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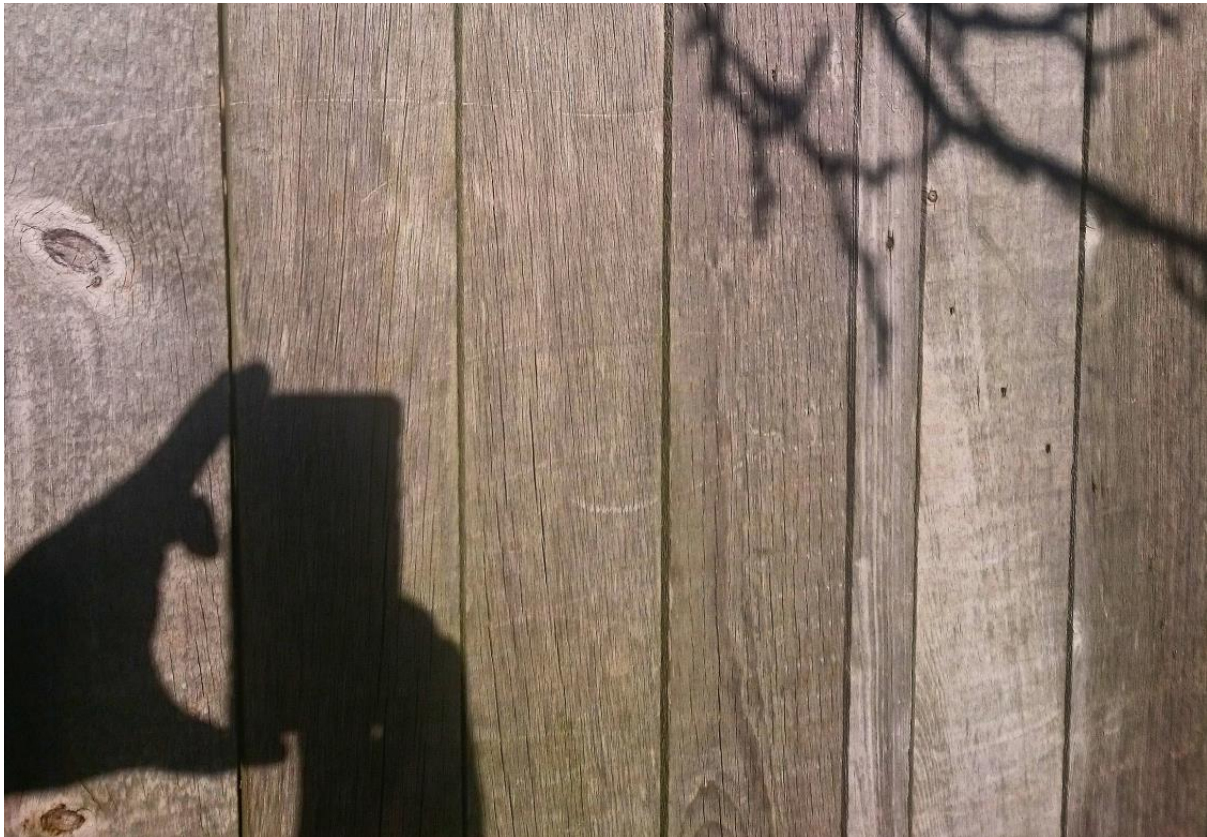
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Some Observations on What Photography Is Now...



I have just spent seven days in the North West of the Balearic Island of Mallorca staying in a town which I once lived in. The town is Soller, famed for its oranges, lemons, art nouveau inspired architecture and a proud hard working indigenous population of small scale farmers, builders, fisherman and inevitably on Mallorca tourist industry based workers. I was there to write and develop an ongoing photographic project. However, my mind was repeatedly drawn, perhaps inevitably to those around me capturing images with their smart phones and tablets. I admit that I am an advocate of the power of both to democratise the practice of image making and have written on this before <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/in-pictures-35026932> But these are observations not a personal dogma.

I lived in Soller from the beginning of 2006 to the end of 2008, a time when tourists were easily identified by the cameras around their necks and the local municipality was still reliant upon the pencil and the paper document to ensure the smooth running of the mountain-ringed region.

Things have changed. In seven days I counted many tourists but no more than ten cameras being used to capture family moments or the beauty of the local area. All of these bar one were expensive DSLR's with long lenses fitted, the tool of choice of the enthusiast and professional photographer. Everyone else including myself was using a smartphone or tablet.

Of course this is no great revelation, but my extremely unscientific survey does reveal the total dominance of this form of image capture for the majority of people who would never use the term 'photographer' as a description of what they are doing. Photography as recorded memory.

Checking on to my flight many people had their boarding cards as home printed documents but many also had theirs as images on their phones. Photography as document.

Whilst in a local restaurant I asked the owner why so few of the bars and restaurants offered business cards as they once did. The pragmatic answer was simple, “We don’t need to” I was told, “people take a photograph on their phones of where they like and use that as a reminder of where they have been”. Photography as database creation.

Jumping from a parked van a young driver landed on an extremely slippery metal sewer hatch cover twisting his ankle badly. A local bar owner took him to hospital. Within the hour a local Soller policeman arrived to survey the offending hatch cover. He took out his smartphone and began photographing the scene of the crime. Photography as evidence.

Waiting at Palma airport I noticed a boy aged no more the eight sitting on top of a suitcase placed on a luggage trolley; as he was pushed along by his father he used his tablet to photograph everything and every body he passed. Photography as learning.

These are just a few of my observations over the past seven days (I’m sure you can add many more). They are by no means presented as conclusive evidence of anything, they are just one person’s observations after all. But what I do think they demonstrate is the fact that photography cannot and should not be defined as having one purpose or one level of understanding or one reality or one touchpoint. It doesn’t only exist in small rooms of intensely engaged people or in glossy photo magazines or in much lauded photo books, or in judging panels, or in academia, or within online forums, or articles like this. It exists and is being created everywhere we look.

Photography is alive and well and its role in all of our lives is constantly evolving and for that we should be grateful not begrudging or dismissive. There is no good or bad, there just is! And that’s fine with me.

What is Photography Today? Anything and everything you want it to be!

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