

ANNE DARLING

MASTER THE ART OF

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION



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By Anne Darling

KINDLE EDITION

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Cover Image: Sampan Boatman, Shaoxing, China

DEAR READER

Photography has not changed since its origin except in its technical aspects, which for me are not important. (Henri Cartier-Bresson, 1908-2004 - French photographer considered to be the father of photojournalism)

I have been a photographer for several decades now, and remember as a child the photographs my father took with his Box Brownie. Over the years, I have progressed from simple roll-film cameras, to 35 mm SLR cameras and medium format, and finally digital.

Technology has changed the way photographers work but the vision they seek to express is still governed by the same rules of composition that visual artists have used for centuries. These rules can be learned and once learned, forgotten, or at least relegated to the subconscious mind where they will continue to infuse and inform.

This concise book is designed to take you through 30 steps to mastering the most important of these rules. Read and study the images and practice the exercises thoroughly, and you will gain that mastery.

I wish you great success with your photography.

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Chantillac, France, 2014

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INTRODUCTION

The world we live in is a 3-dimensional world. To complicate things further, it contains elements which are in constant motion. This makes things difficult if you are a photographer because the aim is to create something that is 2-dimensional and static.

So for an image to look real and to communicate effectively with your viewers, it must possess an organisation of elements that convinces them of its 3-dimensional reality, and that is meaningful at the same time.

To organise the pictorial space we use the rules of composition. They give to an image what grammar gives to prose. Compositional rules add structure and organise ideas in a way that the viewer can understand. By understanding how composition works, the photographer has the power to communicate his/her ideas clearly and powerfully. These rules are the means whereby the photographer can articulate his or her personal vision.

If you want to learn to play the piano, you have to practise scales and chords until they are second nature. Only then can you begin to express yourself fully. Likewise with photography, it is important to practise the elements of composition in isolation until they too become second nature.

Like music, where the scales are not heard in the final piece, compositional elements are there to help you build a structure that is present subconsciously and which you build your image on. If you learn the rules thoroughly they will become an in-built and automatic part of your visual language.

WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR & HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF IT

This book is for anyone who wants to be more creative with their camera, who would like to make photos that are more ‘artistic’ and who is not afraid to get out of Auto Mode and start choosing the camera settings based on the knowledge they will learn from this book.

To get the most out of this book you will need a camera which lets you set the aperture (AV), shutter speed (TV) and ISO manually. You only need a superficial knowledge of these settings or at least be willing to read the camera manual to find out how they work. Don’t worry too much if these terms are a bit vague at the moment. Through reading and studying the examples in this book, and working on the exercises, you will gain an in-depth understanding of the controls on your camera.

My aim is to give you the knowledge and the practice, in 30 photographic exercises, to be able to make these choices intuitively so that you can really capture an image as you originally imagined it - perhaps even better!

Try to put into practice the exercise at the end of each section before going on to the next one. You don’t have to read the book sequentially but it is the best way to get the most out of it as the sections are designed to gradually build into a body of knowledge. If it is not possible to do the exercises sequentially, please be sure to go back and practice any exercise you had to skip.

Take as much or as little time on each exercise as you can manage. I would suggest that you only do one exercise on any one day to give you time to fully absorb each idea before moving on to the next. The 30 exercises could therefore be completed in one month or take a whole year. It depends on you and your other time commitments. So please go at your own pace and most importantly, have a lot of fun!

WHAT IS COMPOSITION?

Composition must be one of our constant preoccupations, but at the moment of shooting it can stem only from our intuition, for we are out to capture the fugitive moment, and all the interrelationships involved are on the move. - Henri Cartier-Bresson

For a pictorial composition to work, to be powerful, to affect the emotions, it must have an underlying harmony. Without harmony, there is no art - no music, no picture, no poem. Harmony is the structure which holds our attention, which makes meaning possible and which allows us to communicate.

When we sense harmony as an underlying element in a picture it conveys a feeling of wholeness or perfection. Without harmony as an underlying principle, our experience of beauty would not happen. Harmony in art is the reason why some works of art endure for centuries, beyond fashion and style.

Composition is a set of rules which allows us, as artists and communicators, to create harmony within a framework and to say what we want to say. The rules, once learned, become subconscious and infuse and inform our work so that we no longer need to think about them consciously. This book has been written to help you learn those rules.

The book is divided into 30 double-page sections. I have included camera data where I think it will be useful to you. However, not every image has data included since this book is not meant to be a technical manual but a guide to developing your ability to see in photographic terms.

Each of the 30 sections is self-contained but they do follow on, one from another, so one way to use this book would be to take a whole day's shoot for each section. In this way, you could complete all the exercises in one month or more slowly, say over 15 weekends.

Take your time with each section, make lots of shots for each idea and really embed the concepts in your mind. Once you have completed all the exercises you will have a strong grasp of composition and will find yourself making shots you never dreamt of, using a whole range of new skills.

PART I: FRAMING

Maybe the correct language would be how the fact of putting four edges around a collection of information or facts transforms it. - Garry Winogrand

1. MOVING IN

The first technique is really very simple and as such it is often overlooked by many photographers. Moving in much closer to your subject so that it fills the whole picture area can make a big difference to the composition.

The image below was shot in a botanical garden in France and is a magnificent flower called Magnolia Grandiflora. To make the shot, I had a friend help me by holding the branch steady while I placed the camera lens right inside the petals. This was about as close in as I could get and it has worked, the flower fills the frame almost entirely, creating an interesting composition with the angles of the soft white petals. The petals acted as a diffuser so that the light inside was still bright but the shadows were soft.



The second image was also made in France. As I was driving along I spotted this loveable donkey standing in a field and quickly parked up in order to make his portrait. Donkeys are curious animals and this one moved up close to where I was standing. I used a wide-angle lens set to the shortest focal length of 10 mm (which is why the nose is disproportionately large) and filled the frame almost entirely.



Note that with animals and people, setting the auto focus to a single point allows you to choose where to focus so you can always ensure that the eyes are sharp.

EXERCISE

Choose any subject that appeals - people, architecture, animals, and flowers - whatever interests you. Use a prime lens (50 mm or any lens that is fixed) if possible. If you don't have one then set your zoom lens to 50 mm (or 35 mm if you have an SLR with a crop sensor) and stick with that setting for all the photos you make for the whole photo session.

Get in close to your subject, make a shot, then move your body in even closer. Without the ability to zoom in and out you have to move your body much more and this way of working engages your mind and imagination actively.

Make another shot where you get in so close that one single detail, such as an eye or a

flower stamen, fills most of the frame. Make a shot from further back and then compare all the photos - which works best? Why? Keep shooting for the whole session, constantly moving in and out from your subject and comparing the results. Keep everything until you get back to your computer and compare them all on a big screen. Don't delete anything 'in the field'.

2. ZOOMING IN

Now you get to stand still and use your zoom lens to fill the frame. This is the opposite idea of Number 1: MOVING IN because here you won't move your body much at all but will let the lens do all the leg work.

The beautiful white lily in the first picture was not shot close up to the camera lens but it does fill the frame completely as I used a zoom lens to make sure it did. I deliberately chose a focal length to allow the petals to virtually touch the edges on three sides of the picture frame. There was no need to crop afterwards in a photo editor as there is nothing extraneous in the shot. I did consider cloning out the ant at the bottom of the image but on reflection I let him stay.



The sunflower and butterfly photograph also looks like it was shot close-up but it was taken at a focal length of 300 mm. The subject here doesn't fill the frame completely but the area to the right of the petals is an important element of the composition and is called negative space (more on that topic later). The important point is that there is nothing superfluous in this shot, so no work needs done in the digital darkroom afterwards.



Shutter speed: 1/640 s

Aperture: f/6.3

Focal Length: 300 mm

ISO: 200

EXERCISE

Use a zoom lens and make lots of shots of your chosen subject. Be aware of the four sides of the frame as much as possible. Experiment with the amount of space you leave around your subject. Try some where the frame is filled and the edges of your subject touch the edges of the frame. Then try some where there is just the subject plus some negative space as shown here. Avoid the temptation to think that you will crop your photos when you get home in post processing by doing all the cropping in the field. This helps to train your brain to make good decisions while shooting and not rely on computer software.

Find a moving subject such as children playing, a boat moving on water or a dog running and make some shots where there is space in front of the main subject. Notice how this gives space for the subject to move in to.

Compare your images with those you made in the first exercise. Both methods of working are valid but it's important that you understand the difference and can make an informed choice, depending on your subject.

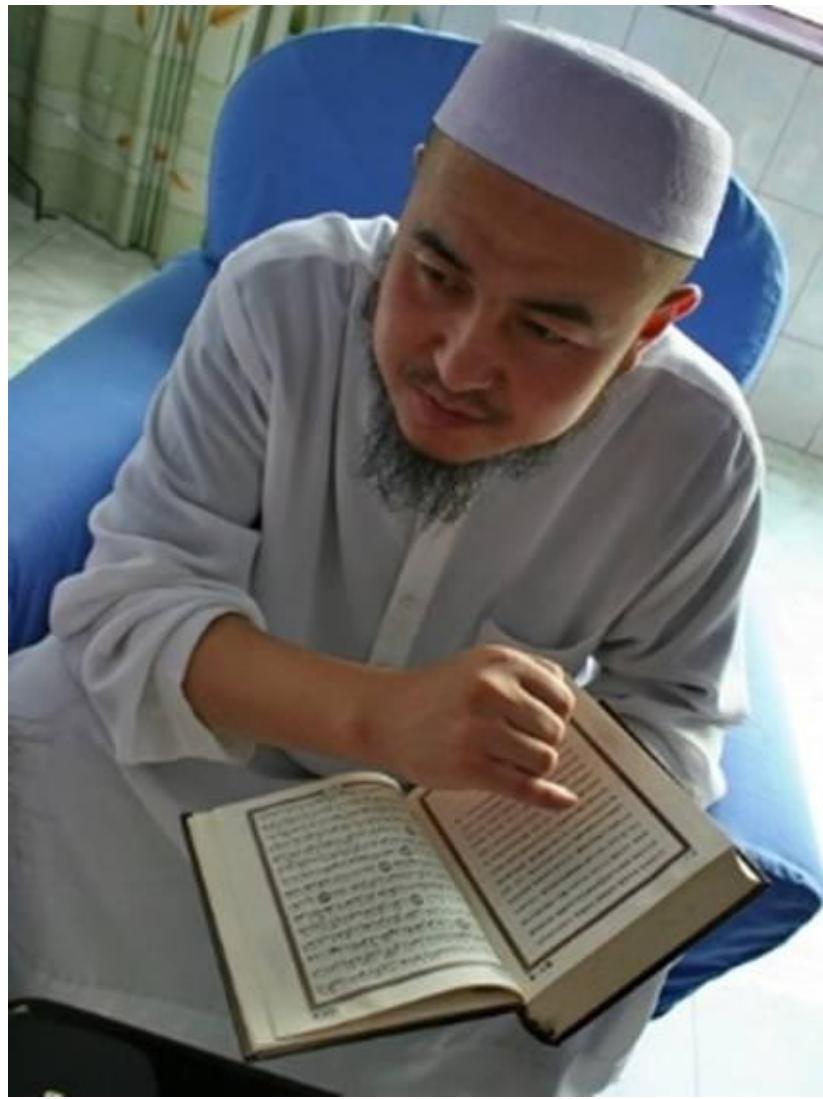
3. MOVING AWAY

Sometimes you may find that the photograph you want to take is of the spot where you are actually standing. You are positioned inside your own photograph! This may mean you have to move further afield. For this shot I had to move from the quarry, where I started out, walk right around and up the hill to make a shot looking down on the scene. This was a good 5-10 minute walk but my effort was rewarded with a greater view which included the deep green water, the birds and the huge crane.



It helps to vary the height and angle at which you shoot. As a photographer this tends to make you engage more fully with the visual scene in front of you, and helps to create more interesting pictures. Photographing children in particular can be vastly improved by bending your knees so that you can make shots that depict the world from their viewpoint.

Shooting higher up may allow you to include additional information that would be lost if you were on eye level with your subject. This can be seen in the picture of the Chinese *imam* where I have shot from high up to include the view of pages of the Qur'an which he has open in his hands. This is called an environmental portrait. Information is included within the frame in order to tell the viewer something more about the life of the subject.



Shutter speed: 1/25 s

Aperture: f/6.3

Focal Length: 18 mm

ISO: 800

I have also shot with the camera on the diagonal. It creates a slight shock when you first see a picture like this because we are so used to having everything ‘squared’ up. Shooting on the diagonal also has the merit of letting you fill the frame. Notice that again there is no extraneous information in the shot, just a strong, simple composition.

EXERCISE

Children and animals are good subjects for practising shots low down. Try to include flowers and other objects that would be in their field of vision at that height. Then make a series of shots from a higher-than-normal vantage point.

Go out in the world and try to find a place to stand that is filled with incident and then look around for a place a short distance way where you might look back and get a good view of your current position. Engage your imagination fully in this exercise before

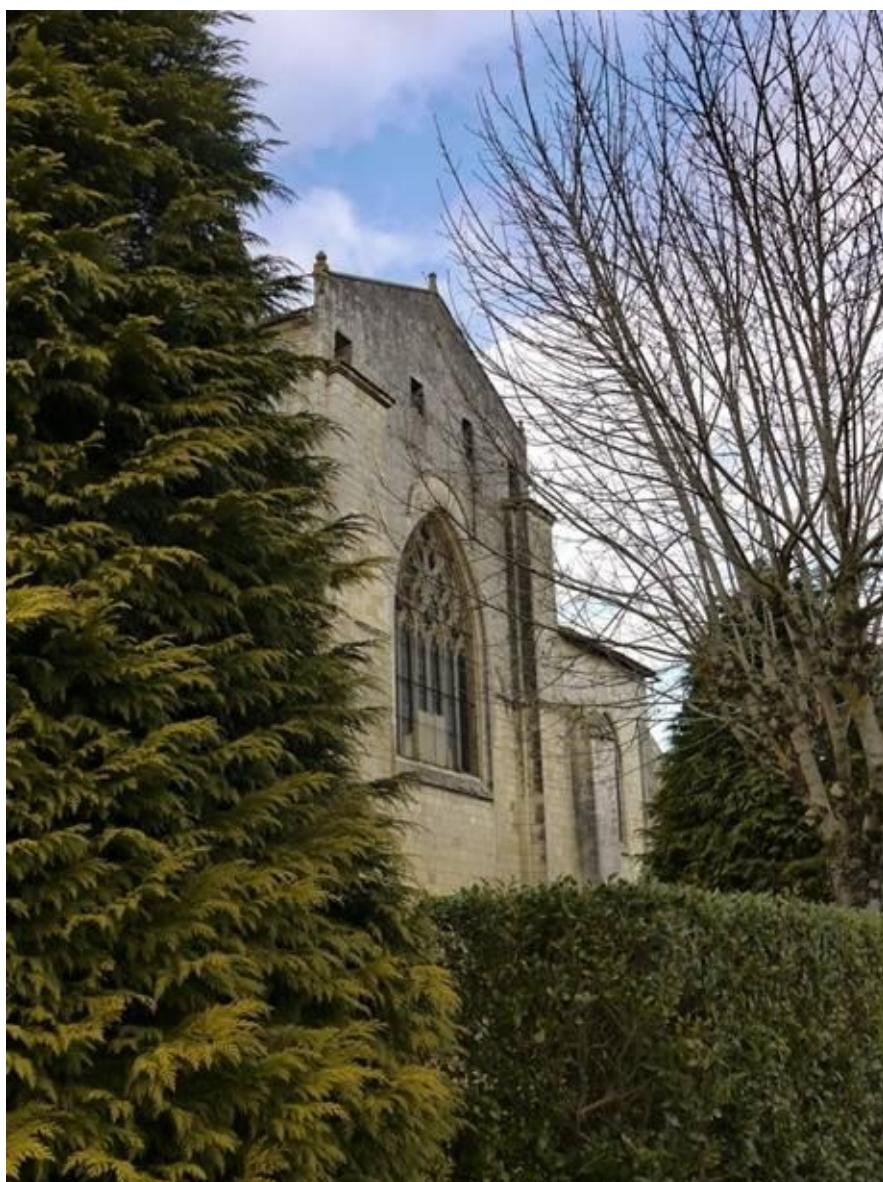
deciding on the best vantage point.

4. FRAMING PART 1

Framing is a technique often used by photographers to enhance the look of architectural images. Having a frame around your central subject is said to keep the eye, which moves constantly, from wandering out of the frame. Simultaneously, framing adds the illusion of depth to the photograph. One way to frame a building is to use trees, branches or anything you can find nearby.

In the two pictures in this section, you can see the wonderful old Abbey at Bassac near my home in the Charente region of France. I have used the framing technique to add interest to both shots.

The first photo uses shrubs and branches to trap part of the Abbey building in a natural frame. They create a foreground plane which gives the feeling that we are peeping through the foliage at the building as if spying on it.



Shutter speed: 1/160 s

Aperture: f/5.6

Focal Length: 18mm

ISO: 160

In the second photo of the Abbey, the building has been framed using an archway which is another part of the building itself. Again, there is a foreground plane created which gives us the feeling of actually standing where the photographer stood to take the shot.



Shutter speed: 1/200 s

Aperture: f/6.3

Focal Length: 14 mm

ISO: 100

EXERCISE

Try this technique for yourself. It's nearly always possible to find something to place in the foreground which will then frame your main subject although you may have to hunt around a bit. Don't forget to look behind you as well and be prepared to move backwards if you find something interesting to include as a foreground frame.

Take some shots of people using organic elements such as branches to frame them. Take some more shots using parts of buildings, cars and other man-made elements to frame your subject.

Which worked better? Can you think of any other objects which would work as frames? Once you start looking, you will begin find them everywhere.

5. FRAMING PART 2

It may seem an obvious statement, but a photograph is a 2-dimensional object which means that you need to be aware of your background, middle ground and foreground at all times.

Objects in the background can be effectively included in your shot. By positioning the elements of your composition just right, you can effectively trap certain parts and compel the viewer's eye to the places you want them to go.



Shutter speed: 1/160 s

Aperture: f/9

Focal Length: 13 mm

ISO: 200

This shot of two horses was made in Shetland and it is cold up there so they often wear jackets to keep warm! The smaller horse in this shot is framed by the shape of the big horse's neck.

The second shot was made when I was photographer-in-residence for the Brittany Tourist Board in France. The coast line of Brittany has some stunning pink granite rock formations and is a popular area for sailing. I saw this boat with white sails as I was walking along the coastal path and waited for it to move in between the 'V' of the two rocks.



Both images use a V-shape for framing but another example could be a single flower surrounded by leaves or the ripples on water around a duck. All these examples have the effect of creating a kind of frame, limiting the movement of the eye around the picture and keeping it where you, the photographer, choose.

EXERCISE

In your shots today, start off by looking for V-shapes and try to move your body around so that the V-shape lines up with an interesting element in your environment.

Then seek out different ways of framing using organic elements if possible and look for geometric shapes such as circles or triangles or even just straight lines in the foreground to surround your subject.

6. FORMAT



Shutter speed: 1/60 s

Aperture: f/5.6

Focal Length: 27 mm

ISO: 1600

Our brains are becoming more and more used to landscape (horizontal) format as a way of viewing pictures. This may be due to the preponderance of TV and computer screens in our lives. Because of this, it is easy to forget that anything but landscape format exists. But by simply turning your camera through 90 degrees, you can often dramatically improve your shot.

Portrait (vertical) format can make a subject seem less stable than landscape format. Subjects such as skyscrapers, trees and people are often better shot using a vertical format and can seem quite unstable by shooting this way. On the other hand, using a horizontal format emphasises a feeling of stability.

For the picture of the male Taoist priest, I used a horizontal format as I wanted to include the beautiful light and wonderful painting on the wall around him as he read the ancient texts of his religion. Shooting in landscape format helped to create a feeling of peace and harmony.

In the second picture, a female Taoist priest is perched slightly precariously on the edge of an ornamental pool. For this shot, I used a vertical format to emphasise her unstable pose.



Shutter speed: 1/100 s

Aperture: f/5

Focal Length: 50 mm

ISO: 100

EXERCISE

Find a subject that interests you, perhaps a person or a pet. Make an environmental portrait using both landscape and portrait format.

Which do you prefer? Now make some shots of architecture using both formats. You might be surprised by the increase in compositional strength when using portrait format for buildings.

PART II: LINE & SHAPE

I often think of that rare fulfilling joy, when I am in the presence of some wonderful alignment of events. Where the light, the colour, the shapes and the balance all interlock so beautifully that I feel truly overwhelmed by the wonder of it. - Charlie Waite

7. STRAIGHT LINES

Now for a bit of (gentle) geometry. When there are three or more similar or identical elements in a picture, there is an invisible line which runs through them. These virtual lines are as important, often more so in compositional terms, than actual lines. Such an imaginary line has a powerful pull and the viewer's gaze will tend to move from one object to the other along this virtual line.



Shutter speed: 1/125 s

Aperture: f/8

Focal Length: 70 mm

ISO: 200

Straight lines are either horizontal, vertical or diagonal, relative to the sides of the picture. Different lines are associated with different moods. A horizontal line is associated with the horizon and has a peaceful, calm effect. A vertical line such as that of a tree or a human being, is acting in the same direction as gravity, or perhaps opposing it.



Shutter speed: 1/250 s

Aperture: f/7.1

Focal Length: 149 mm

ISO: 200

Diagonal lines are the most dynamic of all and seem to possess movement and activity. They enliven a composition and create tension within the image. This is because a diagonal line looks unstable, as if it is falling. A diagonal line in a composition will draw the viewer's gaze more powerfully than a horizontal or vertical line and is one of the strongest pictorial elements available to the photographer. Corner-to-corner diagonals are the strongest of all diagonals and can be created quite easily in a photograph.

EXERCISE

Today, be aware of the lines within your compositions, be they horizontal, vertical or diagonal. Look for three objects of similar size and shape which either line up or can be made to line up by moving a bit. Look back through shots you've taken previously and analyse the different kinds of line they contain. Check out all the lines in the shot I made near the Eiffel Tower in Paris of a vendor selling his wares. There are so many straight lines in this shot it's probably not possible to count them all. They weave together in a complex web to create patterns of rhythm and visual interest that are pleasing to the eye.

8. CURVED LINES

Curved lines tend to convey a sense of gentle movement. They can be implied in a picture by arranging a series of points, as with the bees on the sunflower. The central area of the flower itself is curved and the parallel curved lines together form a powerful compositional element which is visually harmonious.



Shutter speed: 1/250 s

Aperture: f/7.1

Focal Length: 150 mm

ISO: 200

Here is another example of the power of curved lines. This is a photograph of the Great Wall of China. The day I took the shot was a bank holiday and it seemed that half of China was on the Wall obscuring most of the view. So instead of taking the usual generic shot of the whole length of the Wall, I decided to move in closer and use a wide angle of 28 mm to capture a small portion. The result is a strong composition where curved lines and straight lines intermingle.



Shutter speed: 1/800 s

Aperture: f/8

Focal Length: 28 mm

ISO: Unknown

EXERCISE

Urban environments are packed with straight lines - finding curved lines is slightly more challenging but possible nonetheless. Make lots of shots with all kinds of horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines and then experiment with curved lines. Look for shots where all types of lines exist. Move around the scene a lot as you line things up. See if you can make a curved line in your composition by lining up a series of small objects.

9. LEADING LINES

The human eye tends to follow lines and this creates a sense of movement into and through the picture. We can use lines in a photograph to create a flow from one area to another, most often from foreground to background or from one side to the other.

Although the eye follows lines, it is possible to use certain elements to stop that movement. The image of a wheat field has two main lines: one leads to the trees in the distance but then the movement is stopped off by the trees; the other leads to the middle ground and then off to the right and out of the picture frame because there is nothing to stop the eye at that point. The two lines together create tension within the composition.



Shutter speed: 1/160 s

Aperture: f/5.6

Focal Length: 16 mm

ISO: 100

Compare this with the lines in the photograph of an old barge which I took outside the building that used to be a German Submarine Base in Bordeaux in France. Here the yellow line in the road and the line of the kerb work together to draw the eye into the picture. The strong horizontal line of the top of the boat hull strengthens the visual pull.



Shutter speed: 1/800 s

Aperture: f/11

Focal Length: 14 mm

ISO: 125

The eye loves visual games and likes being deceived so although the image is really two-dimensional, the lines lead the eye strongly into the composition enhancing the illusion of a 3-dimensional space.

EXERCISE

Take your camera out into the street. Use a wide-angle lens if possible or set your zoom to the widest focal length. Look for road markings which you can use in your photos in a similar way to those used here. Use them in a way which draws the eye into the picture, from foreground to background, and then from one area in the picture to another. BUT please put your safety first at all times. Watch out for traffic and stay on the pavement to make your shots if it is more appropriate.

10. RECTANGLES

Very often there is an underlying geometry in many photographs just as in paintings. The geometric shapes are most often circles, rectangles and triangles and it is this design that gives harmony and coherence to a picture.



Shutter speed: 1/250 s

Aperture: f/6.3

Focal Length: 14 mm

ISO: 100

These shapes may or may not be consciously perceived by the viewer but when used consciously by you, the photographer, to organise the pictorial space, they help to unify the composition and the result is more powerful than a depiction of a random assortment of elements.

This image was shot in a small lake near my home. The shape of each post plus its reflection together form a rectangle which overlaps the one before it. The result is an intriguing set of shapes which the eye knows is a trick and therefore it becomes a kind of visual game.

The second shot is of a Chinese man using a rubber tyre as a makeshift boat from which to throw his net. The second shot is of a Chinese man using a rubber tyre as a makeshift boat but from which to throw his net. The rectangular shapes at the top of the picture are fairly

obvious but a less obvious geometric shape is the one made by the net in the water which forms an oval when viewed from low down but is actually a circle when viewed from above.



Shutter speed: 1/320 s

Aperture: f/6.3

Focal Length: 140 mm

ISO: 200

EXERCISE

Look for a single rectangular shape that you find pleasing. Then try to find another rectangle within the scene which echoes the first one you chose.

Walk around the scene and line up your shapes in different ways. Don't press the shutter release button until you feel you have explored all the possibilities within the picture. Avoid symmetry for this particular assignment as it can have a deadening effect on your picture.

11. CIRCLES

Circles occur frequently in man-made environments and sometimes in nature and it is a good idea to train your eye to look for them not only as full-on circles but also as ovals which are sometimes circles seen from another angle. In this image, the huge bulls-eye is a series of concentric circles and these shapes are echoed in the circular wheels of the bicycle.



Shutter speed: 1/200 s

Aperture: f/5.2

Focal Length: 29 mm

ISO: 100

The second shot shows a series of painted ovals in the form of cup shapes and these shapes are also echoed in the shapes of the wheels of the bicycle propped up against the wall. Note that in the photo, only one of the wheels is an actual circle. The front wheel forms an oval because of the angle of view.



Shutter speed: 1/500 s

Aperture: f/3.5

Focal Length: 14 mm

ISO: 100

Knowing how to bypass the language part of your mind which loves to label things, and perceive shapes as they would look in a 2-dimensional plane is an important part of the learning process. If you like, it's switching from left brain analytical logic to right brain creative imagery.

The echoing of shapes in this way within a picture gives a nice consonance, a feeling of repetition without the dullness of a repeating pattern.



The final shot shows leaves reflected in a lake. The oval shape in the water is a circular ripple (when seen from above) and creates an interesting visual game when combined with the symmetry of the leaf reflections.

EXERCISE

Look for circles in your environment. These could be natural shapes such as flowers or the moon or man-made objects within your own home. You could even make a still life with objects you find around the house.

Make a shot which has the circle shape repeated in two completely different objects. The circles can be full or ovals. See if you can find more variations on this the

12. TRIANGLES

Having three lines or objects within a picture frame can creates a triangular composition provided they are not lined up in a row. If the three objects are staggered within the picture frame, the mind feels compelled to join them up. This compositional shape is very strong.



Shutter speed: 1/160 s

Aperture: f/9

Focal Length: 28 mm

ISO: 200

Note that a triangle can be formed from three dissimilar lines. Also, the triangle does not have to have sides which are totally straight as seen in the image above. This makes them much easier to find.

It is also possible to imply a triangle through the use of three points, as seen in the second photo where the dark hair of the three boys create a strong visual pull between them as the mind tries to ‘join the dots’.



Shutter speed: 1/125 s

Aperture: f/6.3

Focal Length: 18 mm

ISO: 1600

EXERCISE

Go out into nature, the park or garden. Look for triangles, ones with sides rather than points. If you can also find triangles with points that will be great but they are less easy to find in nature than in a man-made environment.

If you are having trouble finding triangular compositions, then set up a still life in your home with three similar objects. Shoot the still life from different angles and move around the objects noticing how the triangular shape changes.

PART III: MOVEMENT

What reinforces the content of a photograph is the sense of rhythm – the relationship between shapes and values. - Henri Cartier-Bresson

13. PATTERN & RHYTHM

Another powerful compositional device is rhythm, the repetition of similar elements within the pictorial space. These elements may be lines or shapes.

Rhythm, however, is not the same as pattern. Pattern occurs when the repeated elements become predictable. The photo of the boats is an example of rhythm because there is also a sense of motion. In other words, the repeated elements are taking the eye on a journey because of the variations in angle and size.



Pattern on the other hand has a static feel. With pattern, the elements are repeated without variation and could be said to be monotonous. A good example is the bars on the windows and the books on the shelves in the second photo.



Shutter speed: 1/400s

Aperture: f/8

Focal Length: 76 mm

ISO: 200

However there is variation in the colours of the books and this variation is what adds rhythm to the pattern. If the books in any one section, were absolutely identical and without variation in colour, there would be no progression, no sense of movement and therefore no rhythm.

EXERCISE

The conscious inclusion of rhythm and pattern in your photos can be very powerful and it's fairly easy to find both in your immediate environment. Try to make some shots that contain pure pattern and then look for a different subject which contains both pattern and rhythm.

14. FREEZING THE ACTION

The next image was shot at a small aerodrome in France. The rhythm of the arm shapes of the three children waving at the small plane form an interesting composition and are echoed in the shape of the wind sock which also seems to be waving at the small plane about to take off.



Shutter speed: 1/200 s

Aperture: f/13

Focal Length: 30 mm

ISO: 200

We know from experience that the three children waving must have their arms in motion but the action has been frozen at a specific moment in time by choosing a fairly fast shutter speed of 1/200 second. This is called 'freezing the action'.

At this particularly shutter speed, I was able to choose an aperture of f/13, a fairly small aperture which gives a fairly large depth-of-field which allowed me to get the plane in the distance in focus.

Another example of frozen motion is shown in the next shot, where Chinese women dance in the early morning (6 am!) in the city square.



Shutter speed: 1/800 s

Aperture: f/7.1

Focal Length: 55 mm

ISO: 200

EXERCISE

Choose subjects which are fairly fast moving such as cars, bicycles or joggers and set your camera using TV (Time Value) or S (Shutter Speed) mode. Keep the ISO on Auto and focal length the same throughout the experiment. If you want, you can use the camera data on these two pages as your starting point.

With each successive shot, make small changes in the shutter speed. Try to find the point at which the subject becomes blurred. You might also like to experiment with creating more and more blur by slowing the shutter speed more and more. The next section deals with this separately - Motion Blur.

15. MOTION BLUR

If you completed the previous exercise, you will realise that the use of slow shutter speeds blurs your picture. The speed varies depending on the subject but gaining control over the amount of blur in the picture can be used to creative advantage.

The first photo shows a café at night. The building of course is stationary but the traffic passing in front of the café is moving relatively fast. Because it is night time, the amount of light available was lessened which meant that I had to use a slower shutter speed to get a good exposure.



Shutter speed: 10 s

Aperture: f/22

Focal Length: 28 mm

ISO: 100

To help me slow the shutter speed further, I chose a small aperture of f/22 to minimize the amount of light getting in through the lens. With such a slow shutter speed, moving objects such as traffic become blurred and at night the headlamps will leave light trails such as you see here.

So after sunset is a good time to practice motion blur shots. As you can see, the shutter speed was very, very slow - 10 seconds - and I therefore put the camera on a tripod. Otherwise the whole thing would have been a blur!

To make shots like this you need to have a shutter speed exactly matched to your requirements. Too slow and you will get camera shake, too fast and you will freeze all

motion. As a rough guide, a speed of 1/500th second or higher will freeze everything.

I used 1/250th second for the second shot of a man taking a rubbing of an old Chinese stone-carved text. The man's body was more or less stationary and I only wanted to blur the motion of the hand as it moved magically back and forth across the ancient Chinese characters. At an aperture of f/4.5, the background was out of focus but still retained some detail.



Shutter speed: 1/20 s

Aperture: f/4.5

Focal Length: 50 mm

ISO: 800

EXERCISE

Make two shots of the same subject, one where just a small portion of the subject is blurred such as a hand waving or a head turning, and a second shot where the whole subject is blurred. Use the camera data given for the second shot as a starting point. Keep the aperture the same for both shots but experiment with the shutter speed. Do this handheld, without a tripod, indoors or out.

You might also like to make some shots to capture light trails as I have done in the first photo. You will need to find somewhere fairly free of pedestrians as you will be setting up your tripod on the pavement. Again, use the camera data given as your starting point. And don't forget to wrap up warm as you may find yourself standing around for a while!

PART IV: PICTURE DEPTH

I wanted to make...flat pictures that had depth; to find a picture by chance, yet have some control over it. - John Loengard

Each photograph is only a small, flat series of tones... its depth is an illusion, its animation symbolic. Yet it has this mysterious richness transcending all its limitations so that our impressions of major and complex events may be permanently fashioned by a single news photograph. - Harold Evans

16. PICTURE DEPTH PART 1

We are now going to look at how to control the aperture for creative effect.

The wider the aperture, the more the background becomes a soft blur with a concomitant loss of detail. Conversely, the smaller the aperture, the clearer the background will be with lots of detail visible, even when the photo is enlarged.

Note that smaller apertures have bigger numbers and vice versa. For example, f/22 is a very small aperture whereas f/5.6 is quite wide and f/1.8 is very wide.

In the sunflower shot, I used an aperture of f/7.1 which has softened the focus of the flower in the background. We can still see clearly what it is although much of the fine detail has been lost. The central circle acts as a frame for the foreground flower which is just beginning to open up, and the two are visually connected.



Shutter speed: 1/500 s

Aperture: f/7.1

Focal Length: 190 mm

ISO: 200

There are really only two planes of interest in the sunflower shot. But in a lot of pictures there is a third plane so that you have the foreground, the middle ground and the background. Often it is important to separate the background from the other two planes in order to make your subject stand out.

In the second photograph, the background is unobtrusive although it is still obviously a

series of buildings. This was achieved by focusing on the man in the foreground and, just as importantly, choosing the right aperture.



Shutter speed: 1/400 s

Aperture: f/5.6

Focal Length: 100 mm

ISO: 100

A small aperture will ensure everything in the picture is sharp (provided there is no camera shake) and a wide aperture such as the one used here, will help to lose detail in the background.

EXERCISE

Mastering aperture takes time and a lot of practice. This is partly because the aperture you select affects your other camera settings, especially shutter speed, if you want your shot to be properly exposed.

For your shots today, set your camera to AV (Aperture Value). This will allow you to select the aperture each time while the camera software chooses the correct shutter speed for the light available. Keep everything else on automatic, including the ISO, until you feel confident.

Shoot out of doors and choose a wide range of apertures. Your aim is to produce photos where the background is soft and lacking detail and also to make photos where the background is pin sharp. Compare the aperture settings but note that with longer focal lengths, the depth-of-field (the amount in focus) will lessen.

17. PICTURE DEPTH PART 2

As we saw in the last section, a photograph only has one surface but it often depicts three planes: fore-, middle- and background. In the photograph on this page, each of the three planes is essential to the story. The title is: 'At the Airport' and depicts a scene which most people have experienced at some time in their travels.



Shutter speed: 1/250 s

Aperture: f/6.3

Focal Length: 141 mm

ISO: 3200

In the foreground is the half-empty teapot with a single drop of tea about to fall from the spout into the cup below. This gives a sense of time suspended. In the middle ground, and completely still like the drop of tea, a weary traveller sleeps with her head resting on her arm. Finally, in the background, we see the airport which is just a blur but essential to complete the story.

The second picture was made whilst travelling in a sampan along the canals of Shaoxing in China. It is constructed along similar lines, with the roof of the boat in the foreground, the main subject in the middle ground and the canal stretching away in the background.



Shutter speed: 1/60 s

Aperture: f/10

Focal Length: 8 mm

ISO: 200

EXERCISE

Create a photograph using three planes as if it were a theatre stage. Position objects and people appropriately. Select a large aperture (small number) that will create a shallow depth-of-field to blur the background while still retaining enough information to create atmosphere. Start around f/6.3 or wider and experiment. Let your imagination run free and experiment.

18. PICTURE DEPTH PART 3

Having the subject in the foreground and objects in the background (as we saw in Picture Depth Part 1) is one way to shoot a scene. However, this can have the effect of splitting the composition in two and sometimes it is better to use the background as more than just a stage setting and create a picture where foreground and background merge into one. This gives real depth to the picture in a very compelling way and we feel drawn into a 3-dimensional world.



Shutter speed: 1/80 s

Aperture: f/5.6

Focal Length: 18 mm

ISO: 400

More often than not, creating real depth in this way is better achieved by using portrait (vertical) format for your shots. Both the photographs in this section, are examples of a compelling sense of 3-dimensions.

In the second image, the girl in the picture is further back in the shot but is still the main subject as the lines within the composition lead the eye all the way into the background.



Shutter speed: 1/640 s

Aperture: f/6.3

Focal Length: 22 mm

ISO: 1600

Note that there is still foreground interest although that is not the main subject. Having objects in the foreground can add to the story and give the viewer clues about the characters within the scene.

EXERCISE

With the shots you take today, try to include the background in such a way that it really merges with the foreground. Place your subject in the foreground for some of them, and in the middle- or background for others. Use portrait format if you think it helps but be willing to change to landscape format if necessary. Use people as the main subject but if not you can make photos of flowers, dogs, cars or whatever appeals to you.

PART V: RELATIONSHIPS

A lot of people seem to think that art or photography is about the way things look, or the surface of things. That's not what it's about for me. It's really about relationships and feelings... - Nan Goldin

19. POSITIVE & NEGATIVE SPACE

Relationship is everything in a picture. We have looked at many pictorial relationships so far including the relationship between lines and shapes, between different picture planes, action and non-action, and so on.

Another really powerful compositional device is the relationship between positive space and negative space. Negative space is to a picture what the reverse side of a coin is to the obverse - it gives a sense of completeness. Without the negative space the picture is incomplete.

Negative space is any element in a picture which you cannot give a name to. The negative space in a scene will not always jump out at you immediately but practice will enhance your ability to find it.

The negative space in the first image is the large area in front of the young couple who are huddled together on the wall. The negative space here creates a sense of emptiness and loneliness.



Shutter speed: 1/900 s

Aperture: f/4.1

Focal Length: Unknown

ISO: 400

The second photo also has a feeling of emptiness and loneliness created by the negative space behind the seated woman. If she had been photographed close up, the negative space would have been cropped out and the feeling of loneliness lost. As you can see, negative space can be a very powerful communicator.



Shutter speed: 1/200 s

Aperture: f/4.5

Focal Length: 35 mm

ISO: 200

EXERCISE

We are used to viewing the world through a veil of logic which must give a name to everything. Negative space doesn't have a name so we need to learn how to see it by making a conscious effort to do so.

One way to increase your awareness of negative space is to do a drawing of an upside-down picture. This is a technique which Betty Edwards uses, author of Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain. If a picture is upside down when you draw it, you have to get out of your logical left brain and become 'right brained' in order to give your awareness to the

spaces in between things. The right brain doesn't name things so it's an effective technique.

You can try this for yourself by choosing an image on the internet, preferably something simple like a line art drawing. Print it out, turn it upside down, and then copy it onto another sheet of paper. If, for example, you choose a drawing of a chair, then draw the spaces in between the chair parts, the spaces with no name. This exercise should only take about 15 minutes but when you have finished you should find you have drawn something fairly accurate and in the process discovered the wonder of negative space.

20. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN OBJECTS

Sometimes you can imply a relationship between two objects in a picture that doesn't actually exist in real life. To do this you need to find the right angle and height.

This works well with the first image of two flowers because I chose an angle where the deep red flower seems to cradle and support the yellow one, thereby showing a somewhat anthropomorphic relationship between the two.



This concept can also be seen in the second photograph I made of two public dustbins, not normally considered a good subject for photography! There are definitely two eyes and a mouth in each dustbin right? Imagination is a wonderful thing!



Shutter speed: 1/125 s

Aperture: f/6.3

Focal Length: 35 mm

ISO: 100

EXERCISE

See if you can find two similar objects and create a photographic relationship between the two. This could be man-made objects such as shown here or natural objects from your garden such as flowers or insects. You may wish to set up a still life but finding the objects naturally can be very pleasing for you, as an artist.

21. RELATIONSHIPS IN SIZE

Indicating scale in a picture is an easy objective but an important one, particularly in landscapes where the real size of objects can be very difficult to determine.

The first photograph was shot on the Côte de Granit Rose (Pink Granite Coast) in Brittany which is in the very north of France. It's famous for the incredible shapes that have been hewn out of the soft rock by the weather and the pounding waves of the English Channel.



Many people visit the coast including fishermen and the day I visited, there were two men casting their lines from one side of this wonderful rock shape - perfect for giving a sense of scale to my shot! The men look quite small by comparison with the massive shape they stand on. Without them, the viewer would have no way of knowing just how big the rocks are.

In the second shot, scale is more difficult to determine. The flowers in the foreground help but without knowing the distance between the camera and the rocks, it's not easy to be certain just how big the rocks really are.



EXERCISE

In urban areas the relative size of things is usually apparent so you may need to get out into the country to make some landscape or seascape shots. Walk in nature, by the coast or in the countryside, and look for a scene where it is difficult to determine the scale except by including a person, animal, building or anything else you can find that will act as a kind of measure by which the size of the hills, fields or cliffs can easily be seen.

To create this comparison, you might like to take the dog or a friend who is willing to be included in your shots or use your tripod and the timer so you can position yourself in the scene. If you don't have a tripod, balance your camera carefully on a fence-post or gate.

22. RELATIONSHIP TO THE ENVIRONMENT

An environmental portrait is one that shows the relationship of your subject to their surroundings, most often in their home or work place. Making a portrait in this way says a lot more about someone than just taking a picture of them in the park or in front of a blank wall.

The portrait shown here is of four children of a family I met in China. The family live in two rooms and share wash and toilet facilities with their local community. The parents declined to be photographed but agreed to the children having a portrait made in one of their two rooms. The picture is dark as the shot is lit by just one bare light bulb.



Shutter speed: 1/50 s

Aperture: f/3.5

Focal Length: 10 mm

ISO: Unknown

The second portrait was also shot in China. It shows a Muslim business women who runs a stall in one of the oldest markets in the world, in Xi'an, at the beginning of the Silk Road, an ancient trading route. She is surrounded by the goods she sells, busily knitting for her family while she waits for customers. She rarely visits the mosque due to lack of time.



Shutter speed: 1/60 s

Aperture: f/3.5

Focal Length: 18 mm

ISO: 800

EXERCISE

Make an environmental portrait of someone you know or else someone you meet in passing. Street markets are a good place to go or else make a portrait of a friend at their workplace or in their home. Make the shot in a candid manner without too much control. Choose background and surroundings to say the most you can about your subject.

You could also set up your camera and tripod to do a self-portrait of yourself, using your home space to express your interests and lifestyle. You will need to set your camera to a wide angle if you are shooting indoors. A wide angle lens would be helpful but is not essential.

PART VI: AVAILABLE LIGHT

It is both the taking and giving of beauty; the turning out to the light the inner folds of the awareness of the spirit. It is the recreation on another plane of the realities of the world; the tragic and wonderful realities of earth and men, and of all the inter-relations of these.

- Ansel Adams

Light, that first phenomenon of the world, reveals to us the spirit and living soul of this world through colour. Johannes Itten, Bauhaus Colourist

23. SILHOUETTES

Although you may think the topic of light doesn't belong in a book on composition, I've included it here as light can actually be an interesting subject itself.

This first section deals with silhouettes which occur when the background is brightly lit and the foreground then becomes black.



Shutter speed: 1/800 s

Aperture: f/3.6

Focal Length: 24 mm

ISO: 400

In the first image, the three men cleaning the roof of the building using long-handled brushes look like shadows but the roof is semi-opaque and so we are actually seeing the men themselves, not a shadow projected onto the roof.

Make sure you don't confuse silhouettes with shadows. A shadow is a dark area produced by an object which comes between rays of light and a surface.

The second image is also a silhouette but I have retained some of the detail in the houses to create a little bit of added interest. A totally black silhouette can look a bit dead otherwise.



Shutter speed: 1/640 s

Aperture: f/13

Focal Length: 45 mm

ISO: 100

EXERCISE

To create a silhouette you need to make sure you only use available light so turn off your flash, and take an exposure reading for the background. Press the shutter half way to lock the exposure and then re-compose if necessary before pushing it down all the way to take the picture. This way, the camera is ‘fooled’, and will underexpose the main subject which will come out dark, hence a silhouette.

Include interesting foreground and/or background objects. Any colour background will do (except black). Red adds life, vitality and even drama, blue is peaceful, yellow and orange can lift an otherwise colourless shot, white is purity, holy, sublime.

24. AVAILABLE LIGHT PART 1 - MAKING LIGHT THE SUBJECT

The next photograph was taken on the coast on a foggy day. The rock formation in the background is known as the Devil's Castle. You might be forgiven for thinking there wasn't enough light available for making photos on that day but without the fog this mysterious image would not have worked. I shot in black and white and added the sepia tone in post processing.



The second photo shows an outdoor barbecue, and again the early evening light was the main attraction. By using a single patch of light as the main subject, I managed to create an atmospheric image.



Shutter speed: 1/332 s

Aperture: f/12.9

Focal Length: 17 mm

ISO: 1600

EXERCISE

Go outdoors with your camera with the intention of making light the subject of your photos. Keep an eye on the weather forecast and wait until you think the light is interesting. Partial cloud will give tantalising glimpses of sunshine which pick out interesting details. When the sun is getting low in the sky is also a good time to shoot.

Wandering through trees can often lead to the discovery of interesting pools of light or rays of light shining through leaves. Don't wait until sunset to venture forth as the window of opportunity is too small by then. Another possibility is after a downpour when surfaces are shiny with rainwater and interesting reflections.

25. AVAILABLE LIGHT PART 2 - INDOOR PORTRAITS

Portraits can work very well when using just the available light from a window. The light should be soft and even - full sunlight is not flattering and will cause hard shadows to be cast on your subject's face. Make sure the background is arranged in such a way that it enhances the composition.



Shutter speed: 1/40 s

Aperture: f/5

Focal Length: 33 mm

ISO: 800

There will be less available light compared with shooting out of doors so you will need to open up the aperture to allow the lens to gather as much light as possible. This in turn means depth-of-field will be smaller which can work very well with portrait shots.

Choose the smallest ISO you can to ensure the best looking skin tones, and set your camera to Auto Noise Reduction. Although there is software available which lets you post-process digital noise, I prefer to do it in-camera so that I can get feedback while I work.



Shutter speed: 1/5 s

Aperture: f/4.5

Focal Length: 35 mm

ISO: 200

EXERCISE

In your home or at a friend's house you will find ample opportunity for creative shots. Or you could go to the shopping centre with a willing friend. Another option is to use a tripod and the timer on the camera to make portraits of yourself by the window. Keep an eye on the sun and avoid hard shadows.

26. AVAILABLE LIGHT PART 3 - SHOOTING AT NIGHT

At night time, and even around dusk, there may be insufficient light to get hand-held shots. A tripod is a boon and you can use long exposures such as the 1.3-second shot of this church. Notice how the street lights become star bursts when using longer exposures and small apertures.



Shutter speed: 1.3 s

Aperture: f/20

Focal Length: 10 mm

ISO: 100

However, hand-held shots such as the second image of a couple sitting by the river at dusk are perfectly possible, and with a bit of experimentation you will easily get the hang of it.



Shutter speed: 1/640 s

Aperture: f/13

Focal Length: 45 mm

ISO: 100

EXERCISE

Start by making some trial shots using either TV or AV mode. Use a tripod and set the camera to Live View, if it is available, so you can monitor results (but note that Live View may not work so well when the camera is hand-held).

Raise the ISO if necessary to allow you to vary the combination of aperture and shutter speed to suit your needs. Experiment with under-exposing by 1, 2 and 3 stops. Keep on experimenting without trying to get great shots but with curiosity as to the results and how changing the settings affects the outcome.

The camera's exposure is based on the focusing point you have chosen. Exposing for the brightest part of the scene will result in very dark areas as can be seen in the riverside shot where the main subject is silhouetted against the reflected light in the water.

Conversely, exposing for the darkest part of the scene will result in blown out highlights which have no detail at all.

PART VII: LANGUAGE

Photography is a global visual language. - Lakshman Iyer

27. STORY TELLING

Not every picture tells a story. The ones that do are the ones that convey a powerful emotion and these pictures remain in our memories. They show us our innermost selves by drawing out our own emotional response, and can evoke a strong resonance with other peoples and sectors of society.



Shutter speed: 1/125 s

Aperture: 4/9

Focal Length: 200 mm

ISO: Unknown

Photographs such as these often belong to the genre of photojournalism or documentary photography although the latter normally requires more than one image to tell the story.

With photojournalism, just one shot can sum up a whole situation. If a single photo tells the story well, a short caption should suffice without the need for further text to support it.



Shutter speed: 1/100 s

Aperture: f/5

Focal Length: 35 mm

ISO: 100

EXERCISE

Because the expression of emotion through a photograph most often involves people, it can be a challenge for some photographers who prefer to shoot flowers, architecture, and landscape and so on.

So do what the famous street photographer Robert Doisneau did. Doisneau was very shy, too shy to photograph adults, when he first started out as a photographer. So to start he photographed children.

If you don't have children of your own to photograph, borrow some! Be careful when shooting in parks and public places as many people will not be very happy about it. Ask your friends if you can photograph their children and do so at their home, especially if they have a garden where the children can be free to be themselves.

Set your camera to TV and choose a high shutter speed of 1/500 so that the camera will freeze movement, and shoot lots of images. Watch their faces and expressions. Tune in to the games they play. Wait for the story to unfold before your camera and be ready with your finger on the button for that perfect, candid moment.

28. METAPHOR

A metaphor is something regarded as symbolic of something else. In the first image, of a blind man and his dog, the dog's eye is the main subject because it is a symbol for the ability to see. This dog is called Ben-Ben and at the time of making this photo (in 2007), he was one of only 3 guide dogs for the blind in the whole of China, a country that has 9 million blind people.



Shutter speed: 1/250 s

Aperture: f/4.5

Focal length: 18 mm

ISO: 100

The second image is of an abandoned car parked by a dilapidated house. We tend to be anthropomorphic about cars and this one seems to have a persona of its own. In my image, the car has become a metaphor for everything that decays.



Shutter speed: 1/160 s

Aperture: f/10

Focal Length: 22 mm

ISO: 400

EXERCISE

I want you to think of some visual metaphors for yourself and then go out and make some shots. You might like to use the internet to research this topic before making any images.

This is perhaps one of the more challenging assignments because you need to think in the abstract. One way to think in symbolic terms is to represent the whole by a small detail or part of that whole. In essence, this is what I have done with the photo of the dog. The eye is a detail that has become a symbol for something greater than just itself. The second image of the car can be seen as a metaphor for ourselves, as humans, and the ageing process.

Here are a few more examples of visual metaphor to help get your mind in gear: a hand holding a small clod of earth with a plant growing from it can be a metaphor for the fragility of the earth or our need to take care of the planet; an image of two hands clasped can be a metaphor for friendship or agreement; a white dove flying high into the sky can be a metaphor for freedom or peace.

29. BREAKING THE RULES

At first glance you might think this is not a great shot as the boy's face is hidden by the book he is reading. It almost looks like his sister's head is emerging from the book. You would be forgiven for thinking this is a bad shot because normally we require portraits to show the subject's face!

But in this image I've broken the rules in order to express something important about the child. I chose this particular moment to press the shutter release button because the cover of the book shows us his favourite comic book character, and the fact that his head is almost buried in the book shows us how he is completely absorbed in the adventure of his hero.



Shutter speed: 1/100 s

Aperture: f/9

Focal Length: 18 mm

ISO: 1600

There is a similar idea in the second photo. In the west we normally think of a fan as being something a woman would use but in China both men and woman make use of them during the hot summer months.



Shutter speed: 1/50 s

Aperture: f/18

Focal Length: 47 mm

ISO: 400

I like this shot because it seems the opposite of what we expect. The man appears coquettish to us because his face his hidden behind the fan but actually he is just trying to keep cool on a hot summer's day!

EXERCISE

Look for elements of a scene which are hidden or partially so. Don't move around the scene to include them but try to find a way to use it to say something different. Make the hidden object or part the focal point of the scene. Yes, this is going to be another challenging assignment!

30. IMAGINATION

Good composition doesn't just rely on rules it also relies on imagination. What you read in to a picture can be more important than what is actually depicted. Often this means consciously implying something in a picture which cannot be actually seen.

I visited a bullring in Spain for this shot of a *desolladero* (Spanish for slaughter-house), the area where the carcass of a dead bull is taken after a bullfight.



Shutter speed: 1/192 s

Aperture: f/8

Focal Length: 5.6 mm

ISO: 160

Symbolically, the red floor, the hooks on the wall, the white tiles, the brush that is used to clean the blood from the floor, even the emptiness of the space, make the scene look very sombre. I also like the inclusion of the word *desolladero* in the shot as it is reminiscent of the English word 'desolate'. There is no bull in sight, no carcass, no blood but we can almost see it, almost smell it. It's impossible to look at this photo without your imagination being activated.

EXERCISE

Make a photograph that tells a story through what is not there, in other words make your viewer use their imagination through your choice of what to include. Include a word or words from the environment if that helps to convey your message. The best way to approach this is to find a scene that invokes a strong emotion within you. This assignment should bring together all the ideas in this last section. You will be telling a story, probably through the use of metaphor, and hopefully stimulating your viewer's imagination. And feel free to break any or all of the rules!



Shutter speed: 1/32 s

Aperture: f/3.5

Focal Length: 10 mm

ISO: 2000

*If it makes you laugh, if it makes you cry, if it rips out your heart, that's a good picture. -
Eddie Adams*

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