

*Let yourself be silently drawn by
the strange pull of what you really
love. It will not lead you astray.*

Rumi



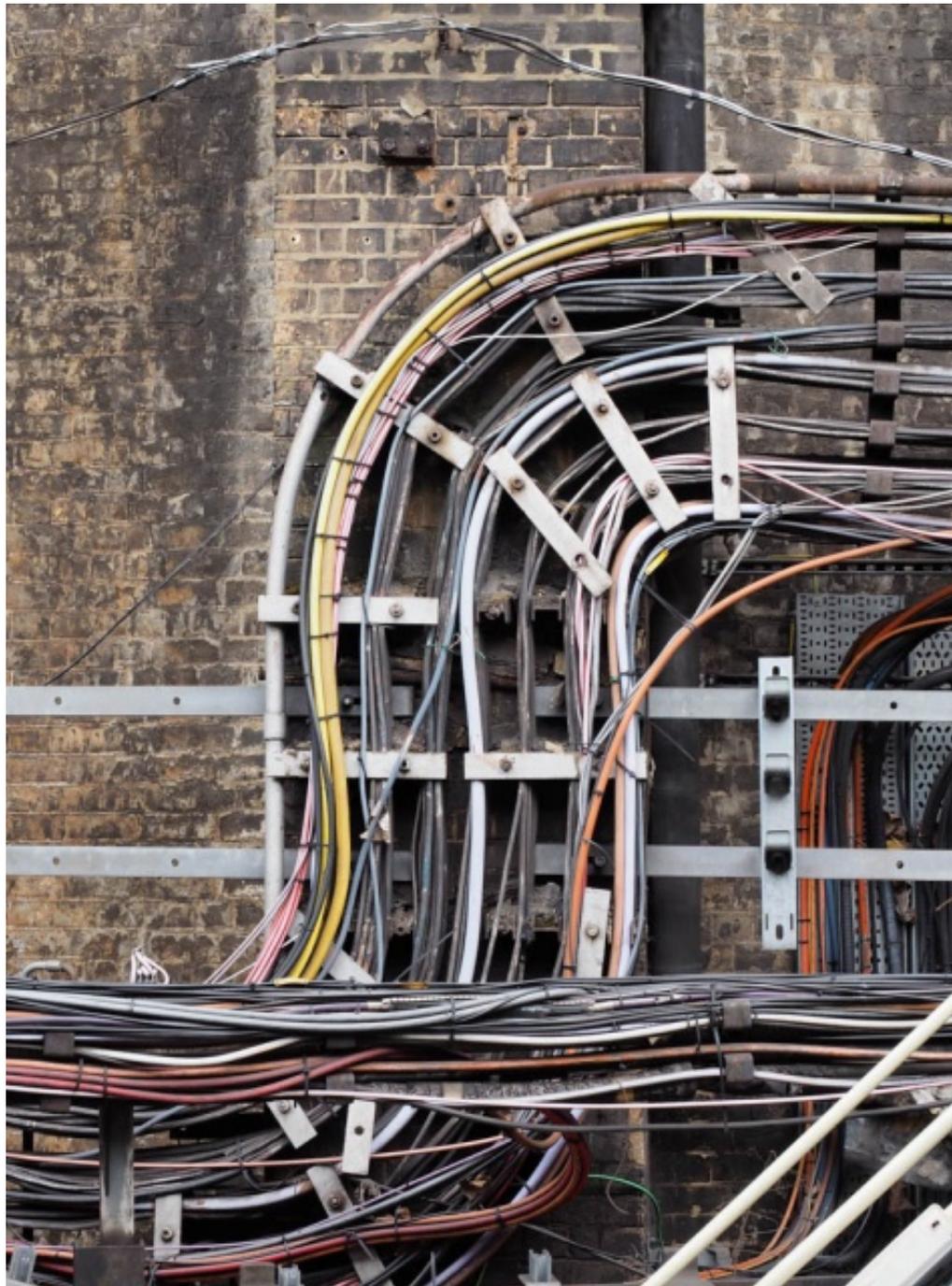
Letting the world speak to you. Focusing and Photography...

I'll start by being candid and saying that for me, photography is a kind of obsession. Or that the obsession came first and then I started to make sense of why I was doing it! For me it is a contemplation of beauty, of the majesty of life as it is. It is about finding life and aliveness amidst chaos and it is the sharing of this sensibility with others. It's about finding symbols out there that speak to me and to others. And in all honesty, seeing and finding this beauty helps to keep me sane.

Over time though, I have seen how photography interacts with Focusing, not in a formal way, like doing Focusing as a preparation to take pictures (though that might be a good thing) but more as an interaction on a bodily/feeling level.

For me, when I am with my camera, everything else disappears; including my life troubles and worries and I enter a space of curiosity, wonder, appreciation and searching. One search that goes on is that some part of me or story in me is looking to find itself mirrored in the world, looking to find a symbol that speaks to it. Like a dream image. The world is full of such symbols if you look.





Another search is for symmetry and beauty in the mundane. These surprise offerings bring me delight and a kind of relief that I find hard to put into words. I marvel at how pattern and symmetry bring joy in my body. Indeed visual artists have been fascinated by this for centuries, this mystery and magic of composition and form.

A related theme that runs very deep for me and for many photographers is abandoned places, indeed there is a whole genre dedicated to it. These places call me, and I often find myself jumping over a fence to get to them. I love the whole atmosphere of these places; the sense of a life lived and then left behind, of past worlds that no longer have relevance. They are filled with senses and textures and stories. And within them you always find nature re-asserting itself. I often think of how in a thousand years these and many places will be forests once more and it starts with these tiny sparks of life.

They hold a personal story of healing from my past ... one of finding beauty amidst chaos and destruction and they express something more universal - the collective human story of how all things pass and fade... people, mountains, empires, planets and stars. This poem by Anna Akhmatova seems to say more about it...

Everything is Plundered

Everything is plundered, betrayed, sold,
Death's great black wing scrapes the air,
Misery gnaws to the bone.
Why then do we not despair?

By day, from the surrounding woods,
Cherries blow summer into town;
At night the deep transparent skies
Glitter with new galaxies.

And the miraculous comes so close
To the ruined, dirty houses—
Something not known to anyone at all,
But wild in our breast for centuries.



Of course in a very literal sense you are Focusing when taking pictures - or I might describe it as allowing the world to speak to you and for some of it to come into focus. The choice of what to rest attention and to focus on (as in the photographic meaning) is a kind of sensing in itself. What wants to be seen here? What wants to show itself?

And a similar process continues...

When I get home and look more fully at what I have taken (I prefer to leave it a few days like I had to with film) a whole other process happens. First I delete the ones that are technically not right in some way - for me. Then I sit with each one and enquire... does this image, or might this image, have a quality of aliveness in some way? If it does I keep it, if not then it gets deleted. There are some that I am not sure about yet and they get to stay also. With the ones that really seem alive, I might edit them a little, to enhance some aspect or to crop so they look just right.

All this is very much 'work in progress' and even more so is what happens next: how they get shared. Some go on my website and social media, some might get printed and I am considering exhibiting locally. For me this is part of the process, I don't just want a hard drive full of images that no-one looks at; these images want to be seen.

You don't need loads of expensive equipment to do any of this. It is true that certain cameras can bring creative possibilities that are simply impossible in others... but any camera can do the above. Some of my best pictures are taken with a mobile phone. Any camera can capture something you love and let the world speak to you...

Manju spent 12 years practicing and teaching awareness and meditation skills to groups and individuals in a Buddhist context. He trained with Ann Weiser Cornell in "Inner Relationship Focusing" in the USA and with Peter Afford in the UK and has been a certified Focusing practitioner and teacher with the British Focusing Association (BFA) and the International Focusing Institute (IFA) since 2005. He is a BFA mentor and IFA Coordinator, offering training for Focusing practitioners and teachers. Manju is also qualified in Somatic Experiencing (SE), a short-term, body-based approach to healing and easing the effects of trauma.

Manju's interest in photography began at art school in the 1980's and was re-kindled in 2011 by the birth of his son.

*www.livingfocusing.co.uk
www.transiencephotography.co.uk*