

# Martin Parr: The Right Shutter Speed [C1]

Abbiamo parlato con Martin Parr dei suoi progetti passati e di quelli futuri, ma anche di “selfie”, intelligenza artificiale e censura.

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From [bleak](#) English seaside towns to crowds of foreign visitors in Venice, Las Vegas, Machu Picchu and Delhi, Martin Parr is best known for turning his camera away from tourist attractions, and on to the [antics](#) of tourists themselves. In a long-term project entitled Small World, the English photographer [aims](#) to take an empathetic approach to his human [subject matter](#) while offering an [insight](#) into what an unsustainable industry is doing to our [heritage](#) and landscape. In a photography festival held in archetypal tourist city Barcelona, Parr talked about his projects, past and present. He began by discussing his initial obsession with tourism, which began back in the late 1980s. **Martin Parr (English accent):** Tourism is the biggest industry in the world, so I've taken myself to many of the famous tourist locations and photographed people doing things in front of it [them]. In Venice, with the Japanese tourists [loading up](#) into their gondolas. In Machu Picchu, very early in the morning, still there was a crowd there, trying to get that particular classic view. This illustrates what I'm trying to explore with my tourism work: the difference between the reality and the actual mythology.

## COMMON SENSE

While photography has been around since the 19th century, it is still a mysterious genre. Why do clocks and sunglasses look good in photos? Why do sunsets or landscapes look banal? Why does food look so different from the way it does in real life? Sometimes the technology can really alter the way we see things, says Parr. **Martin Parr:** In 1995, I decided to buy a different camera with a different flash gun. It was a Nikon with a macro lens and a ring flash. And the ring flash goes around the lens, and this means you've got a studio-type lighting. You can come in much closer to your subject. I decided I would photograph clichés. So I thought, I'm going to go

to different European countries, I'm going to think of the clichés associated with those countries and see if I can photograph them. So in the UK, with a [bowler hat](#). In France, with some [snails](#).

## TO DIGITAL

The [switch](#) from analogue to digital democratised photography. However, Parr waited until 2008, when the full-frame digital single-lens reflex (DSLR) camera was introduced. **Martin Parr:** I did a whole series of people dancing. And this is where my move from analogue to digital has really come in very useful because photographing at night in a party, it's very difficult to know exactly the right shutter speed, the right ISO, the right aperture. And here you can test it out and look at the back of the camera and see if it's working.

## DEATH BY SELFIE

Now, anyone can take a decent picture. However, the proliferation of smartphones and the desire to get a really cool selfie in an unusual location have some times ended in tragedy, as Parr explains. **Martin Parr:** I went to India especially to photograph people doing selfies, because more people were killed in India by taking selfies. Then I published a book with these pictures in the same shape as an iPhone with little [fold-outs](#) and the book is called Death by Selfie.

## CENSORED!

Parr is not uncontroversial. Some observers find his photographs intrusive. As he explains, times have changed in some ways, although class divisions in England still apply. **Martin Parr:** You could photograph kids back in the '80s, no one really [took any notice](#), but these days photographing babies on a beach would be very difficult. So I think that's one thing that really has changed. And one of the things I'd always wanted to do was to go to the Queen's birthday party, and I managed to get a ticket to go to this, and I took lots of pictures, but I wasn't able to publish them because the Palace said:

“We don’t know the people in the photographs. They haven’t given you permission.”

## INAUTHENTIC

Some people think AI is creative and can do the job of skilled photographers. Parr disagrees. He uses an imitative AI image of the ‘Parr style’ as an example. **Martin Parr:** They’ve taken all the magic out of the photograph and created this rather dull interpretation of it. I think there’s a middle ranking of photographers, like people doing catalogues, they’re going to be affected, they will have less work. But, you know, if you’ve got a wedding photographer even, you know, you can’t do AI with that, because you’ve got to be there in front of it. So the ability for the real photographer amongst us all to come out and have a chance to survive and to be out there is not going to be affected by AI.

## GLOBAL PORTRAIT

So what is the photographer working on now? **Martin Parr:** It’s a project that’s been thirty-five years in the making. And in that time I’ve managed to get my photograph taken at many different portrait studios, outside studios, so photography has changed from analogue to digital, so we’ve had this amazing transformation. A very early picture I had taken in Jamaica... [and another] in Havana, in Cuba, is a technique that’s probably disappeared now, the idea of hand-colouring a black and white picture. A technique which is used in Brazil, in Salvador: they take the picture in black and white, and they put an oil wash over the photo, and you get this rather charming but old-fashioned-looking image. And in Mexico, we found a photographer who made carved images. So these are literally three-dimensional, done out of wood. In China, they have this album they create called “Happy Memories” and when a couple get[s] married they go into the studio two weeks before, they select three different photographers, three different uniforms, and then they have their picture taken and they’re all put into this one book. In Lima in Peru, they literally have a studio which they push around the beach.

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# Glossary

- **subject matter** = argomento, tema
- **switch** = cambio
- **in the making** = in fase di sviluppo
- **oil wash** = liquido oleoso
- **bleak** = desolate, squallide
- **insight** = sguardo, spaccato
- **loading up** = salire
- **bowler hat** = bombetta
- **dull** = insulsa
- **antics** = stranezze
- **fold-outs** = inserti pieghevoli
- **carved** = incise, scolpite
- **aims** = aspirare
- **heritage** = patrimonio
- **snails** = lumache
- **took any notice** = rendersi conto