

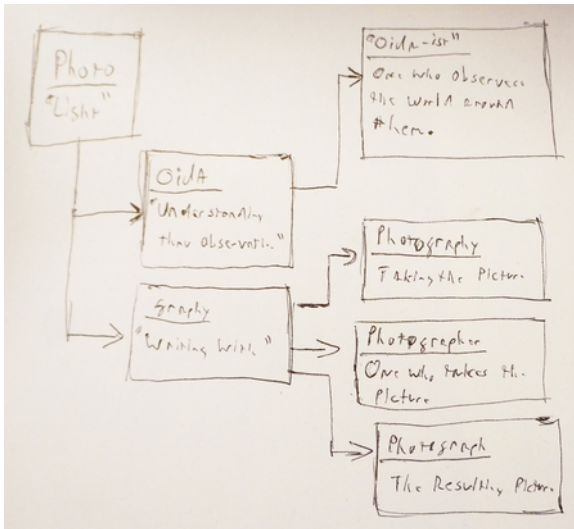
Oida or Graph

by Malcolm McElvaney

04/05/2022 - Photography describes the process that produces an image, so writing with light as it is translated to is very appropriate as the umbrella term we photographers labor under. It is an art form that has changed along with the gear used and adopted at the time from the earliest intensive wet plate process to the digital age and the cell phone camera; that is, the amount of technical skill needed is lessened to achieve a similar result. At least not as of the time I'm writing this the human touch isn't something a table of numbers, programmed response, or even AI can replace yet. That initial spark of inspiration is much harder to define and is unique to each photographer. The degree we let our tools aid us in the creation of the final image is a personal choice as well, I like more creative control over my vision of the scene personally.

Photographer as a term is equally as valid to describe the individual taking an image; however, as the individual with as little to as much control of the camera capturing that scene I'm still an outsider in that feed back between the lens and medium to record that projected light. It is here that I think a term in the same spirit of the root origins could be coined to separate the person from the more technical gear itself. Oida apparently translates to understand something through observation and it is our observation of the world around us either consciously or not that we learn to predict or appreciate its greater complexities. That skill of observing can apply equally to the scene being studied or to the post processing being applied later on. I only know what a quick search yielded when it comes to languages so while photo-oida (ist?) doesn't make much sense somehow it does express a distinct difference between the camera writing the scene for us and we as the artist having that creative control to either yield to the camera's decisions or assert ourselves as fully as possible.

“Photo-oidaist” could be a starting point to see the photographer as an artist and the creative center of the process that produces an image that when seen out of the full context might represent something closer to the reality we saw, augmented to match a vision of the scene, or edited so much it becomes fiction as to not exist at all. The image will take on a life of its own to be viewed and interpreted as the viewer sees fit, the next image will have that same disconnect in the end so the cycle is never ending. That context once lost makes no difference to most viewers but as photographers we can potentially see the gear and how the image was produced as a part of the argument for or against aspects of an evolving art form. I have my preferences and perhaps an aversion or two to aspects of photography I could work on myself; however, it is still the individual that is expressed even if the same built in decisions of the same make and model is present should that route be taken.



04/07/2022 – Maybe this illustration can help show the idea more visually, as this is how I tend to work out such ideas. As the artist I have no limits on where that vision in my head can go; in reality though, being the photographer I work through the camera to help achieve anything at all. The process goes beyond that initial shutter button being pressed into the post processing but this is definitely something unique to each artist / photographer. I think it is here that understanding by observation applies not only to the scene but also to the camera and tools being used because be it the light we observe and appreciate (even if not known why) or the abilities of the camera to influence that recorded light both play a role in creating a photograph.

Why did I become a photographer? Is this something we choose or something that chooses us? I could begin to try to answer these for myself but I suppose that is why I have a website to work that answer out on. The desire to pursue this hobby as far as I have is a requirement in many ways as that will drive the time put into practice and the overall curiosity to be as random as I am; if the goal is to teach photography to others, shouldn't the seed of this pursuit be present for a more successful result. It is perhaps in the untapped dream to somehow teach others about my art form that I even began to explore beyond my perception of photography and look at the complex nature of passing on something so personal and layered upon itself. Beginning one step removed to see yourself as an observer of the world around you and wanting to understand more about it may help, should that form of expression be photography then maybe I have a chance to work on that dream.

In this age of instant distractions and ability to get lost in the virtual of the internet so easily, something like photography pulls me back to the world around me for a while at least. While the technical side of photography is part of my process it is the meditative quality of getting pulled into the world I'm observing and "seeing" what I will attempt to capture once found. The camera's point of view is not fixed so as I attempt to go lower or higher in the point of view taken so do I and it is an opportunity to see the world from another angle. Whether I'm taking the camera along with me or it takes me along with it I can not say some days but we are definitely one and the same somehow. Find your passion, pursue it, and overthink it and maybe you will write a piece like this as well, the key is to enjoy the journey that took you there.