

THE SHADOW OF THE PHOTOGRAPHER project brief

In addition to our snapshots of friends and family, holidays and special events, many of us also make photographs of things... just because we liked the way something looked, but often without knowing *why* our attention had been attracted to a particular scene. For example, we might have photographed two children playing in a park, an old house, or a bicycle lying in the grass – but we don't know those children, or the people who lived in that house, and that's not our bicycle. This workshop will offer another way of looking at – and finding meaning in – many of these apparently 'casual' snapshots.

It has been shown that, when we are moved to record a scene with which we have no conscious or logical connection, it may be because we have intuitively recognised a personally relevant metaphor in the scene before us: an allegorical description of an affective memory or belief below the horizon of our conscious awareness – and one to which our subconscious is now trying to bring to our attention. Accordingly, in *what* we photograph and *the way in which we photograph it* we may find valuable insights into the way we see and make meaning of the world(s) around us – and that, by considering the impressions they evoke or prompt, our 'snapshots' can offer us a means to greater self-awareness.

Part I: Making the photographs

In preparation for your Personal Analysis project, please start to carry a camera with you wherever you go and begin to make photographs of any scenes or 'moment' (these might include landscapes, events or still-life tableaux) that attract your attention with an intuitive 'tap on the shoulder'.

Make photographs of things that attract your attention, scenes that reach up and tug on your sleeve. Photograph scenes that look the way you expected them to, as well as those that should look some other way. Make photographs of the things that frighten you, and of the things that make you feel better. Photograph the things you hope for, and the things that disappoint you. Look for scenes that strike you as a description of yourself: 'self-portraits' made from objects and landscapes. Look for:

- i) scenes or images that make you feel happy when you look at them
- ii) scenes or images that make you feel angry
- iii) scenes or images that make you feel sad
- iv) scenes or images that frighten you
- v) scenes or images that seem to be an 'environmental self-portrait'
- vi) scenes or images that describe your relationship with others
- vii) scenes or images that remind you of the relationships within your family
- viii) scenes or images that describe what your Life is like
- ix) scenes or images that describe or represent something which you feel is missing from your life
- x) scenes or images that describe or represent the life you would like to have in the future
- xi) scenes or images that seem to describe or represent some choice that is necessary
- xii) scenes or images that seem to describe the future (such as 'the way ahead' is bright – or that 'the way ahead' will be full of challenges or difficulties)

Do not look for scenes or events which *illustrate* an idea (for example, do not photograph an elderly person sitting on a bench as an image of loneliness); instead, try to remain alert to those scenes in which the various (symbolic) elements and/or their juxtaposition provoke an *intuitive* response.

Try not to *think about* how to compose the photograph to make it look 'good' or 'pretty', but use your intuition to know what to photograph and to choose the moment to push the button. To exploit the spatial abilities of the brain's right hemisphere, use your left eye and allow your intuition to arrange the elements within the frame. (If you find it difficult to 'turn off' your rational critical mind, hold the camera at arm's length, point the camera towards the scene and push the button when it *feels* right.)

Part II: Interpreting the results

Begin by regularly leafing casually ('absent mindedly') through the photographs you have made and notice – and set aside – those at which you regularly and instinctively pause.

While it is easy to misinterpret a single image, by examining a group of photographs to which you respond, you may find valuable clues in their similarities and/or in their recurring themes and motifs. Are there any elements or patterns that appear in many of the photographs to which you respond? For example, do your photographs often include roads, windows or large areas of empty space? What are your intuitive associations with these (or any other) recurring elements? What do they remind you of? Conversely, are there any elements conspicuous by their absence? Do your photographs seldom include the sky, horizon lines, people or faces? (For example, are people always shown from behind? Are their heads always cut off?) What do these elements or features 'mean' to you – and what do you think these 'missing' elements might suggest that you are reluctant to acknowledge or confront?

Be wary of the tendency to 'see' what would comfort your ego, and don't look for logical, rational answers because the right hemisphere does not work that way; rather, try to get a 'feel for' the meaning of the picture as well as the specific elements through which the photograph tells its story.

Approach the images in the same way you would dream fragments and look for clues in your intuitive associations with both the individual elements within the frame *as well as the 'story' the picture as a whole seems to tell*. To recognise what the story is 'about', try to identify the thoughts and impressions that occur to you when looking at the photograph: What is going on in this photograph? What has just happened – or what do you feel will happen next? Does this photograph make you feel happy or sad? Do you find it comforting, or does it make you anxious?

When examining the photographs you have made, try to identify the most important element(s) within the frame. Which elements seem to be main characters in the story? Look for the place within each image where your eye comes naturally to rest – for it is here that you will often find the most significant element(s) of the picture and a clue to the issue to which your attention is being drawn. These elements can be either *concrete* or *implied*; in other words, they can be physical objects such as a tree, a shadow or even a gesture – or they can be *the relationships implied between* different objects in the scene. These relationships might be found in the similarity of the shapes, sizes, or colours of the thing(s) in front of the lens, or the fact that everyone is walking or looking in the same direction.

'Who' photographs and 'Where' photographs

It may be helpful to begin by asking whether each photograph at which you instinctively pause is a 'Who' photograph (one that seems to describe a person, a personality trait, a characteristic, an attitude), or a 'Where' photograph (one that describes a situation or set of circumstances).

'Who' photographs are those in which the story is 'about' an individual. The 'Who' in our photograph is usually *us* (or some aspect of ourselves) we have not been able or willing to acknowledge. (It is important to consider that not all 'Who' photographs include people; sometimes the central character is 'played by' an object such as a boat, a building or a bicycle. For example, in many of my early photographs, my ego was represented by buildings and my subconscious represented by trees.) To identify the aspect of your Self depicted in your 'Who' photographs, consider: what is the character doing (or trying to do)? What is its rôle, purpose or objective? Next, try to identify what the character seems to *feel* about the situation, setting or circumstances in which they are performing this action.

Just as in our dreams, the people in our photographs often represent some aspect of *our own* character – and often one we have not acknowledged or integrated. When people appear in your photographs, it is often because – in the way they look, in their poses and expressions, in how they appear to feel, or in the action they are performing – you have intuitively recognised a metaphor or allegory of some aspect of yourself that your subconscious is trying to bring to your conscious attention.

In those you identify as 'Where' photographs, consider: Is the scene happy and reassuring, or sad and melancholy? Does it make you angry? Does it seem to hint at something ominous? Does it remind you of something from your past, your current situation, or one that you fear finding yourself in the future?

Part III: Preparing the submission

Examine (approximately) three or four of the resulting photographs and, for each photograph, try to identify as clearly as you can:

- What is the ‘story’ in this photograph? What is going on? What is happening (or what has just happened, or is about to happen) to the ‘characters’ in this play?
(For example: They are all on their way back home after playing in the park – but the girl in the red hat doesn’t want to go home)
- What is the issue or aspect of your life or personality to which the photograph seems to refer? (The *subject* or *topic* of the photograph)
(For example: How do you know that the photograph refers to your need for social recognition, or to your fear of being alone?)
- What are the visual symbols in which you identified the ‘story’ being told? Bear in mind that the clue to the ‘story’ is often to be found in the *relationships implied between* the physical objects
(For example: How the tree feels because it is being ignored by the children, or how the man feels while he is looking at that house, or the reason that the cloud is hiding behind the building)
- How or why you recognise the meaning or significance of the elements within the frame
(For example: Why do you believe that the bicycle represents the difficulty you have in making important decisions?)
- The meaning of the photograph (What do you think your subconscious is trying to tell you?)

Based on the impressions that come to you when looking at the three or four photographs at which you regularly pause when leafing casually (‘absent mindedly’) through the photographs you have made, participants are to submit a self-reflective commentary of 500-1000 words explaining what you have learned about yourself as a result of this project – **and** how the photographs led you to this discovery.

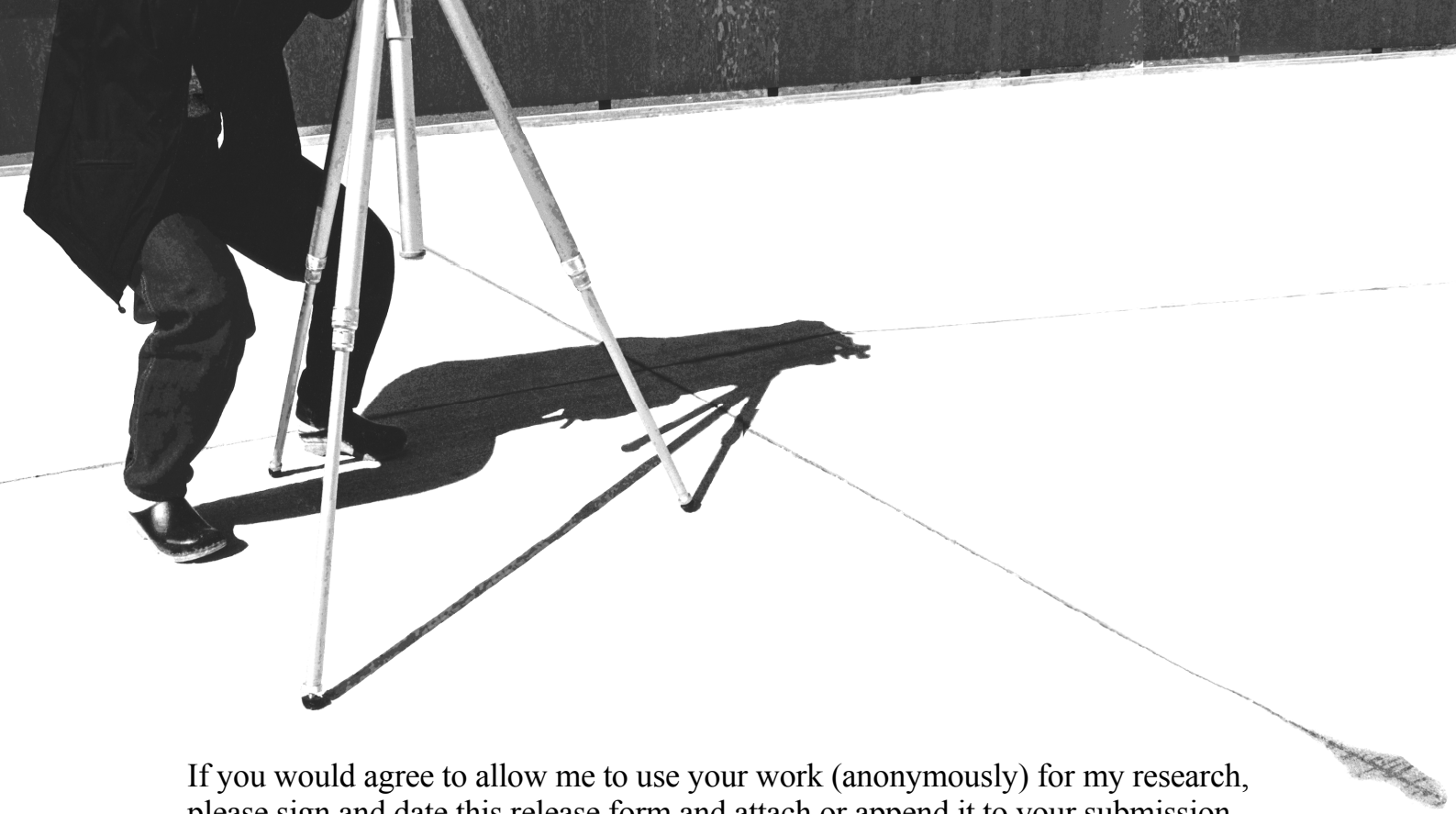
Your self-reflective commentary must describe/explain what you recognise about *yourself* and *how you recognised this within the images included in the commentary text*. Remember: this is a *personal* reflection project; talk about **you**. The photographs may be treated *individually* (descriptions of, or commentaries on separate issues), *or as a group* (treating the same issue from different perspectives).

High resolution copies of the photographs must be included in the text – **and** submitted as separate files (in .jpg format) using the file naming protocol [Lastname1], [Lastname2], [Lastname3] etc.

I would be grateful if you would permit me to use your commentary and photographs for my research by printing and signing the last page of this text and attaching it to your self-reflective commentary.

Rutherford

<http://www.theshadowofthephotographer.co.uk/>



If you would agree to allow me to use your work (anonymously) for my research, please sign and date this release form and attach or append it to your submission.

I give Rutherford and the Dorset GP Centre permission to use and/or reproduce the text and photographs from my reflection project submitted in the GP programme

signature

date

please print your name

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Please return to:

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