Victorian Ghost Photography

Objectives

1. Have some fun

2. Get creative

Single exposure (no photoshop).
How were these created?

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Photograph: Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Made popular by the Victorians and Edwardians. Especially those interested in supporting seances, mediums and the afterlife. But how were these images created? Remember this is in the age of plate glass photography, where the exposed image had to be developed within 15 minutes.

What about this one?

What about this image? Why is the ghost more visible "solid" on the right than the left?

Note: If the exposure is right the sensor will not capture a moving subject (no motion blur). The subjects you want to be solid should be stationary for the entire exposure and the ghost must be stationary for a significant period of time, but move out of the scene at some point. IMPORTANT: No need to run, just move smoothly out of the scene.
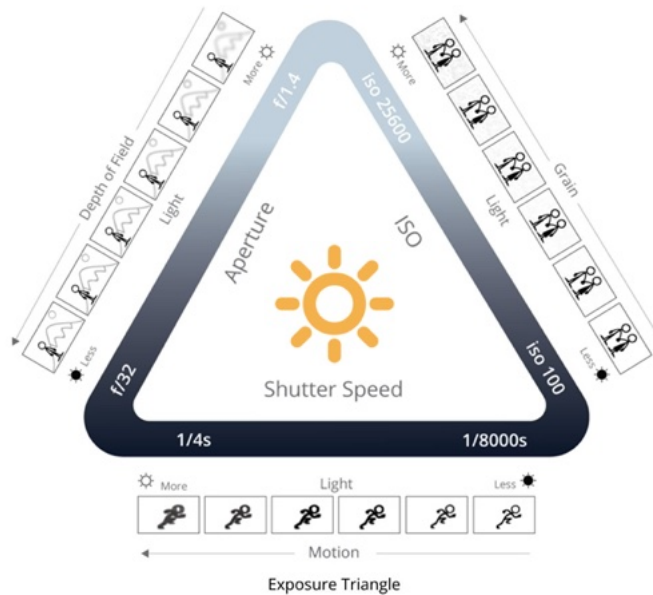
As an analogy of the exposure triangle I think of collecting water in a bucket. The amount of water I need for my purpose is the "correct exposure" and is dictated by the size of bucket (ISO), the width of the pipe (aperture) and how long I need to open the tap for (shutter speed). The pressure of water in the system is equivalent to the amount of light available. If the water pressure is low (dark), it will take longer to fill a larger bucket (or I could get a smaller bucket - increase the ISO). If the water pressure is high (light) I will have to open the tap (shutter) for a very short amount of time or install a narrower pipe.

As we are fixing time and the environment is relatively light, I suggest setting your cameras to their lowest ISO (my Smartphone and camera will both go down to ISO 50) and then adjusting aperture to get the right exposure (probably f/16 - f/32).

Some modern examples

Lin and Jirsa https://www.linandjirsa.com/
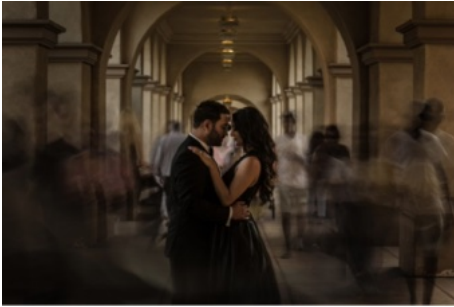
Here are some modern examples. Note how "The Ghost" varies in solidity relative to the light falling on the subject from the lamp.

Adding light(s)

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Here are a couple of examples incorporating some form of flash. In the first it is still a relatively low amount of light aimed at the model's torso, casting light from head to her thighs. In the second image the effect is achieved through either a strobe or by triggering a flash at several stages whilst the shutter is open. Note the model's head is captured more than once.

Smartphone challenge
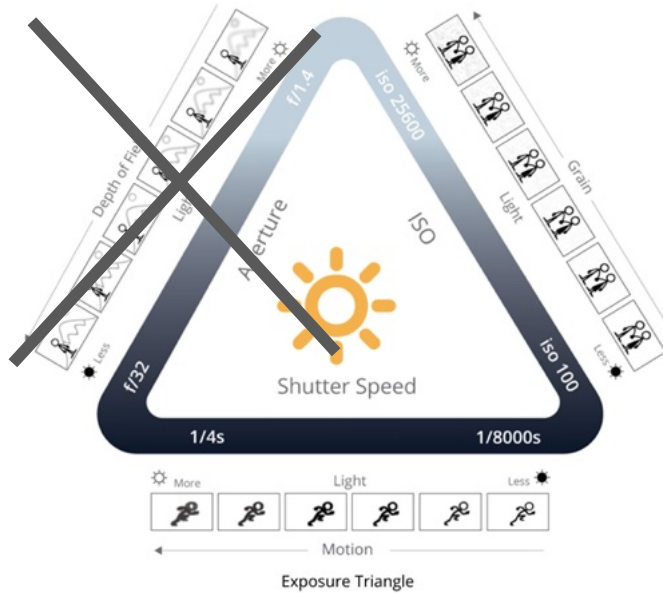
With a Smartphone you can take manual control of your camera, but you cannot adjust your aperture. You may need to adjust the amount of available light. This can be done with the use of sunglasses, shaded glass or ND filters (or moving to a darker room).

How to take control of Shutter speed on a Smartphone

On Android default Camera app switch to "Pro" Mode in Camera

On iPhone default Camera app switch to Live Mode (concentric circles). Having taken image look at image in Photos, tap the "live" dropdown and tap "Long exposure".

Or use a third party Camera App (e.g. ProCamera, ProShot, Lightroom Camera)

Technical Stuff

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Slow your shutter speed (aiming between 5 - 20 seconds) - Why not longer?

Tripod (or a means of ensuring the camera doesn't move through the exposure)

Lower ISO - At least ISO 100, but lower if available.

Reduce aperture size (f/16 f/22) - Not on Smartphone (fixed aperture)

Optional extras

Remote camera trigger (Can use timer delay).
- Most camera manufacturers provide Smartphone apps that allow you to take control of your camera via your Smartphone.
- On your Smartphone you can use headphones with a volume control or set timer.

Neutral Density (ND) filter (Can be held over a Smartphone lens). Also allows larger apertures on other cameras.

Why should the shutter speed exceed 20 seconds? It is impossible for the non-ghost subject to stay still (remember the Victorian dead images). The longer the exposure the more blurred the sitter will be.

For those at home

For those at home, you can still take part. Here are some of my examples. IMPORTANT: If you decide to use some object in front of your face, start with the object in front of your face and then move it away. Bringing an object towards your face my result in unintended consequences.

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Now it's your turn

In the hall - groups of two or more. Give a couple of examples to Howard.

At home - get creative: self-portraits; use props (Dolls, stuffed toys). Send 1 or 2 of your results to Howard (worthingcc.competitions@gmail.com)

Take a break (Incl. Coffee or Tea) when you want.

Fun, but can it be used seriously?

ALEXEY TITARENKO
"City of Shadows"

VASILEOSTROVSKAYA METRO STATION, 1992 (CROWD 1)

CROWD TRYING TO ENTER VASSILEOSTROVSKAYA METRO STATION
DURING THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION, 1992

Alexey Titarenko took these images on film, during the collapse of the Soviet Union. He had to develop them before knowing whether he got his exposure correct for his vision. Often having to return weeks later to try again. There are definite advantages to digital.

George Bananchine, New York City Ballet

Ernst Haas was a mid-20th Century photographer famous for his Street photography, but he was also interested in experimenting with his photography. Some of his most famous images were of Bullfighters were the tunic, cape and bull are all blurry. This image is of the Choreographer George Balanchine. Ernst Haas has deliberately used a slow shutter speed to capture the dancers as "ghosts".

Nadav Kander

Peter Gabriel

Nadav Kander is a modern photographer. This portrait of Peter Gabriel is most likely created by using front curtain and rear curtain flashes and having Peter Gabriel move his arms between flashes.