Fugitive Testimonies

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Fig 1. Fagan (2020)

My fugitive image has attached the following reference _114396234_filca11.jpg. Internet searches reveal that this photograph is from a series of pictures that have recently achieved a worldwide interest.

Fagan (2020) describes how as a collector he bought an old Leica camera with an undeveloped film inside. After seeking developing advice and following a careful process some 20 useable prints were obtained from the roll.

Strangely, not all of the shots were used up and obviously the film had not been developed by the takers of these pictures. On wonders why this might be. Was the camera stolen at some stage or did something happen to the couple depicted in many of the scenes?

I think the story is so interesting that it is worth describing and discussing as it lends to the '*studium*' of the image.

For Barthes, (2000), he uses the term 'studium' to mean the broad story; I take this to mean, what does the image represent, what does it convey? He describes it as an inducement to think and as a polite and general interest. We look at the photograph through the lens of our cultural and personal experiences and so each picture will converse in an individual way. The above image on its own tells me something, but in conjunction with the other pictures it tells me a whole lot more.

Fig 2, Fagan, (2020)

My first impressions when I look at these pictures is how beautiful this woman is. She seems to me to appear both intelligent and sophisticated. She looks well dressed and good humoured and I am really taken by her. She reminds me of my mother and is perhaps a similar age to her. I remember my mother wearing a cotton dress very much like this one worn above with its wide pointed collar, floral design and belt. I recall the texture of the material and the contrast of the flower pattern against the white background. I have a feeling of nostalgia for a time past.

I feel that as she looks at me, she is present in this moment and yet I also know this cannot be so; I feel a yearning in my stomach and a sadness that I have never known her and that she is probably dead. I have for a moment an 'adventure' with her that is repeated each time I look.

Barthes, (2000, p.27) might describe this feeling as a 'punctum '. It is something that wounds and pierces me and induces me to delight and pain. When I read how Barthes describes this concept, I find myself wanting to go along with it and to intensify my response. Barthes' reflections induce me to a more intense and considered gaze.

Barthes (p.96) describes '*another punctum*'. When looking at the 1865 photograph of the condemned prisoner Lewis Payne, he realises that this good-looking young man is about to die. He also realises that Payne is already dead and that this realisation punctures and confronts him with his own mortality. I feel a similar sensation when I look into this young woman's eyes; I think that she has perhaps lots of life ahead of her because she is young but also that she is already dead. She looks so real and present but she is in all likelihood gone.

Fagan (2020) describes how he has published and disseminated these pictures across the world and there has been much media interest in his story. He is trying to establish the background of these images and he has discovered many interesting facts. For example, that the late 1930's BMW convertible car was registered in Munich, West Germany.

Fig 3, Fagan, (2020)

Apparently, the photographs were taken in or around 1951 and it seems they depict a couple on a driving holiday around Switzerland and the Alpine areas of northern Italy.

The man looks older than the woman and is now occupying the previously empty chair at the café table. Was it the woman who took this photo? She has managed to time the shutter so that her subjects' eyes are closed. In the 1950's there was no digital back screen to check the image. I find myself envious of this man and the fact that he is with this woman. She was never to discover that his eyes were closed.

Fig 4. Fagan (2020)

When I see these pictures, I am reminded of my early life. I was born in 1961 and I recall these styles of more formal dress. My grandfather in particular always wore a suit every day, even indoors. I notice how the other people in the café frames appear formally dressed and appear sophisticated.

They are sat on the terrace of a café and I would imagine that the establishment is a family run, small business. The sign in the café says ‘pasticceria’ and I imagine some freshly baked patisserie from the store delicacies. Globalisation was not a term widely used then and I feel

sad at how many aspects of life seem to have changed since that time. I think about the fact that the world population was only some 3.5 billion then and is now almost 8 billion and of all the consequences and implications of these numbers. In many ways it was a simpler life and the world has undergone a very rapid change and much of it is concerning to me.

I think about the growth in the power and influence of the capitalist establishment and how we are advertised at in so many more ways. Just 20 years on from when these photographs were taken, Berger (1973, p. 131) points out how we are seduced by the power of advertising and at (p.142) suggests that we are made to feel dissatisfied with our lives by this constant assault and distraction.

Barnes, (2020) .

Jeanette Barnes depicts a mass of humanity rushing about, engaged in the modern lifestyle, being advertised at constantly. I like her expressionist style, a sense of time passing and how the people are present but disappearing rushing to the next demand or purchase. I feel that the agency of the individual is being eroded and Barnes captures this for me.

I am considering and reflecting on the changing nature of life and what we might put into our bodies and in the environmental impact of these new ways of consuming. At the same time I am thinking about how much we have lost in terms of individual agency since 1951. We are increasingly consumers and not individuals.

Debord (p. 10), even back in the sixties suggests that the spectacle is a pervasive prescence that is omnipresent across the globe and never sleeping. We see the McDonald's M sign everywhere now and they always seem to be open. It is difficult to escape their advertising. The trace of humanity is there but they are diminished; or passive as Debord might propose.

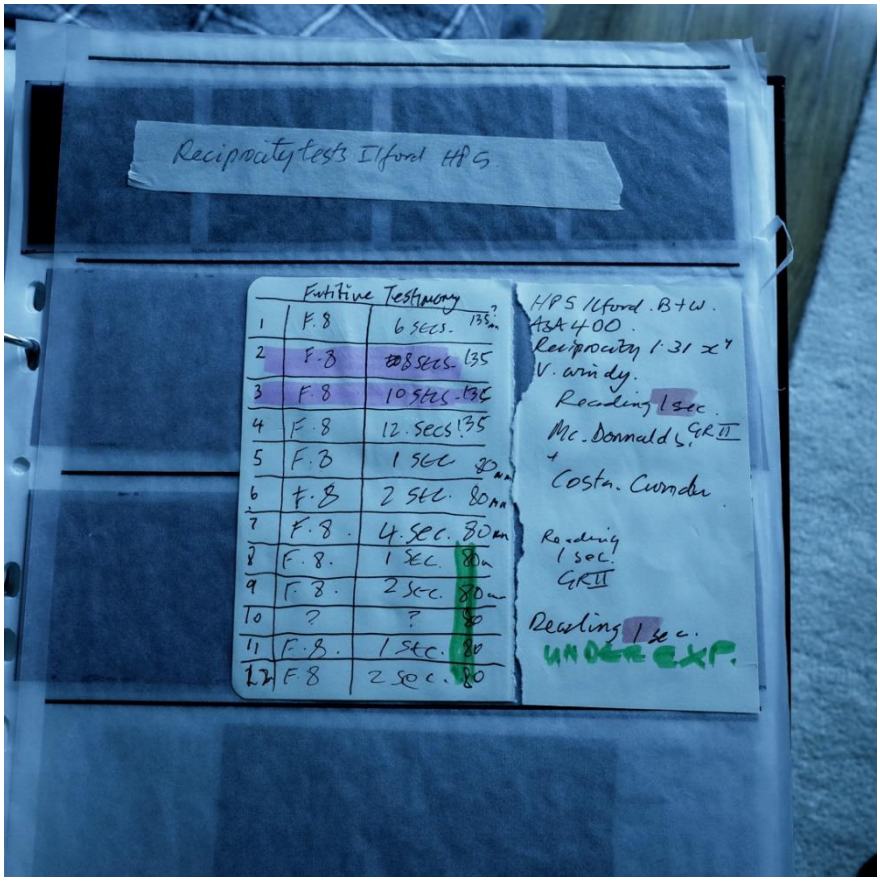
At p.28 he argues that the growth of capitalistic consumption is producing a global banality that to me is exemplafied by the 24 hour fast food outlets of the usual suspects.

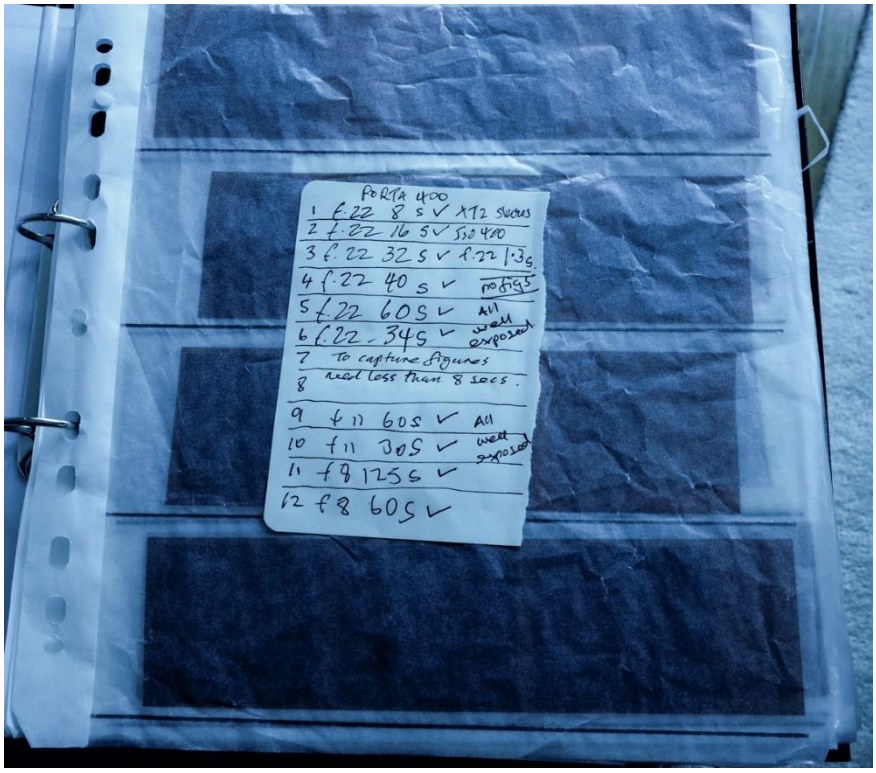
I wanted to explore the possibilities of expressing myself with film and to gain experience of using film in reduced light conditions. I know very little about the issue of reciprocity and I felt that I needed to understand this topic more fully. I experimented firstly with black and white Ilford HP5, 120 medium format with a Mamiya C330 and found that there seemed to be a great deal of latitude once the film had received enough light to create an image. I

found it was not prone to easy overexposure. I have also experimented with a 55mm, 80mm and 180 mm lens with this camera which are interchangeable with this system.

I also wanted to experiment with colour film and made some tests with Kodak Porta 400. Again, I was surprised with the latitude I was able to work with in terms of exposure. It seemed difficult to overexpose in low light and I realised that I need not be too precise with my exposure triangle. The general results indicated that I just needed to give it plenty off time. However, that did not necessarily fit with the movement I was seeking in the image

and I continue to experiment with wider apertures and different lenses, timings and light conditions.


Reciprocity tests Ilford HP5
Futitive Testimony
1 F.8 6 secs. 135 ?
2 F.8 8 secs. 135
3 F.8 10 secs. 135
4 F.8 12. secs 135
5 F.8 1 sec 80 mm
6 F.8 2 sec. 80 mm
7 F.8. 4. sec. 80 mm
8 F.8. 1 sec. 80 mm
9 F.8. 2 sec. 80 mm
10 ? ? 80
11 F.8. 1 sec. 80
12 F.8 2 sec. 80
HP5 Ilford. B+W.
ASA 400.
Reciprocity 1.31 x4
V. windy.
Reading 1 sec.
Mc. Donnalds. GR II
+
Costa. Cumder
Reading 1 sec.
GR II
Reading 1 sec.
UNDER EXP.


PORTA 400
1 f.22 8 s ✓ x72 stories
2 f.22 16 s ✓ ISO 400
3 f.22 32 s ✓ f.22 1.3 s
4 f.22 40 s ✓ no figs
5 f.22 60 s ✓ All
6 f.22 34 s ✓ well exposed
7 To capture figures
8 need less than 8 secs.
9 f11 60 s ✓ All
10 f11 30 s ✓ well exposed
11 f8 125 s ✓
12 f8 60 s ✓

Reciprocity test Kodac Porta 400

Cwmdu. 13.3.21.
Kodac Asa 400

1 F11 1sec. 55mm –
2 F11 2sec 55mm –
3 F11 4sec. 55mm –
4 F11 8sec. 55mm –
5 F11 1 55mm –
6 F11 2 55mm –
7 F11 4 55mm –
8 F11 8 55mm –
9 F11 ½s. – 55
10 F11 1s. – 55
11 F11 2s – 55
12 F11 4s – 55

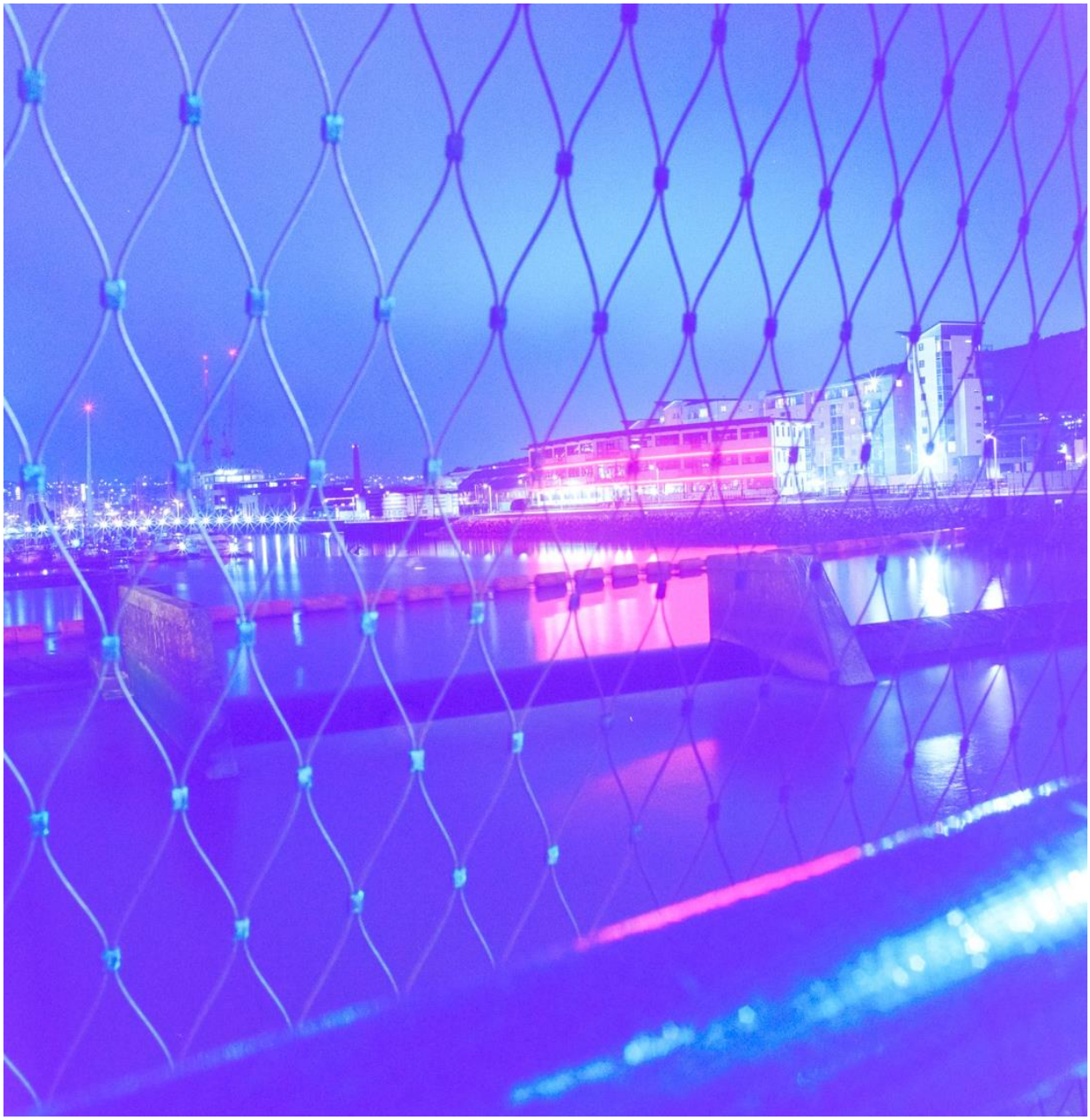
TESCO
F&F

McDonalds

In the above images I was reflecting on the many changes to our lives since the 1950's, our roles in society and the way we live. Perhaps like Barnes, I feel I have a sense of a loss from the past and a suspicion and unease about the pace and nature of contemporary lifestyles.

The colour and black and white negatives were digitised using a copy stand, light screen and a digital camera and then produced in Adobe Lightroom.

Barthe's attempts at a considered deconstruction of photography as a subject has led me to reflect on my own practice and aspirations. I noticed that within Camera Lucida, of the 24 images Barthes refers to, only two do not contain representations of the human form. It seems that for Barthes, the images that hold his attention and excite or 'advene' with him mainly contain close up representations of a human figure.



I am not sure I want to work with human subjects and I feel more drawn to something else occupying the frames of my pictures. I find I am drawn to the work of artists such as John Davies, Richard Long, John Blakemore, Hiroshi Sugimoto and Jem Southam.

I notice that my fugitive photo refers to a couples' holiday in the Alps. The photo of the old car on the snowy mountains reminded me of childhood trips up the Neath valley in the sixties. Some of the villages have an alpine feel. I also reflect on how much they have changed over the past 60 years.

I used to play rugby and football with Cimla sports clubs up and down the Neath and Afan valley as a child and I feel a resonance with these places and it seems that I need to have some connection with my subject in order for work to feel true and have some integrity. On this trip I used a number of different lenses with a digital, mirrorless camera set on a tripod.

When reflecting on the 24-hour fast-food restaurants I also think about the ecological impact of all these places. They have lights burning day and night and the food they serve up uses obscene amounts of wasteful packaging. The meat and dairy industries themselves are a wasteful use of our limited resources as well as being harmful to our health and environments.

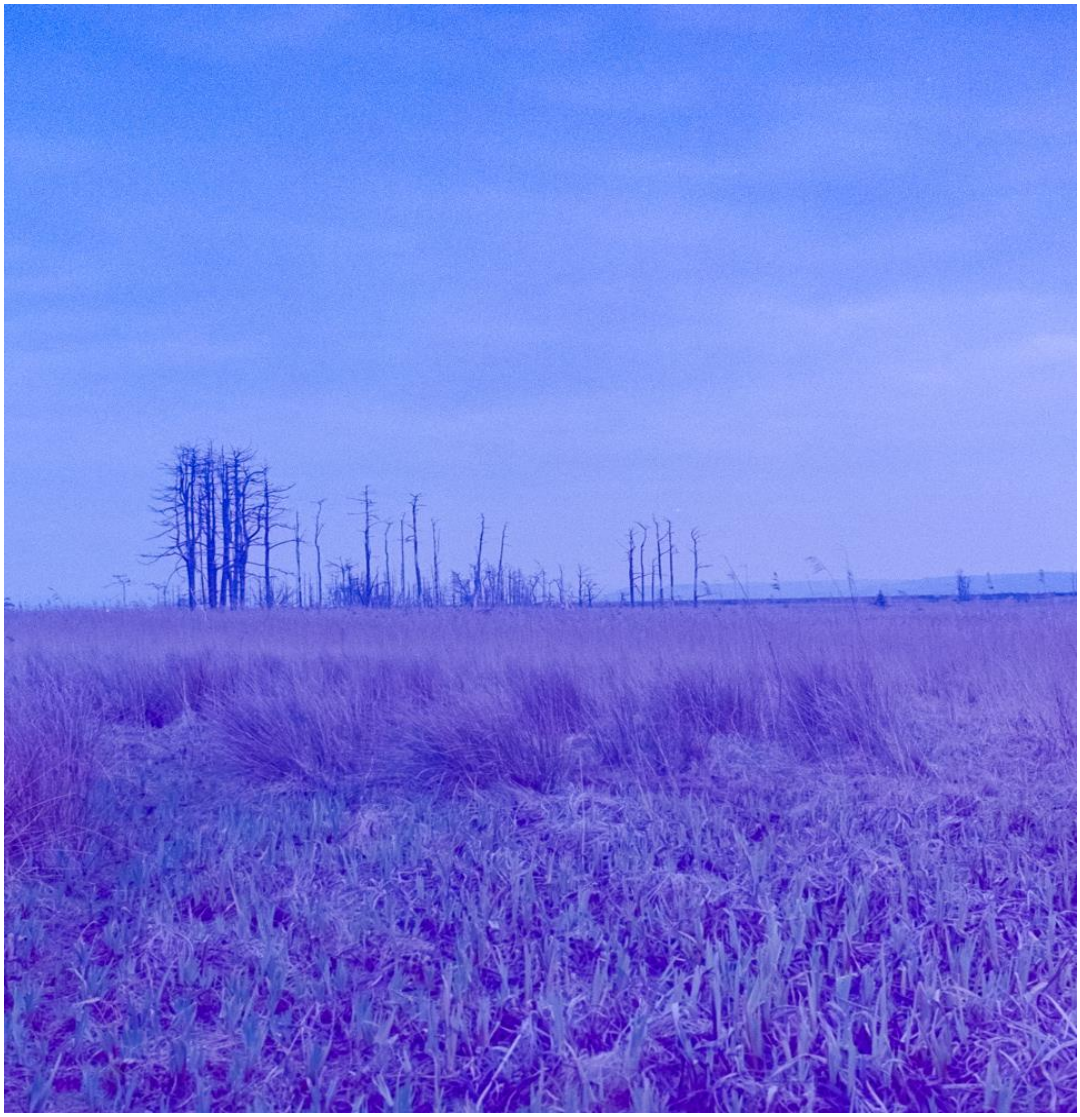
When I saw these trees that appear to be dying at Cwm Ivy, north Gower, I assumed that it was due to rising sea levels. This sight resonates with and touches me as the issue of global warming is very real and yet we continue to do the things that are causing it.

However, I spoke to a woman from the National Trust and she told me that in fact this area is being deliberately flooded to return it from pasture to marine wetland. So, it is true that the trees are dying from excessive salt water but not for the reasons I initially thought.

I believe the image works as a metaphor for environmental damage due to global warming when considered and juxtaposed with the pictures of the fast-food outlets.

I particularly like this image above. For me, the studium speaks of the ecological threat that we face but also of the beauty of our threatened natural environment. I like the way that everything seems to be in focus but that there is also something indescribable about the reeds in the mid distance; they might even be a mist or fog. I like the rendering of the foliage and wooden posts in the foreground and the textures, it has a pleasing amount of contrast and definition and reminds me of images that I used to see in my children's encyclopaedia from the 1930's. I used a polarising filter for this picture and I believe that has helped to create a certain feel.

I have an increasing realisation that there are many variables within the creation of a photographic image and that each one can have an impact on the outcome. I have been back to this location a number of times now with the intention of trying to limit and explore these variables.



I have been experimenting with black and white as well as colour film. I have also been experimenting with many different JPEG pre-sets on a digital, mirrorless camera. I discover that I am keener on taking pictures and creating art and less keen on sitting in front of a computer screen post processing the images.

I am hoping that I can get my camera to do the digital work for me so that I might minimise unhealthy screen time.

I have decided to concentrate on a black and white, digital approach at Cwm Ivy and I am trying to create some JPEG pre-sets that give a filmic vibe. If I limit myself to black and white and to camera set pre-sets then I feel that I can concentrate on some of the other variables. Also, visiting the same venue and having the same subject matter might help me limit the variables and improve my knowledge and understanding.

Even visiting the same location and taking the picture from exactly the same spot can give very different results.

In the image above I have used the same camera settings but increased the shadows and without a polarising filter and it is on a different day. Also, I think the tripod height is slightly different and I am using a different focal length lens. It seems to have a completely different feel and to me is far less appealing. Trying to understand all the variables and how they might impact on a final image seems quite a challenge.

I want to limit myself by using JPEGS but I also realise that I limit my ability to make changes to the image at a later stage and so I will also create Raw files at the same time.

When looking at my Fugitive image I think about the use of black and white film and how the lack of colour seems to exemplify the tonal variations and textures. I am also interested in exploring the use of black and white as a medium of expression.

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