

The future of photography – Justin Quinnell

In the 1950s when Kim Il Sung wrote an essay on the Juche ideology of North Korea, it was agreed to be worshipped as a holy text.

When I become maggot fodder, my hard drive and its: images, PowerPoint lectures and 30 years of work, will not be worshipped, it will become landfill, and after a small burst of data transfer relating to my death, (if my demise doesn't clash with Arianna Grande releasing a new perfume), many of the amazing images I have taken over the past 50 years will be forgotten. Which leads me to ask, what as photographers are we doing?

In the 80s I would wash my fibre-based Record Rapid prints for hours to achieve 'archival quality' ensuring my photographs could be glimpsed for a few seconds over a glass of cava at an exhibition in the hope that postponing yellow blotches on a photograph will maintain a potential value, and my images of the cat could be enjoyed for future generations to come.

45 years on and 'Twinkle' still exists forever on a solid piece of paper rather than lost on an un-swiped screen. Today the internet promises our captured visions will be preserved forever on the cloud, but things are changing.

There was a time when giving out free information on the web was as important as caring for your neighbours.

Worldwide Pinhole Day was instigated by people who simply wanted others to discover wonder. We encouraged people to discover the joy of creating an image through a simple hole. 25 years on it adheres to its original ethos. Its website has: no 'likes' no 'registering' no collecting emails, no 'winners', no fees, no algorithms, no sponsorship, no comments, no advertising and as such is barely hanging on.

Why is this? Surely the 2500-year-old wonder of a small hole creating an image will continue for as long as light travels in a straight line and there are people around to enjoy it. The fact is that Pinhole Day has a specific problem which will be its death knell. It isn't designed to perpetuate growth, consumerism and finance, an essential requirement of contemporary photography.

Every viewfinder screen that is used, distances the user from experiencing the visual world. It pushes our perception of reality down a road away from our brains and memories and into a perpetual sink of data storage. Luckily

data storage requires almost no energy, however the world isn't investing in data 'storage', but in data 'transfer' which uses an immense amount of energy all of which ends up as 'heat'. Add the joy of AI and you may as well remove the word sustainable from the dictionary.

A tenth of the energy of Ireland currently goes towards data use (something I have ironically just learned from Google!) and the demands are set for this to treble over the next 5 years and so on. More pixels more fun!

One thing is certain, our current measure for unlimited growth economics will mean that there will never be 'enough'. Until we can be satisfied by the doing, being and playing of creativity and rid ourselves of the need for recognition and immortality, we will continue down a path in an opposite direction from the where photography enhances our visual world.

No amount of alternative experimental photography will save the planet, but whilst medals are awarded for photo competitions documenting Armageddon and individuals are rewarded for pixel swiping, us alt-photo people can play with our low impact photographic wonder and at least go down smiling.

Step away from the calendar, all we have is the journey, there is no destination.

We are all mayflies.

www.pinholephotography.org

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