> It's as if acquiring the app is like taking the first couple of months of my GCSE photography course. Users start learning to use the Rule of Thirds and depth of field and that kind of thing, which is why everything looks like a college project. For example, we were told to take pictures of tube walkways in college because they're full of straight lines, which are pleasing to the eye, and you see thousands of photos of tube escalators and platforms on Instagram all the time.
>
> … What I don't think most users understand is that, to create a good image of something millions of people see every day, you have to go the extra mile and approach it from a different angle, rather than just standing in front of it, buying a new £3 filter and snapping away.[9]

First, it was a lightbulb moment for me to think that Instagram has encouraged millions of people to master the basic vernacular of photography: to educate themselves in why certain set-ups are harmonious or jarring; to explore how the affect of an image can be manipulated through colour and tone. But second, I disagreed with his conclusion. I would argue that these photographers – amateur, vernacular, social, call them what you will – are engaging with the world in a more observant and intense manner than they used to. Just as teenagers today write more than ever before, our contemporary camera-brain is learning to see the world differently, and our visual databases are expanding.

1 This article is a version of a talk given on the occasion of the exhibition "Ben Cauchi: The Sophist's Mirror" at City Gallery Wellington, 19 October 2012 – 17 February 2013, http://citygallery.org.nz/exhibition/ben-cauchi-the-sophist-s-mirror. (The talk's original title – only ever intended to be a throw-away – was 'Has the Internet killed photography?') A fuller version of this talk, which includes more about nostalgia and also delves into projects that play with this idea and also what technologist and writer Robin Sloan calls the 'digital flip-flop', is available at http://best-of-3.blogspot.co.nz/2013/02/photos-nostalgia.html.

2 Cited in Christopher Bonanos, "It's Polaroid's World – We Just Live in It," *The Wall Street Journal*, 9 November 2012, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324439804578108840573155684.html.

3 Ibid.

4 James Bridle, transcript of "Waving at the machines," keynote lecture given at WebDirections South 2011, http://www.webdirections.org/resources/james-bridle-waving-at-the-machines/#transcript.

5 Instagram is a social photography app that lets you take photos, apply filters to them, then share them in various ways. Distinctively, it confines photos to a square format, reminiscent of Polaroids, rather than the rectangular format native to digital cameras.

6 Teju Cole, "Dappled Things: Pinkhassov on Instagram," *The New Inquiry*, 23 September 2012, http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/dtake/dappled-things-pinkhassov-on-instagram.

7 Aaron Straup Cope, "Stories from the New Aesthetic," notes from a panel discussion at the New Museum, New York, October 2012, http://www.aaronland.info/weblog/2012/10/08/signs.

8 Guy Somerset, "Ben Cauchi Interview – The Long Version," *New Zealand Listener*, 3 November 2012, http://www.listener.co.nz/culture/art/ben-cauchi-interview-the-long-version.

9 Jake Lewis, quoted in Clive Martin, "I Still Don't 'Get' Instagram," *Vice Magazine*, January 2013, http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/i-still-dont-get-instagram.

Perspective

HALIDES OR DOTS AND DASHES?

Brian Scadden

Silver, the bane of countless indigenous South Americans who happened to be living on mountains of the stuff when the Spanish conquistadors arrived, became the miracle metal to early photographic pioneers who found that its properties heralded an amazing era which has lasted over 150 years.

The wet-plate process invented by Englishman Frederick Scott Archer was a negative/positive process which utilised silver halides with glass as a support for the collodion light-sensitive layer. This gave sharper, clearer negatives than the paper negatives produced by the calotype process, in a fraction of the time. The main drawback with this process was that the sensitised collodion lost sensitivity very quickly. This meant that a portable dark tent had to be close at hand for preparing and developing the image. Plates were coated, sensitised, exposed, developed and fixed all within a few minutes – hence the name 'wet plate.'

Negatives produced by this method could be contact-printed back onto albumen paper, or if slightly underexposed and viewed upon a black background these ambrotypes would appear as a positive image.

The advent of dry plates in 1880 spelt the end of the wet-plate era. Glass plates could be loaded into double holders, and exposed and developed weeks or months later with no adverse effect on the image. The wet-plate process lived on into the twentieth century in technical applications or as a seaside novelty, but its heyday was over.

The revival of the process really began in the early 1980s, along with many other 'archaic' processes such as platinum, cyanotype, kallitype, gum bichromate and daguerreotype. Although digital photography was in its infancy, photographers worldwide were already beginning to explore the origins of traditional image-making.

I began dabbling in the 'black art' of wet-plate photography in the 1980s, as I worked for the National Film Unit laboratory and had ready access to an endless supply of chemicals. Although I had trouble sourcing all of the necessary ingredients I slowly obtained enough to be able to make passable images. One book was all the literature I had to teach myself this demanding process. Slowly I gained experience in the process, but even now after nearly 30 years of practising the art I still can't claim to know all of its secrets.

Equipment was another problem which needed to be overcome by a budding collodion artist. As a collector of early cameras and equipment, I had plate cameras which I could adapt to take wet plates without any modifications impacting on the value of the apparatus. This solution was fine to get me started, but later I started making cameras and equipment purpose-built for my needs. A portable dark tent, followed by a darkroom wagon, was my answer to having a darkroom on location. Several cameras followed, with the largest being a 20" x 24" 'Behemoth' built for Ben Cauchi, a collodion artist and long-time friend from Wanganui. This camera is so big that it needs a trailer to transport it to the chosen location. Really only designed as a studio camera, it is currently with Ben in Germany while he attends a 12-month residency in Berlin. I joked with him when it was completed that if ever he was caught in a blizzard, he could always take shelter inside the camera.

People who want to pursue this process must be prepared to either source original cameras or purpose-build equipment to suit their needs. The same applies to the chemicals required. Collodion, the key ingredient in the wet-plate process, is highly flammable and cannot be transported by air, making supply a problem. Many of the necessary chemicals are volatile or toxic, so extreme care must be taken in their use. One cannot journey along this road without expecting many pitfalls and frustrations along the way.

Over the past year, I have been amazed at the interest generated worldwide in wet-plate photography. When I started, there was only a handful of 'crazy' folk worldwide practicing the process. Now that number has increased to hundreds, and interest is growing at an amazing rate. Last year I ran one wet-plate workshop, whereas this year the number will be at least eight. It seems that every week I am fielding enquiries regarding tuition or the availability of chemicals.

Social media sites abound with groups dedicated entirely to wet-plate photography, and instruction in the process can be had through any of the countless sites on the internet. Although there can be no substitute for hands-on tuition, budding wet-platers can access online tuition via sites such as YouTube, with this sort of exposure to the process only serving to fuel the growing interest in the medium.

So what is causing this renewed interest in such an old and difficult process? Well, I firmly believe that with technology advancing at such a rate, people are beginning to rebel against the tide and have the desire to take back some control before these advances remove the craft from so many facets of our daily lives. Photographers around the world are tired of enabling an electronic device to take complete control of an art form which should remain the domain of the photographer.

Applying this purely to wet-plate photography, there is nothing quite like seeing an image appear when the developer is poured upon a plate which you yourself have prepared from a handful of chemicals and a piece of glass. There is an indescribable sense of accomplishment as you gaze upon a totally self-made image which not only is hand-crafted, but has a beauty all of its own.

It never ceases to fascinate me how this form of photography has such an effect on people. It is almost addictive in its grasp on newly initiated, rather bewildered practitioners. Fingers blackened from silver nitrate and eyes glazed over from the effects of the strong alcohol, ether and collodion fumes are regarded as a badge of honour by those who have fallen under the spell.

When George Eastman introduced the Kodak camera in 1888, photography came within reach of millions of people, where before it had been practiced exclusively by professionals and the wealthy. The camera was sold loaded with 100 shots and was returned to the factory for processing and reloading. The advertising slogan, 'You press the button, we do the rest,' got the message through as to the simplicity of the new apparatus. This was the beginning of popular photography and hardly any home could be found without a film camera by the mid-twentieth century. Of all the photographic processes and supports for holding emulsion, roll-film has enjoyed the longest and most successful career – that is, until now.

Kodak introduced the first true digital camera in 1986, little knowing that this would have such a dramatic impact on their future business and recently take them to the verge of bankruptcy. Since then, digital imaging has had such a profound effect on photography that film itself is now considered almost archaic.

I must confess that I do own several digital cameras and that the majority of images I shoot are digital. The ease with which perfectly focussed and exposed photographs can be produced is mind-blowing. We now have cameras and telephones which can be held above the photographer's (a loose term) head, which will not only focus and correctly expose the image, but will even compose the photograph and only trip the shutter once everyone in a group is smiling!

This is not to say that digital photography is not an artform in its own right. Modern digital cameras and particularly DSLRs are capable of truly awesome results, many times in situations where film would struggle. In many cases, digital images are superior to those captured on film. These cameras are truly the tools for future image-making and will continue to evolve and improve. However, there are still those among us who appreciate the organic, handmade quality that traditional processes bring with them.

Until recently I was Head of Laboratory at Peter Jackson's film facility in Wellington. I have been involved in motion picture laboratory work since 1976 when I started work at the National Film Unit. Now the laboratory has gone – a casualty of changing times and a victim of technological change. Film is now considered obsolete and only the die-hards are left to keep this medium alive. For all the arguments extoling the virtues of digital capture, there are still those among us who love the 'organic' look of film.

Digital images have a very pixelated structure, unlike film and wet-plate images which have random or very little grain structure. Sure digital images are clean, crisp and blemish-free, but I feel the way we view the world around us is becoming too structured, too defined, almost too clean. Film and alternative processes help keep us focused on what can be achieved outside of the technological storm that is engulfing us.

Many of us are now relying too heavily on digital cameras without knowing even the basics of how these instruments capture an image. This is not to say that we all need to be techno-wizards, but we do need to understand the tool to be able to maximise its full potential. The instruments that we use for wet-plate photography are really no more than a hollow box with a lens attached. They have no shutter and very often little or no aperture control. Yet with these basic cameras we can create images that are both visually stunning and totally unique.

I feel that returning to the grassroots level of image-making gives the photographer a sense of power and control which is lacking in both film and digital capture. You feel that you are the master of your photographic destiny, the alchemist, the maker of images, a 'keeper of light.' The satisfaction that this gives is what drives us to persevere with these early processes.

Looking at motion picture capture, there are valid arguments against film. Film-stock and processing costs, combined with distribution overheads all conspire to make film uneconomical – but there is still that random grain, organic look that makes film unique. With laboratory services now being taken over by Archives New Zealand, we at least can still look forward to continuing negative processing in Australasia. Film is not dead and will continue to appeal to those who wish to pursue that natural, photochemical look that has appealed to filmmakers for decades.

There is also the question of longevity. I have wet-plate and daguerreotype images in my collection that are over 150 years old, but appear as good as the day they were made. Archives New Zealand and The New Zealand Film Archive have in their collections nitrate movie films which are over 100 years old and although most are not in perfect condition, they are still viewable. Contrast this to digital files, CDs and DVDs which, if not backed up and migrated every few years, run the very real risk of data being lost completely. Currently, there is no digital format that matches film and some of the 'archaic' processes for archival permanence.

This piece is being penned by the now Head of Picture at Park Road Post Production, managing the digital team working on the second *Hobbit* film. Yes, I have gone to the dark side but still maintain the view that capture on film will make a comeback in the next few years or as long as film stock is available. We are constantly receiving enquiries from individuals, film schools and production companies requiring film processing. These are people who recognise that shooting on film is an expensive proposition compared with digital, but who also cherish the organic look of film and who will go on shooting it, teaching and gathering converts as long as the negative is available. Much like the revival of vinyl in the music industry, in some cases newer isn't necessarily better to everyone.

I do belive that alternative processes like wet plate will continue to thrive and attract those who value the art of making an image by hand far above the technological marvels that are poised to engulf our craft.

Perspective

PRODUCTION PROGRAMMES: CAROLINE MCQUARRIE'S "ARTIFACT"

Mark Bolland

In the 1830s, the introduction of machines using Jacquard cards into the lace-making industry enabled the mechanical production of lace, and this programme for production became a key ingredient in Charles Babbage's development of the Analytical Engine, the forerunner of modern computers. Contemporaneously, William Henry Fox Talbot, the inventor of the first positive/negative photographic process, was making 'photogenic drawings' of