celebrate our new King's wisdom in choosing the right mother (I was crowd control, to wrestle down any biddies who rushed the pyre). The beacon was a flaming basket held up against a darkening sky, dripping sparks into the dark foreground. My neighbour held up their phone and took a perfectly-exposed photo that captured the flames, sparks and evening shade. I was still fiddling with a compact camera that made it look like a daylight barbecue.



Perhaps there does come a point when you want to do something more or different with your photography. Online forums can be alligator pits of lurking mansplainers²³³. Some club members are no better, but at least their physical presence and lack of anonymity moderates the exchange. But the function of most photography clubs seems to be to arrange speakers and hold competitions. The speakers are the best part – it's a great way to see pictures taken by people who are good at it. Competitions are odd though – pictures are awarded points on a subjective scale of things like technical quality and composition. A typical speaker will just happen to mention that various ones

231 2021: Clubbing together

232 2019: Automatic for the people

233 2018: Double X

of their pictures ‘have done rather well’. This means they were awarded lots of points in competitions. But, as Glynn Lavender of [Shutters](#)²³⁴ Inc says, the winners are really just the least-worst in the group. And then another judge scores the same pictures totally differently, proving that the scores are totally subjective. I wonder if it’s this aspect of photo clubs that puts people off?

Imagine that you reached a stage where you wanted to know more about your hobby or develop your skills. Join a photo club and you are faced with gifted speakers and competitions that you can’t hope to win and given non-actionable feedback²³⁵ (one comment I got was “I can’t understand what this picture is and I don’t like it” I should get that on a tee shirt). There is probably no programme of learning and no opportunities to try new things. There may be few or no opportunities to just talk about pictures. Anything that doesn’t fit the standard model for a picture (in focus, grainless, nicely arranged) is dismissed.



AI-generated by Pixray from the description ‘puzzled photographer’.

What we could do is swap the competitions for show and tell sessions (or see and say?) where the photographer gets to say what they saw²³⁶ or intended and the audience get to say how well they think it works. With encouragement to bring new versions of the same picture back to see how they progress. As for speakers, get people who can talk about why they took their pictures and what they were trying to show. I don’t care if it won prizes at [Crufts](#)²³⁷ – I want to see better ways of seeing and showing.



Do you see what I saw?

234 <http://www.shuttersincpodcast.com/>

235 2021: What do you care what other people think?

236 2019: The golden question

237 <https://crufts.org.uk/>

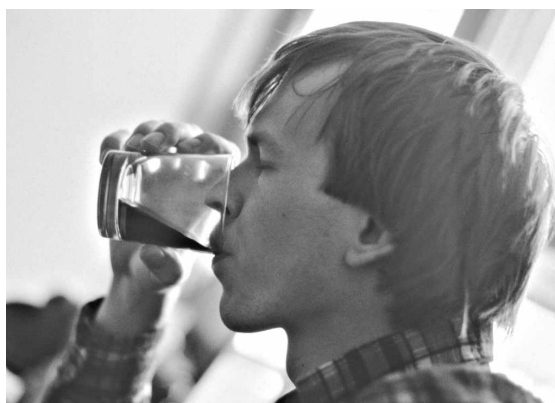
Maybe if we did this we would have something that more people would be interested in? Otherwise we are doomed, with smartphones on one side and AI generated pictures at the other, sharing nothing and clinging to our competition scores for validation.

I recently watched a film that was a mixture of documentary and biography, that made great use of informal pictures taken of the subject in his early years before he became a recluse. It got me thinking how important such pictures become.

I know I have written before²³⁸ about the value of family snapshots, but this was different. This was a series of pictures that traced the parabolic rise and fall of a single person. In some ways it was like *La Jetée*²³⁹ in that single pictures were spaced together to make the story. But different too, in that these were never taken with a narrative in mind, but served later to support the spoken story.

And since you are wondering what I am talking about, the [film](#)²⁴⁰ was *Have you got it yet?* And it was about Syd [Barrett](#)²⁴¹. Now, I have no dog in the fight about what happened between Syd and the rest of the band. I'm sure the film is not the one true historical record, and it states clearly that it is not.

The point I am trying to make is the remarkable series of informal and posed images that were used, and how they showed that glow that Syd obviously had. Now I know and understand that many people don't want their picture taken²⁴². But if ever there was an argument to take pictures when you can, this one is compelling. But, the freedom to take multiple informal pictures seems to be time-limited. Children are not expected to be a part of the conversation between adults, so when I was young I had the freedom to snap away at family events. Indeed, I was encouraged to bugger-off and leave the adults alone. With my friends I could snap away because everything we did was new and wonderful and we wanted to record ourselves doing it. This is the stage where Syd's pictures were taken – when we were all young and beautiful and exciting and knew everything.



Sid Viscous

Having children of my own gave me a new reason to take loads of pictures. Then they grew up and didn't want any adults intruding in their lives (they're not sociopaths: they were teenagers for a while).

238 2020: Does a photo have to be good to be good?

239 2022: *La Jetée*

240 <https://www.sydbarrett.com/have-you-got-it-yet-the-story-of-syd-barrett-pink-floyd/>

241 <https://www.sydbarrett.com/>

242 2022: Don't take my picture

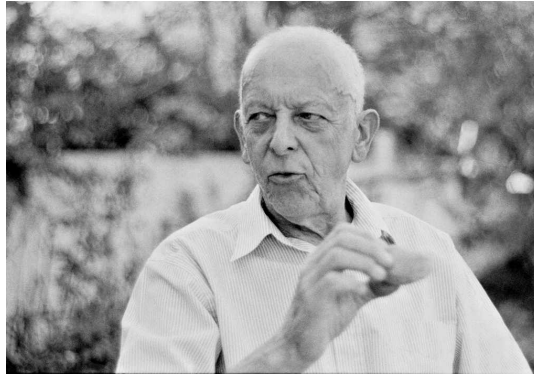


But now I'm the adult. I can't drop into the background and take pictures because I'm supposed to be present. And, as we adults now come with wobbly bits and migrating hair, we don't want our pictures taken anyway. I admit that I never appreciated my parents' views on this until later. They were happy to just sit and look at the camera or to continue what they were doing with no coyness. I expect that this is the privilege of being family – I'm not some unknown street photographer stalking them, so my motives are clear. As a result I have lots of pictures of my immediate family acting normally (for the usual family values of normal). These are the sort of pictures that made the film about Syd so interesting: they were taken informally, as normal life was in the process of being lived.



So I'm belatedly grateful to my family for ignoring the one who made the clicking noises (not like [Gregor](#)²⁴³ though) and grateful too that I have amassed a long series of pictures of them just being them.

²⁴³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Metamorphosis



And a PS. If I do have aphantasia²⁴⁴ (if), then one of the effects is a poor biographical memory and possibly poor facial recognition. Which may explain why I took all these pictures and why I value them. Who knew?

²⁴⁴ 2022: Aphantasia

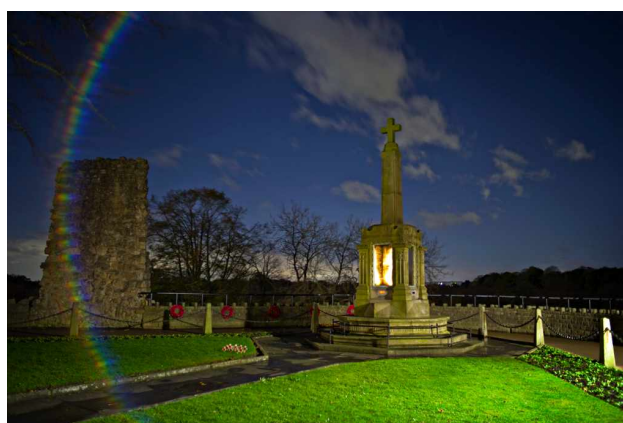
Back in the day, you bought a camera with a ‘standard’ lens of around 50mm. Then, if you were an enthusiast, you aspired to the common set by adding a 28mm and a 135mm. Zoom lenses did exist, but all the serious magazines said they were not as good as fixed lenses. Then zooms got better and the old triumvirate retired. Look at something like eBay now and see the low prices of 28mm and 135mm lenses. And of the pair, the 28mm must be the least popular focal length.

I’ve written about using my 135mm²⁴⁵ lens and how pleasant I found it. I think I should have a look at my 28mm (fnar, [fnar](#)²⁴⁶) to understand why nobody seems to want one any more. In fact (pause for effect) both of my 28mm lenses. This is typical: a lens that nobody wants and I have two of them. Checks bag – three of them!

- Sigma mini-wide 28mm f2.8
- SMC Pentax 28mm f2.8
- Vivitar close-focus 28mm f2.8

The Pentax is original – I bought it as part of the magic triplet for my first camera. The Vivitar was cheap from eBay because I’d heard they were good. The Sigma came with a gifted camera. The probable reason I stopped using the Pentax lens was zooms: I’ve got a Pentax 24-50 and a Vivitar 28-80. The Pentax zoom is very good in that it goes a bit wider²⁴⁷ and a bit narrower than the 28, so covers all the usual wide-angle options. But this isn’t an article about sanity or convenience, this is about the [hateful](#)²⁴⁸ 28.

What this won’t be about, of course, is which one of these lenses is best. They’ve all had plenty of knocks over the years and I don’t do resolution charts. This is about what a 28 brings to the party and why we dislike them. They can’t be that bad, can they? It’s the reason I bought a specific²⁴⁹ model of compact camera, after all.



Although the Vivitar does flare a bit

245 2020: Ars longer

246 https://viz.fandom.com/wiki/Finbarr_Saunders

247 2020: Angle of view

248 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hateful_Eight

249 2020: Pentax Espio 928

So I went back to look at some old pictures, as you do, to see if any of them used my wide-angle lens. And the surprise was how many of them did. It looks like I had the 28 on the camera much more often than the 50. But looking at the pictures, I can see why. I used to be in the thick of things: I would be at parties, with friends, doing stuff. I needed a wide angle because I wanted to get a lot in the frame and I was usually close. What was the old rule of thumb for zone focussing? I think it was that a 50mm lens will cover a full length person (in portrait) at 10 feet. And I think it was five feet for a 28mm. So if you were going to be 5-6 feet away from people, you needed a 28mm.



OK, so it will never do good bokeh, although you can throw the background out of focus if you get close and use a wide aperture. But that's not what a wide-angle is for. Besides, when you get close you tend to get distortion (watch for the scene in Oppenheimer where someone's head turns oval). Wide-angles tend to get used for the 'everything sharp front to back' type picture, perhaps with a [rock](#)²⁵⁰ in the foreground if you're doing landscapes. Like all wide-angle though, they turn a sweeping view into tiny detail. What looks to the eye like a commanding view becomes a lot of sky. Perhaps that's why the 28mm was unloved? It offered a wider view but usually rendered a smaller one.



And perhaps that's the story of the 28mm? It's great for close-in action, but as we get older (and stop making [sense](#)²⁵¹) we party less and holiday more. What started as a terrific up close and personal lens tried-out as a landscape lens then got put in the cupboard. In which case, may I propose getting your 28mm out and getting close? You've nothing to lose but your dignity, social exclusion zone, personal space, etc.

²⁵⁰ <https://duckduckgo.com/?q=joe+cornish+landscape&iar=images&iax=images&ia=images>

²⁵¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stop_Making_Sense

The 28mm – it's a party lens, not a landscape lens.

To be a serious photographer, do you need a project? Or rather, if you haven't taken pictures for a personal project, are you even a proper photographer? And what constitutes a project? People who [know](#)²⁵² say that "a project is a set of tasks that must be completed in order to arrive at a particular goal or outcome." So what's the goal of a photographic project?

I could see how you could form a project around exploring or explaining something, but I wonder if some of what we call projects are actually collections? I could decide to take pictures of people's knees or yellow tractors for example, but what I'd get is a themed set. What would the goal be, unless it was to gather every example into a complete collection?

David [Hurn](#)²⁵³ had something to say about projects. If he wanted to create a piece of work he would start with research. From this you would make a series of headings of subjects you want to cover. Then you shoot them. And then you check your results and reshoot as necessary. Then you know when you are done. This is much more like telling a story²⁵⁴, which has structure and an end, than a collection of words. So if I did want to take pictures of yellow tractors, I'd have to start with why? What is it I want to say or show? Perhaps it would be why there are yellow tractors (because green ones would get lost, or cows can't see²⁵⁵ red, or just that yellow things float). Then I might have a series of things within this that I could show, such as making them, selling them, who chooses them, what they excel at and so on. And I'm off! I have the makings of a project that will tell a story. What I won't have is a set of pictures of yellow tractors. What I could have, if I had talent, would be something like the fantastic essays and reportage that used to appear in [news](#)²⁵⁶ [magazines](#)²⁵⁷.



Not yellow

Then there is the series of pictures. It feels to me that this is either a small collection (some yellow tractors, not all) or has a narrative that means they must be in a certain order. Or perhaps it's a book or exhibition? An exhibition may have a theme, even if it's *stuff I did last year*, and is limited in size. So it's a series. I've seen plenty of books of pictures that are collections with a tenuous theme,

252 <https://www.projectmanager.com/blog/project-definition>

253 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hurn

254 2019: Are you sitting comfortably?

255 2023: Seeing in colour

256 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sunday_Times_Magazine

257 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_\(magazine\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_(magazine))

and some with a strong theme. But they often seem to be ‘and this one, and this one, and here’s another’. I’ve got a great book of Henri Cartier-Bresson’s pictures that contains some fantastic pictures of people and some dull landscapes. I’ve another book by someone who shall be nameless that is a series of ugly random pictures (and not even [Lomo](#)²⁵⁸) and pretentious art-speak. The apparent theme of this one is ‘look at me, I’ve got a book’. But, snide aside, collections can be great. Every exhibition you see will be a collection of some sort. So perhaps most of what we call projects are actually the collation of a [set](#)²⁵⁹ of images into a collection?



Not a tractor

So if a set of pictures has a story it’s a project, and if it has a theme it’s a series or a collection. What about single pictures? Are they just a collection without a theme? Or just good single pictures that have nothing in common? If they are in a gallery then perhaps the hope is that you’ll find one you like enough to buy.

For myself, I wish I could tell a story. The best I could offer would be series of themed pictures (*fish*²⁶⁰ *I have known* might be one). I have quite a few single pictures that I like but have no link or theme. Perhaps that’s what makes me the (happy) amateur²⁶¹ I am: I have nothing to tell the world about. Other than chuntering here of course, but that’s hardly the world (although with grateful thanks to both my readers). Anyway – a question to the class: are most projects actually a series or collection? And does calling a series a project detract from the point of a project: that it has a goal?

258 <https://www.lomography.com/about/the-ten-golden-rules>

259 <https://youtu.be/IV5yg-59yVk>

260 2022: *Going down smiling*

261 2021: *Amateurish*

The concern about AI-generated pictures hasn't gone away, what with AI pictures [winning](#)²⁶² competitions and real photographs being [disqualified](#)²⁶³. But have photographs ever been real?

The promise has always been that documentary photography is real. The whole premise is that it shows what was really there. Unless it doesn't. Just see the story and then the [controversy](#)²⁶⁴ over Capa's D-Day images for example. A good comparison might be with writing. Just like a non-fiction textbook, we believe that documentary and journalistic pictures tell the truth. Some may, but I've a feeling that many are more like autobiography: containing truth, but wrapped in interpretation. A bit like the currants in a pudding. Some puddings are all [currant](#)²⁶⁵, and some are all [stodge](#)²⁶⁶. I think it's a fair comparison, as every photograph contains the interpretations of both the maker and the viewer. Perhaps a more fair comparison than biography would be history. History actually happened, but can be presented in a multitude of interpretations.



Elements of the picture are true, but not the whole.

At the other end of the literary scale are works of fiction. There can be no mistake there – they are labelled as such and shelved in a different part of the library. And in the same way we have works of photographic fiction, such as advertising, posters, fashion and beauty. Or food photography, with all the [games](#)²⁶⁷ of oil replacing syrup or cereals supported in the bowl with mashed potato. Like a novel, the photographer manipulates the setting and the subjects to achieve an effect. And as long as we know it's fiction, there's no problem. (I'll ignore the rabbit-hole of works of fiction that we believe to be true.)

262 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-65296763>

263 <https://www.diyphotography.net/photo-contest-dismisses-iphone-photo-for-being-ai/>

264 <https://petapixel.com/2019/02/16/debunking-the-myths-of-robert-capa-on-d-day/>

265 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eccles_cake

266 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spotted_dick

267 <https://petapixel.com/2016/03/24/photos-show-secret-tricks-food-photography/>



Pure fiction

I think that's the key point though: that both books and pictures range from fiction to fact, and with a wide shading on the amount of fact that a 'true' rendering contains. (I'll dodge another rabbit-hole of our [debasement](#)²⁶⁸ of truth and our inability to agree what it is, or the people who believe that something that is true was [falsified](#)²⁶⁹.)

So should we be surprised when AI is used to create fiction? Perhaps not well-crafted fiction, as that requires creativity and an appreciation of the mind of the audience. But stock photography must be dead – there are only so many ways of showing a pair of clasped [hands](#)²⁷⁰ (or any other cliché shot), and an AI can probably turn out variations faster and cheaper than any photographer. There is a problem when an AI is used to create a picture that is presented as true. This is the region of deep-fakes. But photography has always been [capable](#)²⁷¹ of this (see Capa, above).



Generated image, or was I up a tall tree?

So yes, I think AI will replace stock photography and the rapid production of just good enough images for situations where nobody cares enough to do it better. I can also see it replacing pot-[boiler](#)²⁷² fiction for the same reasons – if you're happy to read Fifty Shades of Something, you're in the market to buy fifty [more](#)²⁷³. There is a risk though that AI images will be presented as true. Hopefully our critical facilities will develop in-line so that we start demanding proof. As Carl Sagan

268 <https://www.wob.com/en-gb/books/dr-felipe-fernandez-armesto/truth/9780593041406>

269 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/48774080>

270 <https://duckduckgo.com/?q=handshake&iar=images&iax=images&ia=images>

271 <https://duckduckgo.com/?q=photoshop+fails&iar=images&iax=images&ia=images>

272 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potboiler>

273 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifty_Shades_of_Grey

said²⁷⁴ “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence”. Perhaps there is a niche role here for analogue film, as an original negative is held to be unaltered (even though the picture itself may have been staged²⁷⁵)?



This was certainly staged

Anyway, I’m back to where I started. I think AI will take over the quick, cheap and just good enough end of the market and probably also the things that just can’t be done for real (think of every special effect in the movies). I think that it will not soon (maybe ever) get even close to skilled storytelling or creative artistry. Have a look at the Seth Godin quote at the end of my first rant²⁷⁶ on AI. Same rules apply, as they (don’t²⁷⁷) say in Scotland.

PS – just to calm everyone down – even in an age of the Rise of the Machines, there’s always that human sand in the ointment.



274 https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Extraordinary_claims_require_extraordinary_evidence

275 <https://militaryhistorynow.com/2015/09/25/famous-fakes-10-celebrated-wartime-photos-that-were-staged-edited-or-fabricated/>

276 2023: Im/perfection

277 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filth_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filth_(novel))

I may have been exposing wrong for years. I have noticed, from scanning²⁷⁸ and reviewing old negatives, that I have a tendency to under-expose. It may be because I tend to avoid bright and well-lit subjects, although that shouldn't mean that I'm underexposing. But I usually set my meter to the box speed of the film and develop to the correct time, temperature and concentration. That bit is easy: I used to be a chemist. But even though I followed the rules, I find I have a lot of negatives that have empty shadows or are a bit thin.

Then I had a beating from the clue [stick](#)²⁷⁹. Underexposure is caused by not giving the film enough light, not from shooting in the rain or anything else. My enlightenment came from an [article](#)²⁸⁰ by Johnny Patience, saying that the box speed of a film was the minimum recommended exposure. It's a bit like the mpg claims for cars: this is the best possible (but your lead foot and erratic driving won't get close). He was saying that negative film will easily take a bit of over-exposure of the highlights to ensure the shadows were captured. Colour negative in particular loves light, so give it plenty.



This is the sort of thing I used to struggle with

So I resolved to be more Johnny. Basically, try shooting at half box speed but develop for the claimed speed. I can see why I didn't do this in the past – my cheap small-aperture lenses and predilection for gloom meant I needed every ISO I could get. But these days, when I go out in the dark it's to walk the dog, not the camera.

278 2020: Self critique through scanning

279 https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/clue_stick

280 <http://www.johnnypatience.com/the-zone-system-is-dead/>

My first roll of Johnny started on a trip to London to see middle child and girlfriend. The camera was an un-metered manual rangefinder (How [groovy](#)²⁸¹ was that?) The light meter was newly-tested and trusted²⁸². The sun shone and the birds sang. I had not a twinge of concern shooting at 100 ISO.

I continued when I returned to the Republic of Yorkshire, and even at one pointed when I crossed the border to Lancashire (on a day-trip visa). Then I dunked the film in some 510-Pyro and hung it up to dry.



Much better – even got some detail visible through the cool shades.

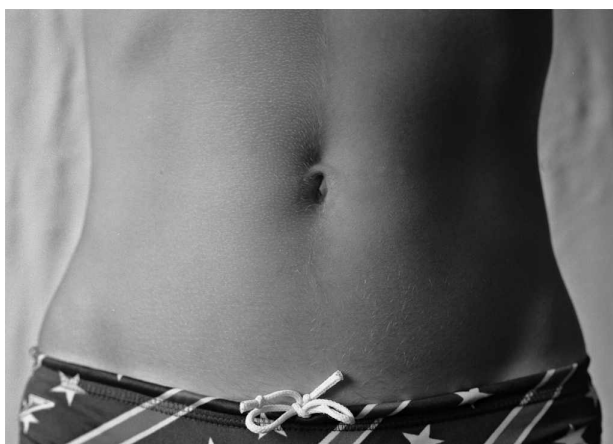
First impressions were OK: there were nice solid negatives on the film with plenty of detail. Scanning them gave me usable highlights and shadows. Nothing was blocked-up with overexposure and nothing was transparent film base. Considering many of the shots were made in contrasty sunlight this is probably also an advert for 510-Pyro. But the main thing was my skin tones were just where I wanted them. This is looking good. I think I'm going to be over-exposing myself more often.

281 <https://youtu.be/0Eji8obIOjI>

282 2023: Old meters

What's the point? OK, there's the obvious pun about it making the points visible, but is there any higher reason than ogling? I'd be willing to bet my lunch money that there are more female nudes taken than male, and most of them will have been taken by male photographers. Fine art? My arse! (Or not, in truth)

We know that there was an Ancient Greek tradition of decorating vases and plates with nudes, which could lead you to believe that everyone in Greece strolled about with nowhere to keep their handkerchief or change. Even that is under [review](#)²⁸³ though, with the conclusion that the Greeks saw buff butts in the same way and for the same reasons we look at 'figure studies'. There is a less erudite but funnier version of this theory in episode [544](#)²⁸⁴ of Shuttters Inc.



Fine art belly button or unfashionably tiny trunks?

I think that people generally look better with their clothes on. That's because the clothes – their choice and how they are worn – are part of the person. Not that I believe in any snobbery about brands or price, but that what you wear and how you choose to wear it is part of your expression (for example, what my clothes say about me is mostly warm, windproof and expecting rain). I suppose this is what lies behind the use of uniforms – to remove individual expression. But clothes are good, and so is the context or environment of a picture.

283 <https://aeon.co/essays/why-are-men-seemingly-always-naked-in-ancient-greek-art>

284 <https://www.shutttersincpodcast.com/2023/03/05/episode-544-what-a-time-to-be-alive/>

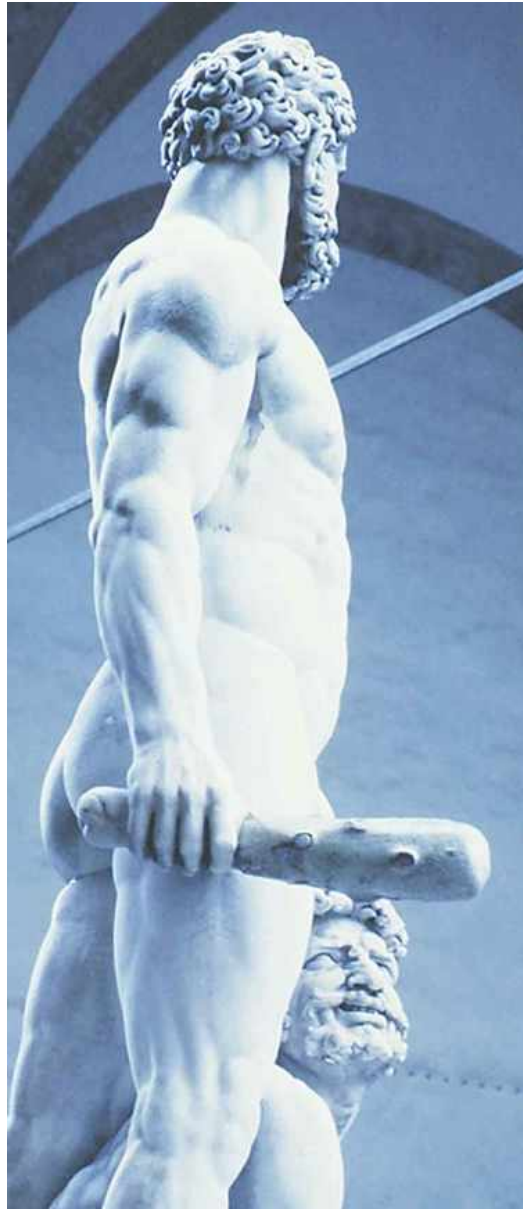


Looks like it should be naughty, but it's not. This is an elbow and a knee.

But, and it's a different kind of but, what's wrong with nudity? I guess it's context, as you seldom have a clue what was in the mind of the person taking the picture. If you look at a [picture](#)²⁸⁵ like Man Ray's *Le Violon d'Ingres* there are several themes at play, not least that the title is slang for *hobby* and the model was his lover. (Not sure I like the implications of that, or I may be drawing a false conclusion.) Or what about painters like Lucien Freud or Francis Bacon? Painting may be less voyeuristic than photography, but is that because it is more considered or because it takes longer? There have been paintings that many might consider to be pornographic – not just the school that was [scared](#)²⁸⁶ of the statue of David; think of something like Courbet's painting of the origin of the world (best not look it up at work). It caused a lot more fuss but perhaps says something more honest than the *Violon* picture. It also led to Facebook changing their policy to allow the depiction of nudity in art after losing a censorship case in France.

285 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Violon_d%27Ingres

286 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/mar/25/florida-principal-resigns-michelangelo-david>



An example of the buff butt excuse.

But let's not get into art history and critique, as I am infinitely under-qualified. So, does photography follow art? There are similar themes of historical or religious allegory. Just [look](#)²⁸⁷ at Oscar Rejlander's *The two ways of life*. To [channel](#)²⁸⁸ Derek and Clive – “you can tell that's art because they've got their kit off”. The speed and ease of photography made it a lot easier to produce salacious pictures though, and to be able to run-off multiple copies at low cost. So I expect the field that ranges from titillation to porn really got started with photography and film. And I guess that's a good reason to avoid repeating it. I'm also thinking as an example of a photographer who was well known at the time and considered controversial for his soft-focus images of very young models and children. I'm not naming²⁸⁹ him – I don't like his work or what was discovered about his character. He was an example though of how easy it is to create pictures like this photographically.

287 <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/294822>

288 <https://www.uncut.co.uk/features/peter-cook-and-dudley-moores-derek-and-clive-albums-reassessed-70954/>

289 2023: Art/ist

So, for all my preaching, how am I defending the two pictures on this post? They were both taken with the full intention of looking at the subject. The bellybutton was about the skinny waist and the suntan, because these things are transient. That particular bellybutton is still around, but further from the backbone than it used to be. The other was taken because I noticed it looked rude – I was asking myself if I really could [tell](https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/know+arse+from+elbow)²⁹⁰ an arse from an elbow.

But, aside from the examples I have posted here, I don't see myself making figure studies or taking nude shots. The most interesting things about most people are their faces and their environment and what they are doing, not their bodies. That's just me though. If I had something meaningful to say about nudity or through nudity I might take different pictures.

What do you think?

²⁹⁰ <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/know+arse+from+elbow>

Early period?

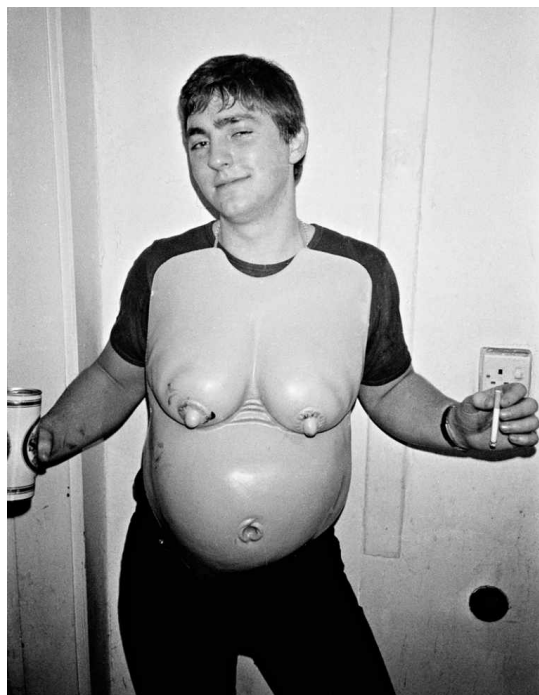
12 October 2023

Is your best work your first or your latest? Has your area of interest changed? We know about some [artists](#)²⁹¹ whose work went through distinct styles, but can you see any development or change in your own photography?

I can see phases or themes in mine, linked to the usual stages of life:

- Learning – random excitement and mistakes.
- Enthusiast – take a camera everywhere, photograph everything.
- Obsessive – shoot slide film, follow the Zone system.
- Married – landscapes, holidays.
- Kids – thousands of pictures of kids.
- Slump – boredom, can't be bothered, no time, no pictures.
- Wrinkly kicks – dig the camera out and get excited again.

The central period from married to slump I could call my dull period. Not that I dislike the pictures of my kids, because they were the spark that kept me clicking. But the dull period covers the time when I was working hard, so had no time for hobbies. Perhaps I should call it my distracted period? That makes more sense – my photographic history is a dull sandwich: a period of distraction wrapped in two slices of excitement.



This must be from the early Blackadder Period. No idea who this was, but they were dressed to impress.

If I look at my early work I can see the thrill of taking pictures of everything and everyone. I can see my technical skills improve and the number of complete fails reduce. I was taking more care in

291 <https://mymodernmet.com/pablo-picasso-periods/>

the obsessive period, taking the camera off Auto²⁹² and thinking about things like exposure and development. It didn't stop me shooting film like it was free though.



Nice jumper

The distracted period has a lot of landscapes, which may be why I now dislike²⁹³ them. I was working what felt like every waking minute, either at my job or at home life. The camera came out for holidays. It came out for the kids too, which gave me the most valuable record as the pudgy little psychopaths turned into smelly, lumbering teenagers and then remarkable and independent people.



And now I'm in my late period. My old cameras are wearing²⁹⁴ out, in company with my knees, but I have plenty to play with (cameras, I mean) for as long as film lasts or is affordable. I have digital cameras. I have flashguns. I have lenses. I also have more time to get involved²⁹⁵ with photography. Are my pictures different or better? Fewer parties and group stuff than the early years; more

292 2019: Automatic for the people

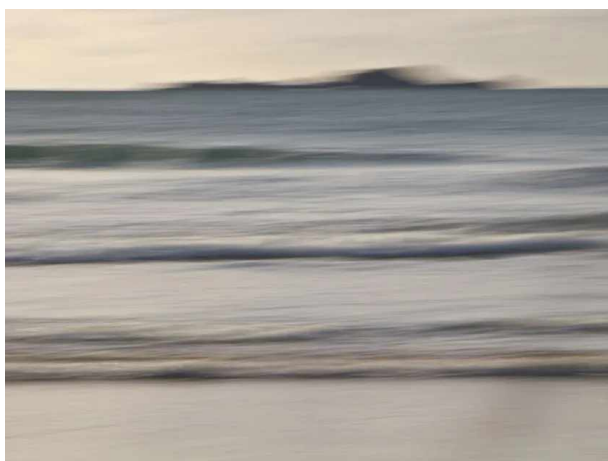
293 2018: Landscapes, yawn

294 2022: The passing of a trouper

295 2021: Clubbing together

thematic stuff. By that I mean exploring things like ICM²⁹⁶, underwater²⁹⁷, infrared²⁹⁸ and so on. If the early years were all “wow! Get a picture of that” then the later years are “how do I want this to look?”. And those 10,000 hours²⁹⁹ of practice count too: snapping kids, sports and motorbikes over the years meant I got some lovely pictures of my nephew’s kids scrambling around a climbing frame at the weekend.

One thing that is evident though, is how long it took me to improve the quality of my processing and film handling. I have some old negatives that look as if I sand-papered them³⁰⁰ and then baked them with a salt crust. I guess that’s how we learn, but I do wish I’d been a bit more interested in making good negatives rather than just good pictures.



But, percussive learning aside, I think I could call my present state my relaxed period. I can take the pictures I want and often make them look the way I intended. I’m free to play³⁰¹, and this feels like the essence of creativity. I like my earlier work, but I also appreciate the journey that brought me here.

How has your work developed?

296 2023: Fuzzygrams

297 2022: Going down smiling

298 2020: Update on shooting IR

299 2023: Did you take your photo today?

300 2018: Fillum

301 2023: Being the cause

Now here's a challenge – that photography is not and should never be Fine Art. Trying to make it so is just copying an idea of art.

For a definition of the term, Adobe [say](#)³⁰² “Fine art photography is about using your camera as a paintbrush. An artistic approach makes fine art photography distinct from other photography types.” Does this mean distinct as in ‘not photography’? Or do you have to dip your camera in paint?

PhotographyTalk [say](#)³⁰³ “Fine art photography is about the artist and their interpretation of the scene. The camera is merely a tool to create art – it's not about what the camera sees, but is instead about what the artist wants to make of the scene.” That sounds more like making photos of what you want to show³⁰⁴, instead of a straight record. So this definition makes Fine Art of all photography except straight record shots.

The all-knowing Wikipedia says “Fine Art [photography](#)³⁰⁵ is photography created in line with the vision of the photographer as artist, using photography as a medium for creative expression. The goal of fine-art photography is to express an idea, a message, or an emotion.” So, like Adobe, not really photography then? Or like PhotographyTalk, basically saying all photography that includes some interpretation of the subject is Fine Art?

If you do an image [search](#)³⁰⁶, you get a wide range of pictures that run from high quality, through chocolate [box](#)³⁰⁷ to copies of paintings. Perhaps Fine Art photography comes in two sorts then (ignoring the trite stuff)? One sort is the pictures that look like paintings and the other are high-quality pictures. The high quality end would be something like Ansel Adams' landscapes, with dramatic lighting and marvellous depth and detail. These are certainly *fine*, in the sense of great craft skill, and there is definitely art in being able to see and capture the subject. So do we call an Adams landscape and all high quality photographs Fine Art?

302 <https://www.adobe.com/uk/creativecloud/photography/discover/fine-art-photography.html>

303 <https://www.photographytalk.com/fine-art-photography>

304 2019: The Golden Question

305 <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photography>

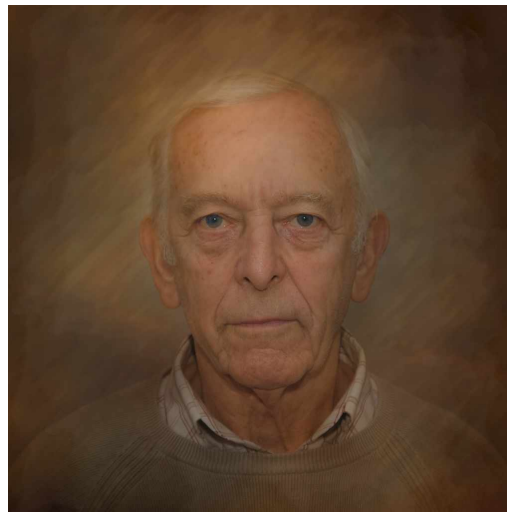
306 <https://duckduckgo.com/?q=fine+art+photography&iax=images&ia=images>

307 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chocolate_box_art



Do I lose points if it's grainy?

The other part of my grouping are the pictures that are made to look like paintings. I think there is a difference though between photography and an art such as painting, in that painting comes from the mind of the author. If I'm using a camera I can't rearrange the photons, but if I was drawing or painting I could place anything anywhere, from any viewpoint and lighting. A painting is pure expression and interpretation – it won't happen without the painter. But I could point a camera at the subject and get an accurate rendering of what the camera saw, without having to make any interpretive effort myself. To quote Edward [Steichen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Steichen)³⁰⁸; "the photographer is the only image-maker who begins with their picture completed'. So if you make a photograph that looks like a painting, it's either because that is how you interpreted the subject, or because you want to pretend to be a painter.



This is deliberately painterly, but the only place I'd hang it is on the fridge to stop me snacking.

You could argue that I'm talking rubbish – just look at the fuzzygrams³⁰⁹ I've been taking. Aren't these 'painterly'? Not to me. I'm removing the details and recording the broad blocks of tone because I like the way that looks. Standard (sharp) landscapes I find a bit dull. If I look back

³⁰⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Steichen

³⁰⁹ 2023: Fuzzygrams

through my old pictures, it's not the landscapes that interest me. I usually wonder why I bothered taking the shot. But the fuzzy streaks and blobs of colour have more of a sense of what the scene was like. To me they do at least, and that's who I'm taking pictures for. I even have one printed and hung on the wall.

And how's that for a definition of art as something you would hang on the wall? That removes all the pretention from the photographer and makes the viewer the arbiter: art is what you would hang on the wall. I've argued before³¹⁰ that art is interpretation, not recording. So this makes *fine* the pretentious part: the word is being used to mean good, or 'you should like this', or 'you should expect this to cost more'. If fine had a real meaning, then what would coarse art look like? I think fine is being used to imply that there is also [vulgar](#)³¹¹ art, the sort preferred by common people with no taste. If you like fine art, then you too are fine.

So what I think I've argued myself into is saying that photography can be art, just as any other means of expression can. Art is interpretation expressed. Brian [Eno](#)³¹² has an expression; "Science discovers, art digests". So science is what we know and art is how we feel about it. So I'm agreeing (lucky Brian!): photography can be art, just as any other form of expression. But *fine*? I think that's a value-judgement meant to raise a piece of work by lowering the rest, and a strategy for charging more for it.



That will be 200 guineas, please

So next time someone talks about their Fine Art, think of it as their F'art and have a [laugh](#)³¹³.

310 2021: Literal is not art

311 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dogs_Playing_Poker

312 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Eno

313 <https://soundbible.com/tags-fart.html>

I've got some medium format kit with a few lenses. I find that I actually use the lenses more often on smaller format cameras such as 35mm and APS-C because I like the results.

It does help that I bought a couple of adapters from [Arax](https://araxfoto.com/accessories/)³¹⁴. I bought a tilting adapter and a shifting one. They work because medium format lenses have a large image circle to cover the 6cm square negative, so they can be shifted or tilted quite a bit and still cover a smaller sensor. You don't have to tilt and shift every time of course; they work as normal adapters that have an extra trick if you want it.



Not a great portrait, but I was trying-out the tilt adapter. I put the zone of sharp focus to run just off vertically, through the left-side eye.

Why bother with medium format lenses though? One reason is that it's an easy way to get a wider-aperture long lens for less money. The smaller sensor also uses the central part of the image, which is often the sharpest bit. You will be stuck with manual aperture control, but that may be no hardship if your camera will handle the shutter speed or ISO itself³¹⁵. You'll not have autofocus either, but your camera may have some form of focus confirmation.

This is a good point to start another technical argument too, or even two. I've heard people claiming that putting a medium format lens on a smaller sensor multiplies the aperture as well as the apparent focal length. This seems like nonsense. If a lens illuminates a large sensor or negative at f2.8, then every bit of the negative should get the same amount of light. The fact that you have chosen a

314 <https://araxfoto.com/accessories/>

315 2019: Automatic for the people

smaller area from the whole with your smaller sensor still means it gets the same amount of light per unit area. So a lens which is f2.8 on 6×6 is also f2.8 on 35mm and on APS-C.

The other argument, and this one could run, is depth of field. Depth of field is due to the *circle of confusion*³¹⁶ – the largest size that an out of focus spot can be before it stops looking like a sharp point and starts looking fuzzy. If you think of your lens focusing a distant speck of light onto the sensor, a cone of light comes out of the back of the lens and the tip of the cone reaches the sensor to record a single sharp spot. Move the lens a bit in or out and what the sensor sees is the cone of light diverging. The circle of confusion is how big this spot can get before it changes from a point to a disk. Moving the lens in or out changes the point of focus, so the circle of confusion dictates how much of the scene appears to be sharp in front of and behind the actual point of focus. Hence, depth of *field*³¹⁷. Now a medium format lens is further away from the sensor than a lens made for the format. The smaller sensor also sees just the central part of the lens image. So there is an argument to be made that the rays of light hitting the sensor will be more parallel: the cones will be sharper. So the lens can move more distance either way before the circle of confusion gets too big. So there may be an argument that medium format lenses have a greater depth of field than their ‘correctly sized’ equivalents. Or not, as angle of the light cone will depend on the size of the lens element nearest the sensor. So perhaps an f2.8 lens, whatever it’s focal length, has the same angle of light rays reaching the sensor? This sounds like an ideal way to start-up an argument online, just like *countersteering*³¹⁸ for motorcyclists.

So, ignoring these whimsical bits of theory, what lenses have I got and what do they do?

The basic ‘standard’ lens for 6×6 is 80mm. Mine is an Arsat 80mm f2.8. On a 35mm camera this is a mild telephoto portrait lens. On APS-C it’s narrower³¹⁹, but still a useful mild telephoto. The nice thing about using this lens with the *swing*³²⁰ adapter is that I can tilt the plane of focus. For a portrait I can make the depth of field even shallower. I have used it to throw-out the sides of a long street and the blur the shops either side of my subject. The nice thing about the Arax tilting adaptor is that it rotates: you can set the plane of focus horizontal, vertical (like I did) or any angle in between.



Shot with an 80mm lens on a swing/tilt adapter

My widest lens is a Mir 45mm. This is a wide angle on 6×6, roughly equivalent to a 28mm lens on 35mm. I’ve also got a Zeiss Flektogon 50mm with a slightly dodgy aperture. Both of these work-

316 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circle_of_confusion

317 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Depth_of_field

318 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Countersteering>

319 2020: Angle of view

320 https://araxfoto.com/accessories/hassel_adapter/

out as ‘standard’ lenses on 35mm and a mild portrait-length tele on APS-C. But they also tilt (or shift, using the other adaptor).

The prize of the set must be the Zeiss ‘[Olympic](#)³²¹’ 180mm f2.8. This is a lovely wide-aperture telephoto on 35mm and a great long tele on APS-C, even though the lens with hood on overwhelmed the camera body. (Call [that](#)³²² a lens?) It’s a bit long for indoor use, but works well for portraits outdoors. The massive lens hood is effective and it does a nice background³²³.



This used the 180mm lens on an APS-C camera with some tilt

I did have one of the 30mm fisheye lenses, but it was really a one-trick pony on medium format and lost its uniqueness on smaller formats, so I sold it. Very wide is great, but I prefer a rectilinear³²⁴ rendering to the extreme curvature of a fisheye.



This used the 180mm lens without any tilt or shift

I’ve got a Jupiter 250mm f3.5 too, that works pretty well as a long lens on smaller cameras. It weighs a ton, but until I bought some longer lenses, it did very well for me shooting sports³²⁵ on APS-C. The lens is a beast to handle though, as it’s heavy and the weight is all at the front. It could be a [Sonnar](#)³²⁶ design, as the front third of the lens is a block of glass. The Olympic Zeiss is also a

321 <https://zeissikonveb.de/start/objektive/wechselobjektive1950er/carl-zeiss-jena/olympic-sonnar.html>

322 <https://youtu.be/Xnww12a6W8o?si=ufwK1Uiybvqwky2A>

323 2020: Simple lenses and choppy bokeh

324 2022: Pentax 15mm lens

325 2018: Shooting bikes

326 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeiss_Sonnar

Sonnar, but lighter. On the other hand I've got a 250mm f3.5 lens for small monies. With a 1.5x teleconverter in my bag I've got a 375mm lens at roughly f5.6. Handy. The narrow angle of view also makes the tilt effects more apparent. This is the lens for doing those 'model shots' where the scene looks like a model set shot in macro. Or tilt the lens forward to get the [Scheimpflug](#)³²⁷ effect.



This used the 250mm lens

So none of these broke the bank to buy, although it was pre-covid and before the recent rise in all prices.



This is the 250mm lens with a x2 teleconverter

The real praise goes to Arax, of course. Their adapters mean that I can use inexpensive lenses on both medium format and other cameras, and also get to play with my plane of focus. And who wouldn't, given the chance?

³²⁷ <https://www.westchoptical.com/blog/the-scheimpflug-principle>

Professional photographers need to specialise. I don't suppose anyone has ever commissioned work from a generalist (not unless they are picking the lowest bidder). What the buyer wants is someone who knows what they are doing, because it's what they do. Each specialism is a different skill-set. So if you want an advertising shot of your new-model car, you pick from the people who can make these pictures.



Then there's the amateurs (like me), who are often generalists. We like photography, probably in all its forms, so we take pictures. I spend my time recording the world around me as I see it (probably with good reason³²⁸). There are things I think I'm good at, or at least better at than the other stuff I do. There are also things I don't want to be good at, because I'm not interested. Product, macro and record photography are ones that come to mind. But this also means I have not tried to get really good at the things I do like. I'm a dabbler, not a digger. That may be due to my curiosity – I read widely (and weirdly) but similarly don't feel the need to drill-down into a [specialist](#)³²⁹ subject.

Perhaps I should put some effort into getting better at what I like? I admit I have done this with underwater photography. My first attempts were abysmal (or even abyssal), so I did the homework and practice³³⁰ to get better. I'm now bumping against the limits of my gear, but there's still room for improvement in my technique. As a counter-example, there's a local [chap](#)³³¹ who discovered he was very (very) good at wildlife photography and concentrated on it. This is very definitely his thing.



328 2022: What does photography mean to me?

329 <https://www.radiotimes.com/tv/entertainment/how-to-choose-the-perfect-specialist-subject-on-mastermind/>

330 2023: Did you take your photo today?

331 <https://www.wakefieldexpress.co.uk/news/people/local-birdwatcher-shares-his-fantastic-wildlife-snaps-3906577>

What added to my pondering was a review of my past pictures. I was looking through old contact sheets for a few specific things and became aware of things I liked and things that had not aged at all well. *People doing things* is always interesting, and people having fun is good if you can capture the fun. I like these and I have good pictures (good in the sense that other people like them too – even the people in the pictures). My underwater stuff is now passably good and my interest in it makes me want to be better. There's also a load of environmental/ urban stuff from places I used to live. This was a surprise. But live anywhere long enough and it will be demolished and rebuilt, so pictures of it become more interesting. Not that I see myself as that sort of photographer, but if I like the results I should perhaps explore it a bit more? Perhaps not – looking and thinking more carefully, what I liked was moody images of strange places without people. That's a niche subject.

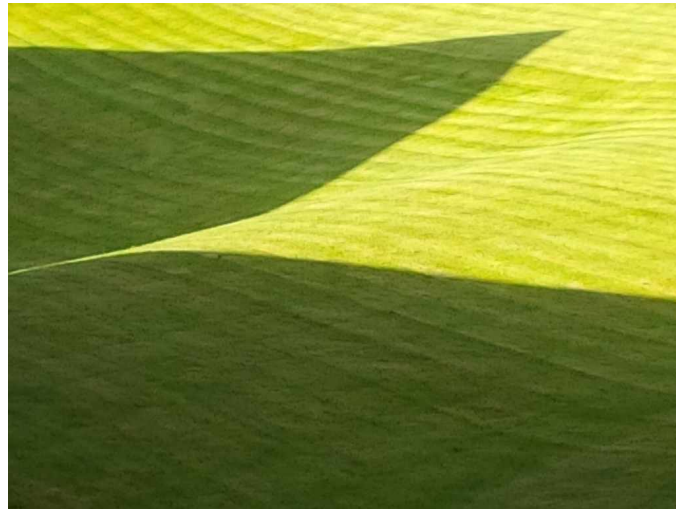


I love taking pictures of sports, even though I don't know one end of a football from the other. What I do like is people going fast or trying hard. Not so much that I'd go to sports matches though. But if it goes fast or explodes³³², I'd go to watch and take pictures.



332 2022: Drag racing

There's also the abstract and minimalist³³³ thing. I love the Zen garden look of a minimalist picture, but not enough to go looking for them. I'll take a picture if I come across one but I'm not dedicating my time to understanding the sound of one shutter curtain clapping.



So where does this rumination put me? In general, I'm a generalist. I enjoy photography as a thing rather than a means to get specific images. I like taking pictures of people doing stuff, wiggly things that live underwater and strange urban isolation. That's too many things to be a specialist, but at least I've realised I don't need to hose the world with my camera. I don't have the focus to be a professional, but I do have a better sense of what brings me joy.

What about you? Do you have one thing, several things or everything?

I should have posted this at the beginning of the year, but I'm late to the party as usual. So who knew there was a colour of the year? And who is on the selection committee? I could see us all agreeing the covid years were a mixture of dull grey and poo brown (with flashes of outrage orange at the antics of some politicians) but the colour of [2023](#)³³⁴ is (was) Viva Magenta 18-1750.

“Pantone’s Color of the Year, Viva Magenta 18-1750, vibrates with vim and vigor. It is a shade rooted in nature descending from the red family and expressive of a new signal of strength. Viva Magenta is brave and fearless, and a pulsating color whose exuberance promotes a joyous and optimistic celebration, writing a new narrative.”

OK, so that does sound like the sort of descriptions that are used to advertise perfume. And while I can see the use of a colour being brave, I don't think the colour itself can be. And can you be brave if you don't feel fear? And how does a colour write a narrative?³³⁵ I'm over-thinking it. I suppose colour names are like car names, in that they need to be unique but carry no accidental *double entendres*³³⁶.

As an aside, as I do like a bit of tangent, describing³³⁷ colours is really hard. We can mostly agree the basic terms such as red or blue, but it gets hard when you get into greeny blues or yellowy reds. People like Pantone give a colour a number so that it is easy to specify accurately. The rest of us have to refer to colours by things that are that colour. So we get cornflower blue, moss green, pillarbox red and so on. It's even worse when you get to smells. At least you can give a colour a Pantone number.

And another tangent – while looking at colours I found the world's ugliest [colour](#)³³⁸, otherwise known as Pantone 448 C or opaque couché. It even has a purpose – it's being used on tobacco products to discourage smoking. I'm pretty sure I have clothes this colour, so that may be why I don't smoke.

334 <https://www.pantone.com/color-of-the-year/2023>

335 2019: Are you sitting comfortably?

336 <https://www.carthrottle.com/post/49rx9gg>

337 2023: Seeing in colour

338 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantone_448_C



*By the power of PhotoShop, an opaque
couché smoke*

Coming back to the subject (at last), I know nobody set out to shoot a picture of a specific colour (unless it's an advertising job), but you may want to use a specific colour, so let's be grateful for things like RGB [values](#)³³⁹ that let us both describe a colour accurately and reproduce it. I had a mono picture of a lovely MG sports car that I was able to tone³⁴⁰ British Racing [Green](#)³⁴¹ and I've played around with toning to use controlled colours. So for anyone planning to use the brave and fearless colour of the year, you can dial-in the values in Photoshop or similar.

That starts to get interesting. You could use a specific³⁴² colour somewhere in the frame as your signature, or produce a series of pictures that use the same [palette](#)³⁴³. How about matching the wall colour in one room in the pictures of an adjoining room, or is that too contrived? We can't all be Wes [Anderson](#)³⁴⁴ though, just as my ability to stand on one leg doesn't make me [Nureyev](#)³⁴⁵.

339 <https://encycolorpedia.com/bb2649>

340 2019: Getting toned

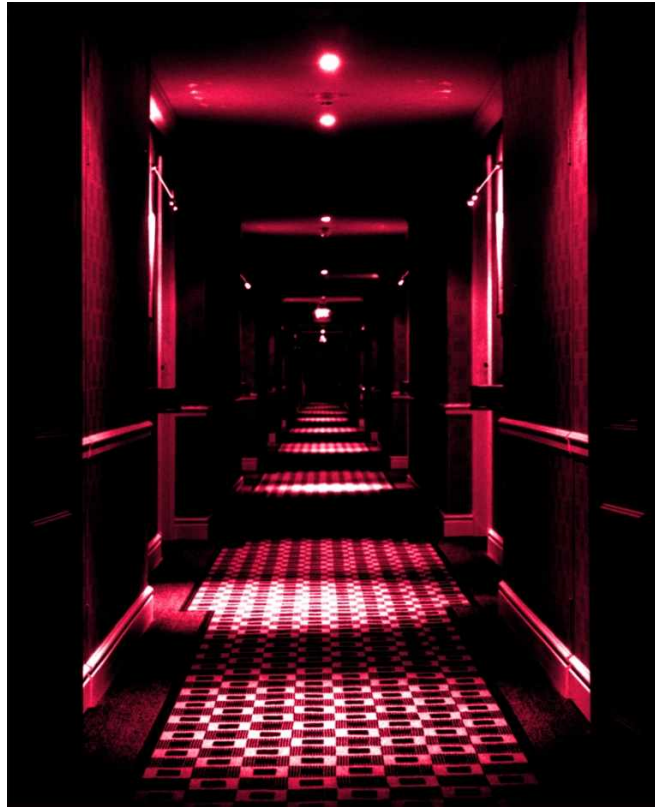
341 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_racing_green

342 2020: Update on shooting IR

343 <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20210916-amlie-the-most-stylish-film-ever-made>

344 <https://www.ceros.com/inspire/originals/wes-anderson-color-stories/>

345 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Nureyev



If a horror film was shot in a brave colour

So anyway, Viva Magenta is the vibe of 2023. And now you'll know to keep watch to learn the colour of [2024](#)³⁴⁶ soon enough to do something with it.

PS – apparently Dark [Cheddar](#)³⁴⁷ is a thing too.

PPS – [aha](#)!³⁴⁸

346 <https://thefashionfrill.com/fashion/key-color-trends-of-2024/>

347 <https://boingboing.net/2023/10/28/trump-so-orange-in-latest-photo-we-need-someone-hold-up-a-color-calibration-board-by-his-face-so-we-can-get-to-the-bottom-of-this.html>

348 <https://thehustle.co/who-chooses-the-worlds-color-of-the-year/amp/>

It all started when I took some pictures of people on a normal black and white film, that looked like they'd been shot on ortho.

Now, ortho film is not sensitive to red light, so it renders red dark and blue pale. If you use it for male portraits it increases skin texture and gives a more rugged look. The opposite would be to shoot with a red or orange filter, which removes freckles and blemishes on pale skin.

But what I got was a bit of ortho effect – skin texture and freckles were more noticeable. This was not what I'd been expecting.



Not sure how well it will show-up, but the subject's freckles are more pronounced and his beard and hair are darker.

I'd been shooting a roll of Agent Shadow [400](https://kosmofoto.com/)³⁴⁹, so I contacted Stephen Dowling in his hollow volcano lair to ask if the mystery emulsion might be a bit blue-sensitive. He assured me that the top-secret research facility that produced his film said that it was panchromatic. Why would you want anything less for a secret mission? So the ortho effect was a puzzle.



Earlier shot under 'normal' lighting

³⁴⁹ <https://kosmofoto.com/>

I'd also shot a couple of 'end of roll' pictures on the film, one of which was some bunting against a brick wall. When I looked at this, there was no difference in tone between the red and blue parts of the bunting. So the film really was panchromatic.



Then the penny dropped – shadows under an open sky are blue. I had taken the portraits under a clear blue sky, but in the shade. My subjects were lit with blue light. So my panchromatic film faithfully recorded the tonal shift caused by the lighting. And yet I know full well that colour pictures look blue in the shade. I've not seen it before on mono film though, either because I wasn't looking carefully or because I rarely go out in sunlight.



Shadows really are blue

So there you have it. If you want an ortho effect to make (usually) male (pale) skin more rugged, shoot in the shade under a blue sky.

I know these are meant to be the favourite tool of the bokeh hunter, but it is also a venerable old paperweight that has been in production, in various incarnations, for a long time. I have three, of various ages, so how do they compare?

The lens was made from 1958 until 1999 with the same basic design but a gradually changing functionality in things like the aperture operation. It was based on the Zeiss [Biotar](#)³⁵⁰. My three are:

- 1966 Helios 44 with pre-select aperture ring.
- 1977 Helios 44M with an auto-manual switch for the aperture and a push-pin on the back of the lens to close it.
- 1986 Helios 44M-4 with a push-pin on the back to close the aperture.

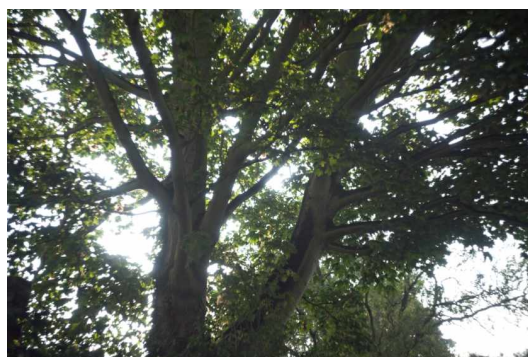
So they cover a span of 20 years, or about half of the total production run. The latter two with the 4 in their name are both of the same generation of build. The generation numbers went to 7. I believe the M in the name meant that it was coated, perhaps even multicoated. All of them are same basic formula and speed: 58mm focal length and a maximum aperture of f2.

If you are thinking of putting one of these onto a different camera, meaning one that doesn't use the M42 lens mount, then the earlier two in the list are better. This is because they don't rely on the push-pin to close the aperture. The 1986 model in the list will only work wide-open, unless you can find a way to lock the pin down.

So the plan is to put each of them onto a full-frame digital SLR and see what they do. Digital, because I can shoot loads and see the results immediately. It's not going to be a recreation of the bokeh-beast challenge³⁵¹: I just want to see if the lens coating or the manufacturing have made any difference. So a shot into the light to check for flare and maybe a close-up to see if the [bokeh](#)³⁵² changes. All of the lenses will be shot wide-open, as one of them can't be stopped down anyway (see above). Simple.

Backlight

Not sure if I can see any difference. I know these are small images, but even at full resolution on a big screen there's nothing between them.



1966 Helios

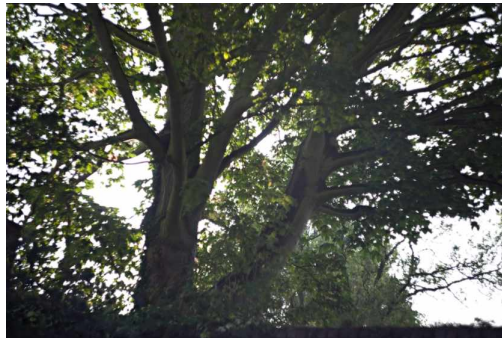
³⁵⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Double-Gauss_lens

³⁵¹

³⁵² <https://www.35mmc.com/13/06/2015/understanding-lens-terminology-bokeh/>



1977 Helios



1986 Helios

Perhaps the 1986 lens has a slight margin on flare, but it's hard to tell. If anything, the 1966 lens has a slight edge on the 1977 one. So perhaps the scoring is, in reverse order, 1977; 1966; 1986.

Close up



1966 Helios



1977 Helios



1986 Helios

Again, there's little difference. The 1966 lens may have very slightly more smoothness in the background, but I may be imagining it.

Conclusion

There's nothing in it. I would guess that any Helios would be more affected by the life it has led than how perfectly it was originally made. So if you want one, pick one of the earlier ones that gives you control of the aperture.

PS

After writing this I found it's pretty much in agreement with what [35Hunter](https://35hunter.blog/2019/07/08/which-helios-44-lens-to-buy-and-why-you-need-one/)³⁵³ says.

³⁵³ <https://35hunter.blog/2019/07/08/which-helios-44-lens-to-buy-and-why-you-need-one/>

“The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something and tell what it saw in a plain way”.

That was John [Ruskin](#)³⁵⁴, and he knew a [thing](#)³⁵⁵ or two.

This takes me back to my ramblings³⁵⁶ about ‘fine art’ photography, where I argue that photography can be art, but using the word *fine* is pretentious. Ruskin, I think, is talking about communication, and photography does this too. Leaving aside the art, meaning interpretation, we have the communication of an idea³⁵⁷, a situation or a story³⁵⁸. What I think Ruskin said was to communicate simply.

I have encountered this in technical writing, where I am trying to impart a conclusion and a proposed outcome based on evidence. The problem here is the [curse](#)³⁵⁹ of knowledge and the missing thread. The curse of knowledge is that the writer knows a lot about their subject and skips the explanations or the steps that lead to a conclusion. I could tell you it’s a mistake to fit the mains sensor that triggers a backup generator on the output side, or I could describe a mains failure followed by a [series](#)³⁶⁰ of brrrrm-click noises. Either way, it depends on you having some idea what a backup generator is and does. The curse of knowledge would be to assume you know what I know. How would that work in photography? Probably by assuming the viewer knows the context of a picture or about the people in it.



Speaking of context...

You can play the Tapping Game to experience the curse of knowledge for yourself. One person thinks of a tune and taps the rhythm on a table. The other player(s) have to guess the tune. It’s obvious to the person tapping and impossible for the listeners. (Unless you cheat and tap in Morse).

354 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Ruskin

355 <https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Monty-Python/Bruces-Philosophers-Song-Bruces-Song>

356 2023: Putting the F in Art

357 2019: Are you sitting comfortably?

358 2018: Pictures at an exhibition

359 <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/the-curse-of-knowledge-pinker-describes-a-key-cause-of-bad-writing>

360 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Useless_machine

The *missing thread* is when you lose or bury the main idea and the steps that lead to it. Journalists call it burying the [lede](#)³⁶¹. Throwing all your research onto the page can lose the conclusion, for example. Telling the story in the wrong order can lose the power of story-telling. In photography it would be including³⁶² things that are not the subject or the story or not being clear what the subject is. I think this is a key part of what Ruskin said: make the message clear and easy to see. To quote [someone](#)³⁶³ else – “everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler”. So perhaps that is part of the art of photography, to show and tell as clearly and simply as possible? And if we’re in the quoting mood, let’s have some Piet [Hein](#)³⁶⁴:

There is
one art,
no more,
no less:
to do
all things
with art-
lessness.



What's the story here?

So good advice all round from Mr Ruskin: show clearly what you mean, as simply as possible. Well, that’s most of my pictures in the bin. I will try harder (just like all my old school reports said I should).

PS – The title comes from “penny plain, twopence coloured”. [Source](#)³⁶⁵.

361 <https://www.dictionary.com/e/slang/bury-the-lede/>

362 2019: The Golden Question

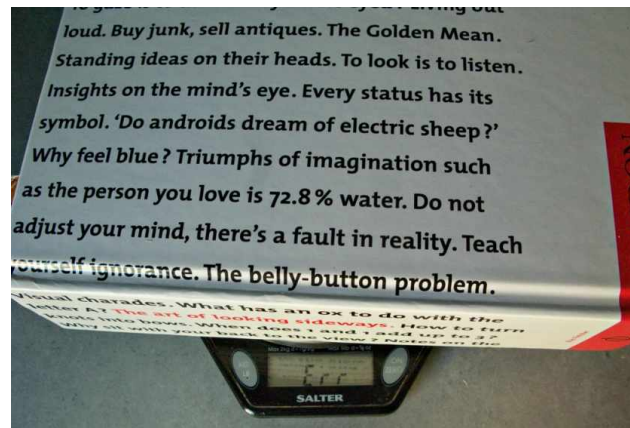
363 <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2011/05/13/einstein-simple/>

364 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piet_Hein_\(scientist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piet_Hein_(scientist))

365 <https://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/library-and-archives/gallery-penny-plain-twopence-coloured-1811-1830>

ways

If you want to see things differently, you have to look differently. Looking differently is hard though, so any help is good. May I recommend to you the best inspiration and guide I know? Alan [Fletcher](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Fletcher_(graphic_designer))³⁶⁶, who was a creative and prolific graphic designer, spent 18 years compiling a collection of curios, prompts and resources about creativity and design. His [book](https://www.wob.com/en-gb/books/alan-fletcher/art-of-looking-sideways/9780714834498)³⁶⁷, *The Art of Looking Sideways*, is a delight.



*It's not my brother **

Photography doesn't stand alone – it has links to every visual art. If, as a photographer, you only look at photographs, you will be missing a world of links and influences. So it makes sense to look at other visual art. Painting and drawing are good and very relevant to the concerns we have for AI-generated pictures³⁶⁸. Artists have always created pictures of things that don't exist. It's only photographers who got caught on the hook of “the camera never lies”. So here's a treat – a whole great big book full of ideas of how things could look and how to look at things.

This is what you get – 533 pages on these themes:

366 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Fletcher_\(graphic_designer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Fletcher_(graphic_designer))

367 <https://www.wob.com/en-gb/books/alan-fletcher/art-of-looking-sideways/9780714834498>

368 2023: Imperfection

Culture	Seeing	Places
Tools	Stereotypes	Perception
Creativity	Value	Space-time
Wit	Illusion	Figuring
Improvisation	Paradox	Language
Colour	Figure/ ground	Rhetoric
Dreaming	Symmetry	Design
Ideas	Reflections	Process
Synchronicity	Pattern	Copying
Mutation	Camouflage	Words
Learning	Economy	Imaging
Noise	Measure	Pictureplay
Paradigms	Composition	Wordplay
Information	Leys & lines	Handedness
Intelligence	Aesthetics	Pictograms
Brain	Taste	Scripts
Mind	Style	Letters
Senses	Perfection	Identity
Thinking	Meanings	Names
Problems	Symbols	Signatures
Chance	Numbers	Insignia
Imagination	Typography	Trademarks
Visualising	Skill	Writing
Alphabet	Perspective	Protagonists

The book is chunky – more than 2kg in weight – so you may not slip it into a pocket to browse in spare moments. I find though that I start reading at a random page and fall off the world for a while. Recommended. And there's time to [get](#)³⁶⁹ one for Christmas.

* see [here](#)³⁷⁰ for explanation

369 <https://www.wob.com/en-gb>

370 <https://youtu.be/-m1sYZzUpf4>

What we should be doing is recording the make, model and serial number of all our photographic equipment. If something is ever lost or stolen, we will need that record. But it's a pain in the arse. I really don't want to sit and type the serial numbers and descriptions of every widget and doohicky. Besides, it may not be me who uses the information. I may know that my 16-45 lens is actually a super-go-faster turbo f4 Asph, but I don't want anyone to quibble that what I recorded is not what it says on the lens. The serial number itself should be unique and unequivocal.

Then I was struck by a flash of the blindingly obvious: take pictures.

I can rattle through a load of old kit quite quickly if I photograph each item and then its serial number. It also provides an immediate and easily used visual description and shows where the serial number is, which may not be obvious. I could tell you that I've got a Fed but you may think it's a [hat](#)³⁷¹ until you see the picture. Besides, I'm lazy and this is a quick and simple method.



The serial number is inside the camera

So there you are. I may have discovered something that you have all been doing for years, or I may have started a trend. And it's something to do over Christmas.

³⁷¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fez_\(hat\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fez_(hat))

I wasn't going to buy another camera, but I was wandering around a local camera fair and there was a table with a pile of old Prakticas and Zenits. So of course I had to look. Looking turned into testing³⁷² them to see if they worked. There were the expected woes of gummed-up battery chambers, lenses with stuck apertures, broken meters and stained focusing screens. And in the middle of the pile was a very clean Zenit 12xp with a recent-model lens. Ten whole pounds. It would be rude not to, especially as I had taken apart and fiddled with all the others.

I stuck a couple of batteries in when I got home and the meter LEDs lit up. The camera really is very clean – just few scratches on the top and no dust inside. There are also a few scratches on the base plate, so it has been used, but not much. So what have I got?

The 12xp was a later model of the venerable but basic Zenit SLR. It was made between 1983 and 1994. Mine has serial number starting 88, so it was probably made in 1988. The xp model was for export, so it comes with decadent extras like a hot shoe and a 'normal' shutter speed dial, unlike the older models that had a lift-turn-drop dial. Some were made in Brazil, but this is a Russian one.



Previous model – the Zenit E shutter speed dial. Around it is the flash sync control. To the right of it is the film rewind release button. The shutter button is in the middle of the film counter dial.

I also have a 1966 Zenit E³⁷³, and it's interesting to compare them to see how much the camera has changed. The tripod socket has moved – on the E it's under the take-up spool and on the XP it's under the lens mount. The lens mount block has become more square – on the E it has chamfered corners at the bottom. It may have had to change shape to allow them to fit an aperture-closing pusher-plate on the XP. The E has no pusher-plate so relies on the user to stop the lens down. The light meter dial is in the same place but has different functions. On the E it operates the match needle meter while on the XP it sets the ISO of the film (although it is marked as ASA/Gost). The XP gains a hot shoe for flash. The shutter release has also moved – on the E it is in the centre of the frame counter/ winder while on the XP it has shifted to take the place of the film-rewind release on

372 2020: Testing a camera

373 2019: What else happened in 1966?

the E. The rewind release on the XP is a collar around the release button, so the internal mechanism must be in the same place.



The Zenit 12xp shutter speed dial. To the right of it is the shutter release button. On the left you can see the ISO dial for the meter.

The back of the camera now opens by the standard method of pulling-up the rewind crank rather than a separate release catch. It also has a crank – the E has a little spindle that you twist. The take-up spool has also changed to a plastic one with more slots. That's good, as the one on the E is fiddly to get the film leader to catch.

The body of the camera also gained some strap lugs. The older E relies on its case to provide the strap.

The main improvement though is the shutter speed dial. The dial on the E rotates as you wind the camera, and again as you fire it. The dial on the XP is like most other cameras: it's a rotating drum that does not spin when the shutter moves. The difference in use is the you have to be careful with the older shutter to always wind-on before changing the shutter speed. With the new type dial you can change the speed at any time. The newer speed dial has also done away with the older one's choice of X or M synchronisation for flash. Who uses flashbulbs these days?

The other improvement, and it's even more exciting (true for small values of thrill), is the focusing screen. Not only is the mirror bigger, but the screen has a micropism dot in the middle. I may actually be able to focus this beast in something less than blazing sunlight.

So in 22 years the white heat of technological change brought you a slightly improved old camera. Just to compare, Pentax had stopped making the MX³⁷⁴ four years before this Zenit 12xp was built.

So what is it like to use? I was very rude about the handling of the Zenit E but perhaps the brighter and better viewfinder, the meter and the better speed dial will make a silk purse out of that sow's ear?

Well, the first thing is that there is no lock on the shutter. So either be careful or only wind-on just before you shoot. It also looks as though the meter is over-reading by about two stops. The older Zenits that had a meter window on the top plate sometimes had an adjuster, just behind a screw on

374 2022: Pentax MX

the front of the camera. This 12xp has a screw in the same position, so it's worth a try. (pause) And yes, it works – you can adjust the meter.



Zenit 12xp meter adjustment is under the screw on the right, between the ISO dial and the strap lug.

The meter contacts are a bit iffy though, as the meter sometimes doesn't switch on when the shutter is half-pressed. It may be lack of use, as a slap on the side of the camera gets it working again. You could call that *character*.

The other sign of character is that you definitely know when the picture is taken. There are noises of metal slapping when you press the button, as all the moving parts that come with an SLR³⁷⁵ do their thing.

I mentioned the lack of a shutter lock. The other thing I found is that if you carry the Zenit around in a bag, it's possible for something to press on the shutter button and drain the meter battery. So perhaps treat yours better than I do, if you have one. Oh, and the same mishandling can change the frame counter, so get one that comes with a case or carry it on a strap.

The good news is that the first film through it has a set of evenly-spaced and evenly-exposed frames. So it passes the basic *does it work* test.

The larger mirror and better focusing screen compared to the E are a big improvement. It's not a Pentax, but it's not a Konstruktor³⁷⁶ either. So, on the whole, it's ok. It will shoot any M42 lens and the meter is nice to have. Would I spend more than a tenner on one? No. Anyway, don't the kool kids buy them just to get the lens? In which case it was a bargain.

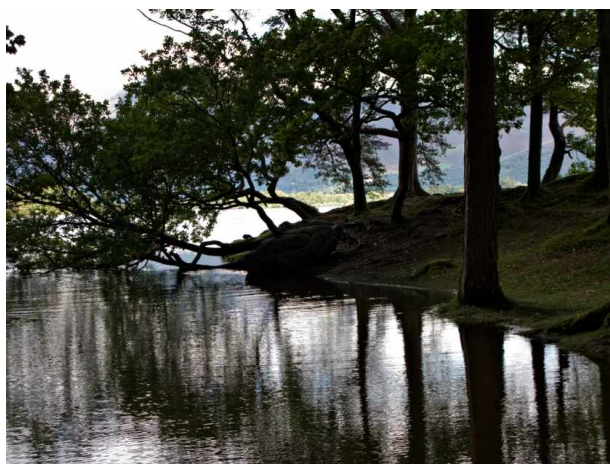
375 2022: SLR – the perfect camera
376 2020: The Konstruktor challenge

Now here's a thing to plan for the New Year – a bit of walking. Here in the UK we have the most excellent Ordnance Survey maps, but they take some skill and planning to use. But they also produce [books](#)³⁷⁷ of pre-planned circular walks. These usually start at a car parking spot, take you round the scenery and bring you back. The walks are graded and grouped by length and difficulty, so you can get out for an hour or two's mild stretch or tackle something longer or steeper.



Occupation Road, Dentdale

I like them because they give you some of the history of the area you are walking through, and also describe the walk well enough to not need serious navigation skills. “Walk along the hedge until you get to a gate, go through and turn left” is a lot easier than a set of grid references or hoping that you are on an actual right of [way](#)³⁷⁸. I can also take the dog (being mindful of sheep, cows, etc) knowing that I'm not going to have to put him in the rucksack to get past [scree](#)³⁷⁹ or a scramble. Thankfully he is small enough to be lifted over the occasional ladder [stile](#)³⁸⁰.



Derwentwater

377 <https://dash4it.co.uk/ordnance-survey-maps/os-circular-walk-guides/os-pathfinder-guides.html>

378 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right_of_way

379 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scree>

380 <https://www.countrylife.co.uk/country-life/country-crossings-stile-guide-128113>

Combine the walking route with an [ephemeris](#)³⁸¹ and you will know where the sun rises, swings and falls.



North Wales

So, a short post, but it may help you get on a few nice walks during 2024.

And another thing... if you fancy doing the North East coastal [path](#)³⁸², there's a good bus service. I walked it in sections, spending the day walking along beaches and cliff-top paths, then catching the bus back to the car. Another recommended method.

381 <https://photoephemeris.com/>

382 <https://www.oliverstravels.com/blog/north-east-coast-path/>

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