

Spain & France

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In March 2011 I traveled to Spain & France with my girlfriend Claire. We drove twelve hundred miles and stayed in six cities. During the trip I took over three thousand photographs with my Canon 30D and two lenses. I chose to produce a short film in which I displayed every photo from the trip in a rapid progression, at a rate of 13 photos per second. The film is just under 4 minutes long and features all 3147 photos I captured. Through this writing I will explain my methodology for capturing the trip and editing the video; talk about the places we visited and what I saw; and discuss the impact the trip had on our relationship.

The Process

I own some fairly advanced photography equipment but my strategy for shooting photos on this trip was painfully simple; I set out to take as many photos as I could. I shot anything and everything I saw that I found interesting. My philosophy behind this lies rooted in the shifts photography has made alongside the advent of digital technology. With modern cameras, and large format memory cards, it has become possible to shoot as many photos as you want while on a trip. I found myself pondering the potential impossibility of taking three thousand photographs on a week long trip had I tried to do it in 1970. With traditional film cameras this would not have been practical in any sense. Armed with that realization I wanted to celebrate my ability to shoot everything I saw, so I did. I saw much of the trip through the lens of my

camera. This led to me examining things in the streets in the biased context of what would make for a good photo. In this way, my ardent method of photographing the trip asserted itself as a shaping force on how we experienced these countries.

While editing the film I developed my own process and utilized a number of software packages to achieve a result I was satisfied with. This first step was organizing all the images in a uniform fashion. I imported all the shots from the camera into a program called Adobe Lightroom, which is designed to store libraries of digital images. When I had every photo in place I backed up the entire collection to an external hard drive to ensure I would not lose anything from the original collection and then got to work. I began by exporting every photograph with the same settings. I resized them to 1280 x 853, which was my intended resolution for the final video. My rationale behind choosing this size is that 1280 Pixels is the width of a 720P frame. The photos are a different aspect ratio than 720P (which explains the vertical pixel count being 853 rather than 720) but I felt by going with the same width, I was achieving a standardized resolution that would play nicely on a wide array of devices (iPhones, iPads, Televisions, Laptops). After exporting all the photos, I grouped them into a JPEG image sequence in Adobe After Effects, which is a video editing program, and then rendered them into a video file tweaking the settings until I got a smooth video track I was satisfied with. These renderings took anywhere between 20 minutes and one hour and I rendered it out 10 or 15 times before I was content with the result. Once I had the settings for a smooth render figured out, I added the music, title and credit graphics and rendered everything at once into a singular .mov file. What resulted was the finished film, which I subsequently uploaded to Vimeo and Youtube.

To present my work, I decided to embed it in a page I created on my website. Additionally, I augmented the page with a title slide depicting some statistics regarding the trip, as well as an interactive Google map within which users can explore the route we followed, a link to a Facebook photo album of my favorite shots from the trip, and a link to download the document you are currently reading.

The Trip

During the trip we traveled through many small towns and large cities, stopping to stay in six different locations. We had nights in Madrid, Valencia, Barcelona, Toulouse, San Sebastien, and Bilbao. Other cities we stopped in along the way were Narbonne, Carcassone, Biarritz and Burgos. Traveling through Spain was excellent, and gave us both the chance to practice our Spanish. We are both conversational in the language and it was a good bonding experience to practice conversing with the locals and with each other. As we traveled into France, Claire was able to speak fluently with the local population as she grew up visiting family in the country and lived in Paris for five years while attending an undergraduate institution. She was able to teach me some basic French vocabulary, which I enjoyed.

In considering what I saw on the trip, I would classify my experience into three cardinal categories...

I saw transit infrastructure.

The trip involved a substantial amount of highway travel between cities and utilization of mass transit systems within each city.

I saw food.

Our trip was packed with delicious meals. Many of the photographs I shot were of food

because we stayed in hostels, which all had kitchens. Claire enjoys cooking, so this was a cheap and effective method of dining while on the trip.

I saw Claire.

With the exception of one night in Toulouse, when we stayed with relatives of Claire's, we were traveling with each other alone for company. Invariably, she became the focus of many of my photographs, and we shared a lot of experience on the trip.

In the short film, every photo is displayed for the same amount of time. I feel this leads to the possibility of multiple interpretations by the audience. Some people could look at it and see a story about driving in Europe; others could see it as a chronology of the different foods we experienced in Spain and France; yet again others could see it as a romantic piece about the nature of our relationship. The multiple ostensible interpretations leads to the reduction of bias within the piece. Additionally, I feel the page I created on my website provides the viewer with a great deal of context and decreases the amount of bias present within the representation by allowing the viewer to freely explore many facets of the trip.

As I mentioned before, my technical methodology of capturing the experience exercised its hand in impacting our trip. Vice versa, in terms of the trip's impact on us and our relationship, nearly everything was positive. Spending eight days together abroad was a new experience for us, and some what of a test for our relationship, but everything worked out wonderfully. She and I returned to the United States with a strengthened relationship, and will forever remember our shared experience.