

INTUITIVE vs. DIRECTED SHOOTING

There are two ways in general of shooting – the Intuitive way and the Directed way. Neither way is any better than the other. It is all a matter of your personality and which fits your way of working. [And of course this is not a black and white issue, photography is all shades of grey (*pardon the plethora of puns*) (*pardon the alliteration*).]

In a period of early human development our ancestors were referred to as Hunter - Gatherers. This is before we became an agrarian society, but a distinction should be made between these two terms. As a gatherer, no action is taken other than to collect what is given by the world. This is like walking around the neighborhood and shooting whatever looks good without any planning in advance. A hunter, on the other hand, is searching for a specific type of photograph. Gatherers are working on an intuitive level while hunters are working in a more directed fashion.

Intuitive Shooting

The Intuitive Shooting Method is a way of shooting that works like the Gatherers. You go out into the world and you see what you are drawn to. Don't think about it too much. Bypassing the conscious mind allows you to get closer to the true *you* hiding inside. This method can be used as a 'third eye', where you shoot a lot and after a while you have an uncontrived collection of photographs. [ref: John Cage, uncontrived composition]

An important aspect of the Intuitive Shooting Method is that you cannot continue to shoot forever as a blank slate. You have to become self-aware at some point. When you do, that awareness will affect your future photos. If you never do this it will be like the movie '50 First Dates', where you start from scratch every time you shoot. You will never get anywhere. You have to learn about yourself while shooting each batch of photos, and then apply these lessons to your next batch.

Self-Awareness and Organization

To gain self-awareness you have to come to an agreement with yourself about what is actually interesting (to you). You have to go through your photos and find how they group themselves together. These groupings will be a measurement of your affinity with your subjects. When you find a group of photos that are working in a similar way, you need to define that as a 'topic' and make that subject a destination the next time you go out to shoot. Then you need to align the formal and technical tools that are being used to best suit the content. This is where intuition fades into discipline. [ref: Form Supports Content]

You can consider these groups as chapters in a book. When you have a healthy collection of chapters that are related yet varied, then the book becomes your Portfolio. Sometimes the real meaning behind the work is not revealed until it has been organized. An interesting technique is to write down a list of adjectives that describe the key features in the photos. A secondary technique is to write down a list of antonyms for these terms and go out to shoot these 'opposite' photos. This will either generate a new body of work or convince you that what you were doing was really the right thing for you. Either way, this will fortify your work.

Directed Shooting

The Directed Shooting Method is a way of shooting that is self-defining. You set a goal for yourself and you do whatever you need to do to get those shots. You go to a specific place, at a specific time, you find a certain kind of light, you set up a scenario, you find models and props, etc.

You can continue to shoot in an Intuitive manner and then collect, organize and present the resulting findings. Or you can develop this Directed Shooting Method where you hunt for specific subjects shot in a particular way using unique capture devices (cameras, lenses, film, sensors, filters, etc.) then use specific post-processing techniques to enhance the vision (developers, alternative emulsions, toners, digital processing, etc.) and then employ presentation methods that take the work even further. (large scale or small scale printing, installation, projection, etc.) and consider audience response. This is an alignment of not only Form with Content, but with Impact. [Physical, Conceptual, Emotional disciplines, respectively]. If all you do is push the shutter button and print the picture, you are not working hard enough and are not actually involved in the full realm of creative possibilities.

Content Bleed

When all of these considerations come together a photographic style begins to emerge. When you hang your photographs on the wall for a critique, they have to 'stick together'. They have to have some commonality. This is where the concept of 'content bleed' comes into play. This is where the content of one photograph informs your viewer about how to read the content in adjacent photographs. This is a common occurrence in critiques, even when not deliberate. It is evidence of the inherent continuity that is formed by your personality.

Balanced Shooting

If you never stop to find your 'essence' you will never learn anything from your photos. And if you do not know who you are, how can anyone else looking at your photo ever learn anything about you? But if you only shoot a specific subject in one specific way you risk becoming too tight and you will never make any new discoveries.

In the long run, it is probably best to develop a blend of both the Intuitive and the Directed disciplines of working. You must always be open to new experience. You must allow the act of shooting to teach you something. You should also always have some goal in mind, some specific aspects of the world you wish to investigate. Sometimes this hunting for photos will also lead us to new discoveries. [These are two examples of Visual Research on a personal level.] These two ways shooting can feed each other to make a well-rounded photo-artist.

Photo Journ

A few years ago I had three students who were very good friends and they coined the term 'Photo Journ'. They would go out with their cameras, usually in the evening, and would pick a destination. They would not necessarily know what this destination would provide but they had this as a goal nonetheless. And they would continue to shoot through the evening into the night and sometimes till dawn. They would shoot a lot in a relatively intuitive matter but they also had their own style of shooting already. It was interesting to see what they would show up with for the next critique. You could see that their photographs were shot in the same locations but the flavor of each person's photographs was unique.

If you wish, you can contact some of the other students in this class, or other photo friends of yours for that matter, and organize a Photo Journ. Or, if you wish, you can contact Samuel Dupont and see if he will be your leader and take you out on a Photo Journ.

Motivation

All photos are ultimately about you. If the photos are totally objective then they might not be, but this is what divides the world of art photo from photojournalism - the subjective vs. the objective (not that they are mutually exclusive). The big question is: what motivates the photographer? Is it to communicate some personal interest, or is it to provide information that you have been assigned to shoot? Or is it to sell some product - that is commercial photography, a third category. [Please realize that no photos are absolutely in one category or the other. They all overlap. But for the sake of conversation it is helpful to make these distinctions.]

What is always being sought out in critiques is the motivation behind the photographs. And then it is to see how a viewer's experience resonates with the intentions of the photographer.

Discipline

The function of **DISCIPLINE** is to connect your hand to your heart without your head getting in the way. Discipline enables you to shoot quickly without thinking too much, i.e. intuitively, and still shoot in an directed way. This is why we play scales on the piano - to give us muscle memory. There is an expression mentioned earlier called "the third eye". This is getting oneself into a state where you're watching yourself doing things without letting your thought process interrupt. It is an enlightened state that enables one to become better in touch with the subconscious self and develop a more sincere photographic methodology.