

FRAMES WITHIN FRAMES



◀ TURNBERRY

A natural frame formed by the tree in the foreground makes for a strong composition in which the eye is led under the branch and up the lawn to the house.

One of the most predictably successful of all photographic design constructions is an internal frame. As with any established design formula, it contains real risks of over-use, and has the makings of a cliché, but these dangers are only evidence of the fact that it does work. It simply needs a little more care and imagination when it is being applied.

The appeal of frames within frames is partly to do with composition, but at a deeper level it relates to perception. A frame like those shown here enhances the dimensionality of a photograph by emphasizing that the viewer is looking through from one plane to another. As we'll see at other points in this book, one of the recurrent issues in photography is what happens in converting a fully three-dimensional scene to a two-dimensional picture. It is more central to photography than to painting or illustration because of photography's essentially realistic roots. Frames within the picture have the effect of pulling the viewer through; they are a kind

of window. There is a relationship between the frame of the photograph and an initial step in which the viewer's attention is drawn inward. Thereafter, there is an implied momentum inward. The rhythm and shape of the gap between the two frames is only dynamic when narrow. A small internal frame simply appears to be embedded in the picture.

Another part of the appeal is that, by drawing a boundary around the principal image, an internal frame is evidence of organization. A measure of control has been imposed on the scene. Limits have been set, and the image held back from flowing over the edges of the pictures. Some feelings of stability and even rigidity enter into this, and this type of photograph lacks the casual, free-wheeling associations that you can see in, for example, classic journalistic or reportage photography. As a result, frames within frames appeal to a certain aspect of our personalities. It is a fundamental part of human nature to want to impose control on

the environment, and this has an immediate corollary in placing a structure on images. It feels satisfying to see that the elements of a picture have been defined and placed under a kind of control.

On a purely graphic level, frames focus the attention of a viewer because they establish a diminishing direction from the outer picture frame. The internal frame draws the eye in by one step, particularly if it is similar in shape to the picture format. This momentum is then easily continued further into the picture.

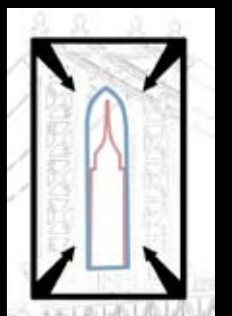
Another important design opportunity to note is the shape relationship between the two frames. As we already saw when we looked at the dynamics of the basic frame, the angles and shapes that are set up between the boundary of the picture and lines inside the image are important. This is especially so with a continuous edge inside the picture. The graphic relationship between the two frames is strongest when the gap between them is narrow.



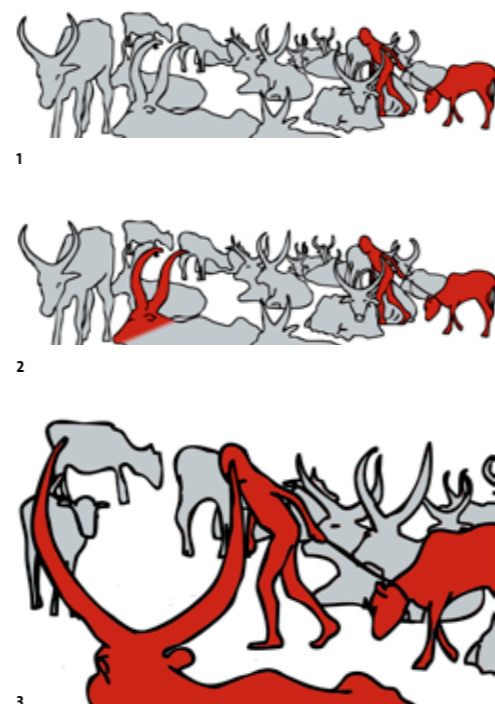
▶ PERSPECTIVE

This pair of related photographs, taken a short distance apart, of the Empire State Building and the Brooklyn Bridge in New York, shows how the frame-within-frame technique can alter the dynamics of the image. In the first photograph, the viewpoint was chosen so that the image of the building butts right up to the edge of the bridge's tower. The principal dynamic here is the correspondence of

shapes, encouraging the eye to move between the two, as shown in the diagram. From a viewpoint slightly to the right, the building can be made to fit neatly into the bridge tower's central arch. Now the eye is directed inward toward the building, in three steps, as shown by the arrows in the diagram. Once again, the internal frame structures the images more formally.



ANTICIPATION



The less control you have over a shooting situation, the more valuable it is to have an idea of what may happen next. Though largely irrelevant in studio work and other kinds of constructed photography, it is hugely important in reportage. Anticipation is a skill that goes much deeper than photography, and draws mainly on observation and a knowledge of behaviour. Using it for photography gives it a particular edge, because the aim is not just to work out how a situation might unfold and how a person may react, but how the results will work graphically. The example here from a cattle camp in southern Sudan shows this combination. The aim is always to translate the event into an organized image. As Henri Cartier-Bresson put it, “To take photographs means to recognize—simultaneously and within a fraction of a second—both the fact itself and the rigorous organization of visually perceived forms that give it meaning.”

Therefore, there are two strands to anticipation. One is concerned with behaviour and action, and also the way in which things move across the field of view and the light changes. This can be honed by staying focused and attentive, and by practice. The other strand is graphic, predicting how shapes, lines and all the other elements that we saw in chapters three to five will shift and come together in the frame, and the way to improve this is to keep in mind as many types of successful image composition as possible—the repertoire on pages TK, in other words.

On the behavioural front, the number of situations is infinite, but there are some identifiable types. There is a general situation in one location, of the kind described particularly well by the French reportage photographer Robert Doisneau: “Often, you find a scene, a scene that is already evoking something—either stupidity, or pretentiousness, or, perhaps, charm.”

So you have a little theatre. Well, all you have to do is wait there in front of this little theatre for the actors to present themselves. I often operate in this way. Here I have my setting and I wait. What I’m waiting for, I don’t know exactly. I can stay half a day in the same place.” There is a specific type in which the shot as framed is good provided that some element, such as a person, moves into a particular position. Another type is focused on a subject that you have already identified but which is not yet graphically a picture—imagine that, in wildlife photography, you have found the animal but the shot depends on it moving into a particular view. When photographing people, expression and gesture form yet another class.

◀ CATTLE CAMP

This example involved seeing a potential subject, knowing what was going on, and spotting a possible juxtaposition—with just enough time to move into position and shoot. This was a Mandari cattle camp, where young men and boys live with the cattle for part of the year, at a distance from the village. Cattle play an important social and cultural role, as well as economic, in this southern Sudan ethnic group. The animals have names, and a fine pair of horns is particularly prized.

1. The location was ripe with image possibilities and I already had a number of successful shots. I spotted the boy pulling the calf along—a potential picture, depending on what he was going to do and where he would pass.

2. Looking ahead of him, to the left, I guessed that he was taking the calf to the mother for suckling, but as my eye travelled to this cow, I saw that there was a very good pair of horns on the way. Would the boy pass in such a way that I could frame him? If so, the shot would have the added value of making a point about the importance of cattle.

3. I quickly realised two things. One was that I needed to step forward and to the right to get the horns large in the frame (and adjust the zoom focal length to suit). The other was that the bull with the horns might turn his head to the right as the boy passed. I moved into position, and fortunately the bull did move its head.



▶ THE PASSER-BY

A common class of situation in photography, particularly street photography, is when you can see a potential picture that has a strong setting, but which will be lifted a notch higher by a person, or people, walking into the frame. This view of a traditional narrowboat moored on a canal in the heart of Birmingham had most of the elements needed, and the footbridge above added interest. Visually, however, the weight of the boat needed ideally to be balanced by a group of people above. How long you are prepared to wait for passers-by in the hope that you will get just the right ones is another matter.



IMPLIED TRIANGLES



In photographic design, triangles are considerably more useful shapes than rectangles, for a number of reasons. They are more common, partly because they are simpler to construct or imply (they need only three points for the apices, and these do not need to be in any particular arrangement) and partly because of convergence—the natural graphic effects of perspective make convergent diagonals very common in photography, particularly with wide-angle lenses. They are also the most basic of all shapes, having the smallest number of sides. Moreover, they have the interesting combination of being both dynamic, because of the diagonals and corners, and stable—provided that one side is a level base. Triangles are an extremely useful design device.

The triangle is such an inherently strong shape that it appears easily to the eye, not only through converging lines, but with three points alone. With lines, often two are sufficient; the third can be assumed or else an appropriate frame edge can be taken as one side. As for points, any three prominent centers of interest will do, particularly if they are similar in content, tone, size, or some other quality. Unlike rectangles and circles, both of which

need to have their principal components in an exact order, triangles can be formed in almost any configuration. The only arrangement of three points that does not create a triangle is a straight row. For example, a portrait of three people will almost inevitably contain a triangle, with each face an apex.

The natural tendency of linear perspective is for lines to converge on a vanishing point in the distance, and form two sides of a triangle. If the camera is level, the prime apex of the triangle will be pointing more or less horizontally (you could think of the triangle formed by a receding row of houses as lying on its side, with the apex on the horizon and the base the nearest upright to the camera). If the camera were pointing upward instead, at a building, trees, or any other group of vertical lines, the apex would be at the top of the picture, and the base level, at the bottom. This is also the most stable configuration of a triangle.

The sense of stability inherent in many triangles comes from structural association; it is the shape of a pyramid, or of two buttresses leaning in toward each other. Therefore, arranging three objects so that two form a

◀ ▲ HEADING

Eyes are the first point of reference in virtually any composition which features people. In this shot of three businessmen (far left), the relationship between the eyes forms a strong triangle—the trick is to avoid taking the shot from the same eye level as the subjects.

base and the third an apex above creates a stable form, and this association is carried into the image. It is the classic three-figure shot, and in photography that allows the subjects to be manipulated, it is a standard and usually successful technique to reposition things in this way. The two diagonals in such a triangle help it to escape the heaviness of a square or rectangular arrangement. The reverse configuration, with the base at the top of the picture and the apex at the bottom, is an equally useful shape to introduce into a design. It has different association: less stable, more aggressive, and containing more movement. The apex points more obviously, probably because it appears to face the camera and viewer, and there is the kind of tension that you would expect from a shape that symbolizes extremely precarious balance.

▶ ▲ MANDALAY HILL

Through a combination of design elements, this photograph of novice monks in a Burmese temple is organized to be seen in just one way. Although the moment for taking the shot was very short—just the time taken for the gesture and glance of the second boy—the photographer had plenty of time to prepare and to anticipate most of the possibilities, including the fact that the gilded statue in the background could be taken as looking at the foreground. The actual coincidence of expression of the face of the two boys was, of course, unplanned, but anticipation of other details, such as the exposure, focus, and overall balance of the image, made it easy to recognize the potential and shoot in time. The result is a very structured image, as the different analyzes of points, shapes, lines and eye-lines demonstrate.



LOOKING FOR STRUCTURE

Many of the examples used in section 3 to show the use of shapes, lines, and points are graphically very obvious. Photographers who enjoy using design and strong composition are usually attracted to definite visual elements, such as the parallel shadows on page 83 or the silhouette on page 59. This is fine if you choose to photograph only when there is a distinct design, but there are many other reasons for shooting, and in many photographic situations—maybe most—the scene tends to look messy and disorganized at first glance. Indeed, Edward Weston, one of the great figures in American photography of the 20th century, initially disliked landscapes for this very reason. He considered them too “chaotic...too crude and lacking in arrangement.” He overcame this by learning how to impose his will on landscape images, and that, in principle, is what design-aware photographers do with most scenes.

The aim here was to show a kindergarten with children using it, and to cram as much information as possible into the image. In other words, a recipe for a busy scene—perhaps too busy. The most obvious variable was expression and action from the children. This was what you would normally expect to make the difference between a good and an ordinary shot, and was the first priority. A member of staff was briefed to organize the children and encourage them into different activities; it was then a matter of observation and waiting.

As usual, however, design can add an extra layer of improvement, as the sequence shows, in time order. The two final shots both successfully include all the necessary information (table, activities, playhouse, children, teacher) but in a graphically coherent way, precisely because they have structure. The major difference between the two is in the attitude—and so visual importance—of the boy closest to camera.



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A HEADING

1. The initial shot, from a standing position, simply aims to take in the three major elements: children with teacher, table, and a chalet-style playhouse behind. The result is clear enough, acceptable, and a starting point for improvement.

2. The next step was to try something on the opposite side of the table. Not obvious from the previous shots was the colorful rainbow pattern on this side. What is wrong here, however, is that even with a wide-angle lens the other group of children is out of frame.

3. A first step toward looking for the strongest viewpoint and composition is to walk round the table. The painted mural is an alternative feature of interest to the playhouse, and one of the children has chosen to sit at the opposite side of the table. But the shot doesn't work: there are too many backs of heads.

4. This viewpoint made more sense. There is a good sense of depth from the boy in the foreground to the other children, and on to the chalet behind, and this gives the eye something to do—looking across the frame from one to the other. But can it be improved?



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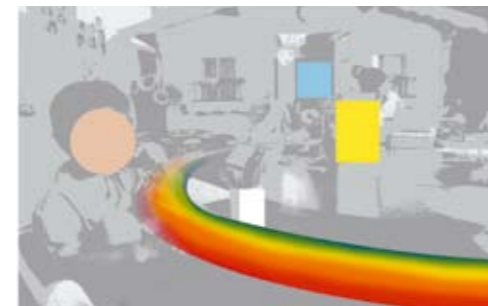


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5. A lower camera position does improve the shot, for two reasons. First, it puts us at the children's level, which is more involving. Second, it makes more of the rainbow pattern and, with the same wide-angle lens as used throughout, gives a more dynamic composition.



6. The boy looked up and then swiveled round in his seat. The expression is good and holds the viewer's eye. In fact, both of these last two images are fine; the eye-contact just makes this a different kind of picture. If we analyze this image, we can see that the eye-line straight out from the boy to the viewer makes it much the strongest focus of attention. Faces always carry a strong visual

weight, so that despite the various strong colors, the three other foci of attention are indeed the three faces on the opposite side of the table. The dynamics of the picture are strongly controlled by the curve of the table, emphasized by the rainbow colors and by the distorting effect of the 24mm efl lens, while the faces, yellow box, and blue window act as stops along the way. Then, once the viewer's

eye has been led around the frame by this structure, it roams the picture to examine the various details, but always returns to the face of the boy.

REACTIVE OR UNPLANNED

Another choice of intent is between shooting that relies on observational skills and speed of reaction to capture events as they unfold in front of the camera, and photography that is to some extent organised from the start. The issue is one of control, or at least attempted control, over the circumstances of the shoot. There is no question of legitimacy here, and a purely reactive reportage photograph does not have any claim to being truer than a still-life that has been carefully arranged over the course of a day. It is instead very much a matter of style, influenced by the nature of what is being photographed.

The usual view is that the amount of control exercised when shooting is determined by the subject. Thus, street photography is the most reactive because it has to be, and still-life the most planned because it can be. Largely this is true, as we explore in the next chapter, Process, but it is by no means inevitable. Just because most people tend to tackle a particular type of subject in a predictable way does not mean that other approaches are not possible. Personal style can override the obvious treatments. Take street photography, normally hallowed ground of slice-of-life realism. The American photographer Philip-Lorca diCorcia approached the traditional subjects in a different way, by installing concealed flash lights that could be triggered by a radio signal, to add “a cinematic gloss to a commonplace event”, in the photographer’s words. An earlier, well-known example is *Kiss by the Hotel Ville*, taken by French photographer Robert Doisneau in 1950, a photograph that became a romantic icon and popular poster. Seemingly spontaneous, it was in fact posed. As Doisneau later said, “I would have never dared to photograph people like that. Lovers kissing in the street, those couples are rarely legitimate.”

Equally, while the studio still-life image epitomises control in photography, with some shoots taking days, from sourcing subjects and props, building the lighting and the set, to finally



constructing the image (see pages TK), it is also possible to do the opposite—guerilla still-life photography taken handheld from real life. The role of the photographer’s personality is crucial. Even Edward Weston, who famously took hours to make exposures in natural light and was extremely rigorous in composition, claimed to react rather than to pursue a worked-out plan: “My way of working—I start with no preconceived idea—discovery excites me to focus—then rediscovery through the lens—final form of presentation seen on ground glass, the finished print pre-visualised complete in every detail of texture, movement, proportion, before exposure—the shutter’s release automatically and finally fixes my conception, allowing no other manipulation—the ultimate end, the print, is but a duplication of all that I saw and felt through my camera.”

However closely a shot is planned and art-directed, as tends to happen in advertising, there are moments during the shoot when new ideas occur. American photographer Ray Metzker commented, “As one is making images, there’s

▲ DELHI STREET

Spontaneous and reactive, this photograph of a homeless boy waking up next to a garbage can on a Delhi street was the result of nothing more planned than walking around the streets for a couple of hours from sunrise onwards.

this flow; there are certain images that one stumbles on. Sometimes it’s with great delight and sometimes it’s with puzzlement. But I can recognize that signal....” This is the subject of the next chapter, Process, but when photographers know that this may happen, it becomes part of the intent. There are many shades of what we could call half-planned photography, in which the photographer partly creates favourable conditions for shooting, and then allows reaction to play its part. Making a reconnaissance for a landscape shot to check possible viewpoints and the way the light falls, then returning when weather and lighting conditions seem favourable, is one example. Researching an event and turning up on the day prepared for an anticipated set of possibilities is another.

► THAI KITCHEN

A set-piece interior, in which a traditional nineteenth century Thai kitchen was fitted out and put to work, with costumed model, owes most of its effect to planning and logistics, including the acquisition of props, timing for the natural light, and provision of photographic lighting.



▼ MOUNT POPA

One widely-practised form of planning is anticipating natural lighting in an exterior view. With both landscape and architecture, experience and local knowledge (making use of sunrise and sunset tables, GPS, compass and weather forecasts) make it possible to take an informed guess about how a scene will look at a later time. In this case, Mount Popa on the outskirts of Pagan, Burma, the recce was made earlier in the day, and this shot, taken shortly before sunrise, was more or less predicted.



▲ MAKE-UP FOR DANCING

A half-planned photograph, in which the event—behind-the-scenes at a dance performance in Kerala, southern India—was known and permissions and attendance secured.

Despite the inherent vagueness of the idea of style in photography, it can and does influence the way in which some people work. There is some distinction between an individual photographer's style and the more general style subscribed to at any one time by a number of photographers. The difficulty lies in agreeing on what legitimately constitutes a style rather

than a trick or straight-forward technique, and opinions vary greatly. When a style can be easily defined—for instance, in lighting, two from the past that come to mind are 'painting with light' using customised light 'hoses', and ringflash that gives a shadowless, hard effect from a special tube that surrounds the front of the lens—it might be better called a mannerism. On the

other hand, when critics struggle hard for the definition of something they feel ought to be there, it may be that the style is at best tenuous.

Whether we like or approve of them, there have been a number of photographic styles that are generally acknowledged. Because style is intimately connected with current fashion, most of these have already had their day—though, in the manner of fashion they are always available for revival. Roughly in date order, they include Pictorialism, the Linked Ring, Photo-Secession, Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity), Straight photography, Modernism, Constructivist, Minimalism, Color Formalism and post-modern new realism.

Also, surrealism in its time and beyond has had a powerful influence on photography, with Man Ray its best known practitioner. But while most people would probably think of surrealist photography nowadays as being versions of the themes of René Magritte and Salvador Dali (endlessly re-worked), it had a more fundamental effect. Peter Galassi, in his book, *Henri Cartier-Bresson, The Early Work*, wrote, "The Surrealists approached photography in the same way that Aragon and Breton...approached the street: with a voracious appetite for the usual and unusual... The Surrealists recognized in plain photographic fact an essential quality that had been excluded from prior theories of photographic realism. They saw that ordinary photographs, especially when uprooted from their practical functions, contain a wealth of unintended, unpredictable meanings." Cartier-Bresson himself wrote, "The only aspect of the phenomenon of photography that fascinates

◀ ST JAMES'S PALACE

This "straight" photograph of St James's Palace in London displays several of the characteristics of formalism. The composition is considered, the essential architectural features are included, the verticals are correct, the detail is as sharp as only a large format negative can make it, and the exposure and printing have been managed carefully, to retain both shadows and highlights.



▲ BAYUD DESERT

Another minimal approach in a different context uses frame shape, frame division and the isolation of one small pathetic bush to convey the emptiness of this bleak desert in northern Sudan. Including the small bush close to the camera enhances rather than diminishes the emptiness, and considerable thought was put into exactly where in the frame to place it — very slightly off centre helps create a balance with the low sand hill behind.

me and will always interest me, is the intuitive capture through the camera of what is seen. This is exactly how [André] Breton defined objective chance (le hasard objectif) in his *Entretiens*."

A tendency of photographers who work consciously to a style is to take the whole thing very seriously. For example, when Ansel Adama, Edward Weston and others set up their 'f64' group to promote 'straight', 'pure' photography, they railed against the sins of pictorialism. "In the early '30s," Adams wrote, "the salon syndrome was in full flower and the Pictorialists were riding high. For anyone trained in music or the visual arts, the shallow sentimentalism of the 'fuzzy-wuzzies' (as Edward Weston called them) was anathema, especially when they boasted of their importance in 'Art' We felt the need for a stern manifesto!"

As an antidote to this. I like the dry comment of M. F. Agha, who became art director of *Vogue* in 1928, on the then modernist style in photography: "Modernistic photography is easily recognized by its subject matter. Eggs (any style). Twenty shoes, standing in a row. A skyscraper, taken from a modernistic angle. Ten teacups standing in a row. A factory chimney seen through the ironwork of a railroad bridge (modernistic angle). The eye of a fly enlarged 2000 times.



◀ SMOCK

Employing techniques of minimalism, the essence of this nineteenth-century linen shirt hanging in a Shaker meeting house in Kentucky has been conveyed with the least detail and least colors. All necessary information of texture and shape is available from little more than half of the garment, and the tight crop at left and top frames the scene. Bare simplicity characterizes this style of photography.

▼ HEARTH

A long exposure blends in and around this fire being used for cooking. The full exposure and the yellow-to-orange colors also helps to unify the elements, giving a swishing, flowing images.



Exploration becomes possible when we expand the timescale a notch up from a pure reaction situation. While you could justifiably argue that reactive photography is a kind of fast exploration, when there is more time, as in these examples, more coherent thought is possible.

There are different types of exploration. One is when the subject is a clearly defined physical object and there is time enough to move around it, or move it around, looking for different angles, lighting and so on. This commonly happens in still-life photography, but also, as in the example here, with any kind of discrete physical object such as a building, or a person. Another is when the general subject is a place and the photographer travels around it, and the area can range greatly in size, from, say a garden to a national park. A third is when a localised situation occurs over a period of time—a prolonged event, in other words—and this could be, for example, a football match, a street demonstration, or a ceremony of some kind. We could categorise these if we wanted, into physical, spatial and temporal, although there is plenty of opportunity for overlap; in the case of the windmill here, partly physical, partly spatial.

The means for exploring range even more widely, and potentially draw on all the compositional methods that we have already looked at. The viewfinder, or in the case of many digital cameras the LCD screen, is the primary tool, and one of the most common, and useful, ways of exploring with a camera is to move around while looking through the viewfinder to see the continual changes of framing and

geometry—active framing, in other words. With a static subject (rather than an event), the basic way of exploring is spatial. Changing the viewpoint is the one action that alters the real perspective in a photograph. That is, it alters the actual relationship between the different parts of a scene. Its effectiveness, therefore, depends on how much of the scene you can see as you move, and this naturally favours wide-angle lenses—and only a small change of viewpoint is needed with a wide-angle lens for a substantial change to the image. The juxtaposition effects that make telephotos so valuable are controlled by viewpoint, but with a long lens you need to move further to see the relationship change. Zoom lenses offer an extra permutation, to the extent that moving around a scene while also altering the focal length of the zoom can often be too complicated—that is, offers too many levels of change to deal with comfortably.

With a single object, viewpoint determines its shape and its appearance. Moving closer alters the proportions of its different parts, as the sequence of the windmill demonstrates. Its circular base is hardly noticeable in the distant pictures, but in the closest shot it makes up a good third of the building and is an important contrasting shape to the diagonal sails. Moving around a subject gives even greater variety: the front, sides, back and top.

The viewpoint controls the relationship between an object and background, or two or more objects, in two ways: position and size. Simply the action of bringing two things

together in one frame suggests that there is a relationship between them; this is a major design tool. Relationships depend on who chooses to see them, and what one photographer may see as significant, another may ignore or not even notice. The sequence of the Acropolis is a case in point. Isolating it with a telephoto lens at sunrise places it deliberately out of context; all relationships have been deliberately avoided to give a timeless view as possible: the historical version. The last view, by contrast, makes a point of juxtaposition; a decidedly unromantic relationship between the Acropolis and a modern city.

Even when a photographer feels disinclined to make more effort, there is often a sense of duty to cover all the bases. Cartier-Bresson wrote that even when the photographer has the feeling that he or she has caught the strongest shot, “nevertheless, you find yourself compulsively shooting, because you cannot be sure in advance exactly how the situation, the scene, is going to unfold.” And, of course, you cannot afford to leave any gaps because the situation will never be repeated.

Ultimately, exploration has to be limited, which means that the photographer has to choose when to stop. This is by no means always an easy conclusion, as it not only involves deciding when you have exhausted the possibilities (like many activities, photography can be subject to the law of diminishing returns, with fewer and fewer benefits from more and more time spent), but also whether time will be better spent moving on and finding another subject.



▲ CHANGING VIEWPOINT WITH A WIDE-ANGLE LENS

The example here is a windmill in a rural setting, and the lens 20mm efl, one of the shortest focal lengths, with a pronounced wide-angle effect. We begin with a medium-distance view, from a little less than 300 feet (90m) away. The whiteness of the windmill is particularly striking, and in an attempt to keep the graphic elements simple, this first shot is framed so as to exclude the surroundings, to make a high-contrast, blue-and-white image. The sky is a particularly deep blue, which should, and does, make a powerful contrast with the windmill. It also seems possible to make something out of the whiteness that is shared by the clouds and the windmill. In the event, the picture is only a partial success. The symmetry of the windmill encouraged a central placement in the frame, but it does not balance the two areas of cloud as well as it might. Also, placing the windmill low in the frame, to avoid seeing the surroundings, gives too much sky.

The second shot has more normal proportions and more careful organization. The intention is the same as in the first photograph, but works better. The viewpoint is closer, so that the windmill fills more of the frame and is off-centred to give a better balance, and has been moved to the right, so that the windmill just occupies the space between the clouds. The potential of a symmetrical image remains. To make the most of this, the viewpoint is changed so that it is exactly facing the front of the windmill. Moving closer to remove the clouds

from view reveals an interesting distortion of the base; its curve makes a pleasant contrast of shape with the triangular structures above, and still contributes to the symmetry.

From this, the camera position is changed radically, to as distant a view as possible, while maintaining the windmill as the focus of attention. This is the classic depth-enhancing use of a wide-angle lens, showing as much of the foreground as the depth of field allows. To this end, the camera position is low, and the windmill placed high towards one corner. The last photograph in the sequence is basically the same type of shot, but with an improvement in the location. A new viewpoint has been chosen which shows more distinctive detail in the foreground, to make this part of the picture more prominent.

- ▶ • Low viewpoint close to foreground vegetation
- Windmill as small as possible while remaining recognizable
- Horizon high to give prominence to surroundings
- Windmill slightly larger, clearer
- Maximum depth of field gives front-to-back sharpness
- Structure of vegetation a little clearer



- ◀ • Vertical format exaggerates the excess of empty sky
- Windmill centered laterally for symmetry
- Surroundings cropped at bottom to simplify colors and shapes.



- ▲ • Image of windmill shifted left for more balanced composition
- Shot timed and positioned so that clouds clear sails of windmill
- Frame kept high to limit appearance of trees and vegetation
- Exaggeration of perspective makes curve dominant
- Viewpoint and frame accurate for symmetry



VARYING VIEWPOINT AND LENS

In this example, over the course of several days, the Acropolis in Athens was photographed from every useful viewpoint, and the lens focal length chosen to suit each view.

In order to be able to make full use of the extremes of focal length, it is important to find a subject that is visible from a distance. The version of this project shown here is a sequence of photographs of the Acropolis in Athens, and specifically the Parthenon, the central building.

The first shot is with a wide-angle lens (20mm efl) from close, and makes a deliberately pronounced graphic arrangement—triangular, using the typical exaggeration of converging verticals from a wide-angle lens.

The second photograph is from the ideal middle-distance camera position—a helicopter, flying in the early morning. This, naturally, took a great deal of trouble to arrange, and this shot is just one of many from different heights and angles.

Then, from a distance. Whereas the close view experimented with shape and line, and the medium view is more documentary, the third photograph deliberately sets out to give a romantic, atmospheric impression of the Acropolis, isolated from its modern surroundings. To this end, a telephoto lens gives a selective view, and the dawn lighting conceals unnecessary modern details in a silhouette. With a longer focal length from the same viewpoint, the graphic possibilities are explored: these are chiefly ones of blocks of tones and horizontal and vertical lines.

From exactly the same position during the afternoon, a different approach was tried, using a wide-angle lens to set the Acropolis in the context of the surrounding landscape, with plenty of sky. Although it appears tiny in the frame, the brilliant white of the stone helped it to stand out. With this treatment, making use of the foreground, even the city is diminished in relationship to the overall setting.

Finally, to make a distinct contrast with modern Athens, a viewpoint was chosen to show the very ordinary, drab streets that surround the Acropolis, and the composition gives them prominence. A standard lens was used to give the feeling that this is a normal view, such as a passer-by might glimpse while walking along.



1. Telephoto: distant
2. Wide-angle: distant
3. Wide-angle: close
4. Medium-telephoto: middle-distance aerial
5. Standard lens: distant

PHOTOGRAPHS TOGETHER

Images behave differently in groups, juxtaposed, than when displayed individually. In a sense, a new kind of image is created—one in which the frame is a gallery wall or a two-page spread in a magazine or book, and the few or several images become themselves picture elements. The arrangement can be time-based or spatial, or a mixture of the two, and according to the medium the viewer has more, or less, choice in the order of seeing the photographs. A slide show, for example, is inflexible and highly controlled, while a magazine or book allows the reader to flick backwards and forwards.

One of the classic uses of photographs in an assembly is the picture story, and some of the best examples come from the heyday of large-format, general-interest illustrated magazines, from the early days of the *Münchner Illustrierte Presse* and *Illustrated Weekly* in London, to *Life*, *Picture Post* and *Paris-Match*. Well executed, the picture story is a complex entity, involving not just the talents of the photographer, but of the editor, picture editor and designer. The individual visual unit is the “spread” (a double-page spread), and it is the sequencing of spreads that gives the picture story both its narrative and dynamic flow.

From the point of view of shooting, the knowledge that the end-product will be a grouping of images introduces new demands, but perhaps eases the pressure on getting one single all-encompassing shot. Only very occasionally do all the important elements in a complex situation come together in a single composition, and when it does this is often noteworthy enough for the photographer to breathe a sigh of relief. Dorothea Lange wrote about one of her iconic images of the Depression that it was one of those occasions when, “you have an inner sense that you have encompassed the thing generally.” The alternative, if the aim is telling a story, is to shoot different aspects of it in a set of images. Cartier-Bresson likened



◀ CREATIVE ART DIRECTION
Both of these photographs, of Greek Evzones (palace guards) on parade were shot from the same position with the same 400mm lens, several seconds apart. A greater distance separated the officer from the soldiers than appears here, as the art director allowed the gutter to reduce the separation visually.

a typical situation to a ‘core’ with sparks being struck off it; the sparks are elusive, but can be captured individually.

There are technical matters such as knowing that the “gutter” between two facing pages can ruin a centrally-composed image, and editorial ones such as the need for graphic variety, and the need for vertical images to fill full pages. We can extend this use of assembled images to illustrated books, where there is greater variety of style than in magazines and more pages to expand a story. The spread remains the visual unit, but in the case of a highly illustrated book (that is, mainly images with little text), the large number of pages introduces more of a time sequence. In other words, there is likely to be more of a sense of seeing images one after another rather than side by side. The dynamics of sequencing are subtly different from the the spatial relationship on one spread left open. An extra comment is the captions, and these need to work together, typically long enough to provide a kind of interleaved text narrative. Caption writing is an editorial skill in its own right, but again, the importance for us is in how it changes the viewer’s perception of the image by directing attention to one element or another, as we saw on pages TK (Clear or ambiguous).

The classic picture story is just one of the ways in which photographs achieve a new life when combined. The other important one is a gallery show; pictures framed and hung on a wall. Time-based collections of images are sequences such as slide shows, whether shown as an event or offered on-line. In all of these, the graphic relationships tend to impact more than relationships of content (first-glance syndrome), and this places a special importance on color, which if strong registers very rapidly on the eye. The color relationships between the several images impose their own structure. Sequence is always involved in whatever form they are displayed, because the eye travels from one to another. Because the units of color are entire images, the juxtaposition of photographs tends to favour those with a dominant color.

▶ COINCIDENCES ON A GALLERY WALL

There are as many ways of hanging groups of prints in a gallery show as there are curators, and this is just one incidental example. Once the images have been decided upon, and framed, what remain are the permutations of grouping. Here, consideration was given to a coincidence of color and form—two red-robed Burmese novice monks over the vertical red reflection of the sun in the Mekong River, both images from a show on Asia. The lower picture is used differently in the layout below.



▼ Á LA TIME-LIFE

An example of a picture story in book form constructed by editors at Time-Life Books: five double-page spreads on a theme of the life of the sea-faring inhabitants of the remote Sulu archipelago in the southern Philippines. The book was a 160-page volume on Southeast Asia in the series *Library of Nations*, in which the construction was six chapters, one for each country or group, interleaved with picture essays like this. Each essay is a glimpse in detail at one specific aspect of what had been covered in the preceding chapter, and this one was chosen, unplanned, on the strength of what emerged during the long shoot. In all, eight images were selected from a total take of around 400 useful frames.



▲▶ OPENING SPREADS

Of the endless ways of combining images on a page, one that art directors seem to like to use when the circumstances permit is embedding one in the relatively featureless area of another. This same technique is here used by *International Wildlife* and by *GEO*.





Syntax, as normally defined, is the study of the rules governing the way words are put together to form sentences. In photography we need something similar, particularly in the digital era, to account for the changes in the general visual character of photographs. If we compare a late-nineteenth century landscape from a wet plate, a Tri-X 35mm black-and-white, a 35mm Kodachrome and a modern digital image of a night-scene shot on Raw and using HDRI (high dynamic range imaging), there are some obvious fundamental differences in how the images look—and in how they were and are perceived by the audiences of the time.

To take the first example, the dead-white sky of early photography was due to the inefficient

response of emulsions, which were blue-sensitive. When the exposure was good for the ground, in the print a clear sky appeared white and most clouds were invisible. While some photographers responded with artifice, using another negative to print in another sky, those who remained true to the medium learned to compose in a way that this limitation effectively. The American Timothy O'Sullivan, for example, treated the white sky as a shape, exploiting the figure-ground relationship (see page TK). This approach, in turn, came to be accepted by its audience as the natural way that a photograph should look. Syntax in linguistics explains what makes an admissible sentence. Syntax in photography explains how a photograph ought to look.

▲ HDRI

A good example of the new style of High Dynamic Range Imaging, in which the entire dynamic range of this New York subway scene is captured with full color saturation, from the darkest shadows to the individual bare lamps. No additional lighting was used, and for comparison a low dynamic range single frame is shown alongside. This kind of image was inconceivable until the 21st century, but its full presentation of all the information in a scene may take some getting used to.

The invention of 35mm film helped to create a different syntax for photography, with the camera used off the tripod, handheld. The smaller film frame revealed the grain in an enlargement onto a print, and photographers learned to live with the texture of grain.

Kodak's Tri-X in particular had a tight, distinct grain structure, and this was enjoyed by some photographers, and eventually by viewers. The invention of Kodachrome, with its rich, deeply saturated colors (the more so when underexposed), led to another way of working. Its particular limitation was that even in the handful of labs that could process it, there was almost latitude for correcting mistakes by altering the processing. The transparency went straight to the repro house, and Kodachrome photographers learned to put all their effort into getting the exposure and framing right—more than at any time previously. At this point, the process for the photographer ended with the shutter release. Remember that with black-and-white, photographers shot in the knowledge of what they, or a skilled printer, could later achieve. W. Eugene Smith's darkroom marathons became legend, but they were also the epitome of printing as a second, essential stage in the process. This disappeared with Kodachrome for reproduction in magazines and books. This film, which dominated professional color photography during approximately the 1960s and 1970s, also created the practice of deliberate underexposure. Photographers exposed to hold the highlights, which when overexposed on Kodachrome looked terrible, in the knowledge that the repro house could "open up" the shadows.

Color formalism, born in the United States in the 1970s, and the later love affair that many fashion and advertising photographers had with color negative film processed and printed in idiosyncratic ways, were in part a reaction to the Kodachrome generation, as we saw in Chapter 6, Intent (pages TK), but the greatest change of all in the rules of what makes an acceptably photographic image are happening right now. As just noted on the previous pages, post-production is possibly the major change wrought by digital photography, certainly from the point

of view of process. Particularly interesting is how post-production can change the syntax of photography by eliminating or altering the graphic elements special to cameras, lenses and film—the elements discussed in Chapter 4.

Digital possibilities include the ability to make everything technically "correct." Consider those two components of photographic syntax that have gone unquestioned until now—flare and silhouettes (see pages TK). Flare is actually inefficient, an artifact in computer-digital terminology, but has that made it wrong? Of course not. Photographers have had decades to make it work and be attractive and evocative. Audiences have had the same time to learn it and enjoy it. Flare brings the impression of flooding light and the view out. The same with



▲ EVOCATIVE FLARE

Shot on black-and-white film, deliberately without added lighting, this morning view of St. John's Chapel in the Tower of London attempts to capture the flood of light as the sun streams down on the altar, and to do this makes full use of the flare characteristic of well-exposed high-contrast images.



▲ SILHOUETTE

Typical of Kodachrome images exposed for the highlights—in this case then sun rising behind the Jefferson Memorial, Washington DC—this photograph treats its subject as a silhouette, relying on viewpoint and a recognisable profile outline. The multi-spiked flare star around the sun is typical from a lens at small aperture with underexposure.

silhouettes, which I would argue are an invention of photography (I exclude cameos from this). Well, with digital photography, neither flare nor silhouettes are inevitable. High dynamic range imaging can remove them. Is this good? Is it acceptable or desirable? These are questions still to be answered, not only by photographers but by everyone else who looks at them. There is now the possibility of making photographs that are closer to the way we see, but whether or not this is something that photography should aim for is open for discussion. As always with photography, nothing is agreed, and all is still in flux.