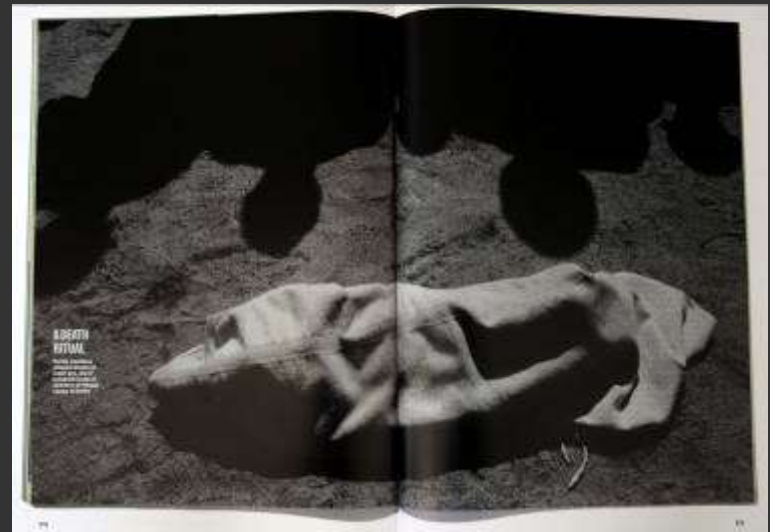
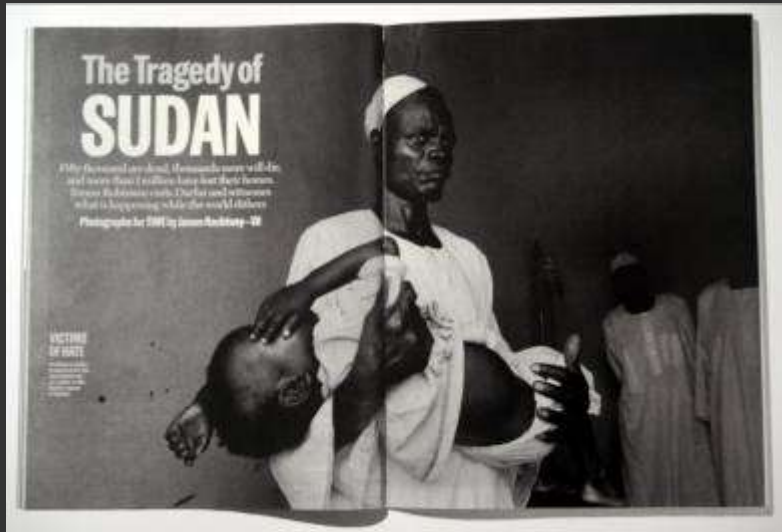


# The Picture Story

Visual Storytelling through the  
Construction of a traditional  
Picture Story.



James Nachtwey: *The Tragedy of Sudan*, Time Magazine

# Deconstructing the Picture Story

No picture story is ever the same, even if the subjects are identical. If three photographers approach the same subject, then you will get three very different 'looks'. None of the stories or images would be wrong, it's just that every photographer sees things in a different way, has different approaches to photography and individual styles. One photographer might just include portraits of people whilst another may concentrate on abstract details without any people in the images at all. They will both 'tell the story' albeit in their own personalised way. But you got to know what story you want to tell or try and portray



What we are about to learn however is how to construct the 'traditional picture story'. The vast majority of photographers who work in the reportage, documentary or press field of photography will have started with this style and many still use it today. It is the perfect way to learn why some pictures 'work' and why some stories seem clearer than others.



# The Traditional Picture Story

There are 6 or 7 individual types of picture that should be both visually strong and informative in their own right but put together make a flowing dynamic narrative. Outlined below are these individual pictures:

- **Person at Work**
- **Relationship Shot**
- **Establishing Shot**
- **Detail shot**
- **Environmental Portrait**
- **Formal Portrait**
- **Observed Portrait**

Picture stories are generally made up of between 3 and 15 pictures depending on the depth of the story but they will include most if not all of the individual pictures mentioned above. By looking at each of the picture elements individually we can discuss how they are best achieved.



# Picture story

**Establishing shot.** Establishing the setting and what we expect to be reading about.

**International:**  
The Sunday Times Magazine



**Environmental portrait.**  
Establishing what the person in the photograph does for a living (police).

**People at work.**  
Showing us what the police in the photograph do on a daily basis. Establishing and developing their story.

**Headline.** One phrase or sentence explaining what we are going to be reading.

**Text.** Summarising and describing the story we are seeing in the 5 photos.

**Relationship shot.**  
Establishing who the people are in the photo and what role they represent.

**Detail shot.** Showing in detail what the people in the photo wear. Detailed of what kind of attitude they need to adapt in this job.

# *Person at Work*

Self explanatory really but there are key elements and working practices that will help to make this picture work. Things to look for are:

- Who the person is...we should be able to recognise them.
- What is it they are doing....
- How are they doing it...
- In what context are they doing it...



One of the main points here (as well as the other pictures) is communication with your subject. Talking to the person doing the job will not only tell you exactly what they are doing but also when the best time or 'decisive moment' will be to take the picture. More importantly, talking will relax both you and the subject enabling you to capture more natural looking pictures.













# *Person at Work...cont*

Here are a few more useful pointers which will help you to understand what you are aiming to achieve in a 'Person at Work' picture. Most of these ideas will also relate to the other pictures you will need:

- Don't rush into shooting pictures. Observe for a short time, talk to your subject and ask questions.
- Move around your subject. You may be able to see the job more clearly from another perspective.
- Move in close-fill the frame. Do not forget you may need to show the tools or other objects relevant to the type of work.
- Shoot a number of frames-try both horizontal and vertical compositions. Be critical of your own efforts, can you improve on what you have already shot?



# *Relationship Shot*

This means a relationship between two or more people. It could be one of love, hate, passion, or just simple affection, supportive or one of rejection, teaching and learning, superior or inferior etc. The key points here are that the photograph must show clearly:

- What is taking place between them and
- What the nature of the relationship is....













# *Relationship Shot...cont*

This picture requires the skill of observing people without disturbing the scene or the moment. You may make yourself known to the subject so they are aware you will be taking pictures, but after that try not to interfere at all. Do not talk to the subjects as with a Person at Work picture. The relationship is between the two subjects, not you. A few points of advice:

- To start with chose a simple subject such as a conversation or parent and child relationship.
- You will find it easier to be inconspicuous in places where there is a lot going on or at an organised event.
- Explain to your subject what you are doing and ask for their co-operation in disregarding your presence.
- Watch for expressive body language such as posture, physical gestures and facial expression.
- Shoot a lot of frames. Many of the most expressive signs will be fleeting moments and it takes a concentrated effort and repeated attempts to capture this.

# *Establishing Shot*

The Establishing Shot is an important element in the picture story because it serves to define the context in which the other pictures have been located. It describes where and sometimes when the event took place. It can also describe mood and other information such as how large the event is how many people were involved, the weather etc....



















# *Establishing Shot...cont*

The Establishing Shot summarises all this information and provides the context in which other photographs in the story can be understood. Take into account the following:-

- Remember that the Establishing Shot is often the first picture that a reader will see so you need to grab their attention and entice them to look at the rest of the story.
- Fix a clear picture in your mind of what the story is about and even the other pictures that might be needed to 'tell the story'. In this way you will gain a clearer understanding of the kind of establishing picture you will need to locate them.
- While the establishing picture is essentially a wide shot, that is a general view, remember that the distance will be determined by the subject.
- The Establishing Shot must also work as a photograph in its own right, you will want to make it more than just a general view of the scene.
- Consider light, composition, elements of animation and other elements of visual interest to enliven and add interest to the picture.



# *Detail Shot*

The detail shot is often overlooked but is very useful in many stories to emphasise a point or subject area. It also adds 'pace' to your story which will be discussed later. A detail shot doesn't have to be a minute macro picture but just something that concentrates on something in particular to open up the story. They can be a good chance to shoot something in an abstract way that gets the viewer thinking about what he is looking at. It adds a new dimension to the story. Some very successful picture stories are made up solely of detail abstracts.





# *Portraits*

- Portraits are an essential part of any story. They convey a sense of personality and humanity to a story which helps the viewer to identify with the subject. It can be a demanding picture to make because of the need for intimate interaction with the subject.
- There are many different approaches and styles to portraiture but they can be the most rewarding. We have identified three types, the formal, environmental and observed portrait but the potential really is limited only to your imagination. Outlined below are a few established approaches to taking portraits, each of which have value in context with a particular story:-



# Formal Portrait

The subject is totally under your control. You decide lighting, posture, distance etc but in a way that still permits the personality of the subject to come through. A good relationship with the subject is helpful here.











# Environmental Portrait

This is similar to the formal portrait in that the subject often knows he is being photographed but a lot more emphasis is placed on location. I.e. portrait in the subjects workplace or a picture that reveals a lot more about the person due to the surroundings he is photographed in. A pilot next to aircraft or in the cockpit etc...











# Observed Portrait

This when the subject is not as aware of having his picture taken. A more candid approach to get that natural relaxed feeling to the picture. There is a lot of crossover between the different portrait styles to you could have an observed/environmental portrait or even an observed/formal portrait taken during a moment when the subject maybe not aware your taking pictures. Again, there are no set rules in portraiture.

















# *In Summary*

Everything that has been discussed so far will be good practice in learning how to create a powerful, informative and entertaining picture story. There is no substitute for shooting pictures and only by pushing yourself and trying out new subjects and ways of working will you improve. Once you feel you are comfortable with the different elements of the traditional picture story, experiment and start breaking the rules of convention to see what turns up. There really are no set rules once you are competent in the basics and this is when you will start to produce your most exciting and intriguing images. But you got to know what story you wan to tell or try and portray

- Every new subject will make different demands on you so be prepared so that you know what you want to achieve and inspire confidence in your subject.
- Know your equipment and check you have enough film, batteries etc.
- Talk with your subject and explore picture opportunities so they feel involved but don't let them get pushy and take control.
- Shoot lots of pictures to avoid the inevitable closed eyes and awkward expressions.
- Shoot both verticals, horizontals and from all different distances, angles etc.



# Other Considerations....

What has been previously discussed will give you a good grounding in how to construct a well executed picture story. There are however other considerations that could and should be thought about whilst shooting pictures which are mentioned below:

- **Composition/Content:** Composition is critical to creating a powerful image but it also has to have content. A good picture which has no relevance to the story will only confuse the viewer and devalue your whole story.
- **Lens Use:** It is possible to shoot a whole story using just one lens but there is the danger that all the pictures will look the same with no dynamism. Using wide angle lenses, zoom lenses as well as your standard lens will give greater impact, feel and pace to your pictures.
- **Depth of Field:** As well as changing lenses also change the depth of field as often as possible. Throw backgrounds out of focus in some pictures and not always when expected. Experiment.....
- **Wide/Close Shots:** Don't stand the same distance from each of your subjects. To have 'pace' a story needs to change viewpoint every other picture to keep the viewer interested. This can be achieved by physically standing at different distances and heights but also by using the above two methods. Everything is interlinked....
- **Filler Shots:** Sometimes you will just see something unusual which maybe you didn't plan on using or seeing but is relevant to the context of the story. These can sometimes end up being your best shots.

# A local story: a place

Identify individual shots in a traditional picture story









