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# Minus 2/3 – The Invisible Flash: Crafting Light For Photographers In The Field



## Synopsis

Gerd Ludwig, a National Geographic veteran known for his powerful photo essays, is one of the leading documentary photographers of our time. As a photographer focusing on diverse cultural and environmental stories, Ludwig is often confronted with a wide range of low-light situations—from classic street photography to portraiture, from scenes in bustling night clubs to intimate moments in churches—many of which require additional lighting that must be created quickly, effectively, and discreetly. More than 20 years ago, Ludwig began incorporating small handheld flashes into his photography with the aim of creating an evenly balanced look in the final photograph. These small flashes also alleviated the burden of carrying heavy equipment, allowing him to be flexible and inconspicuous when moving around in the field. Over the years, he has refined his use of small flash to hone his technique even further. His use of flash appears so subtle in the final image that it is easily mistaken for natural light—an invisible flash. Additionally, in his fine-art and documentary work in interior or night settings, Ludwig recently began making long exposures by combining a camera on a tripod with a series of flashes fired from a single hand-held unit. In the past, Ludwig has discussed his tricks of the trade only in lectures and workshops. Now, in *Minus 2/3: The Invisible Flash: Crafting Light for Photographers in Field*, Ludwig takes us behind the scenes of many of his most iconic images to share his approach to lighting with small flash. Equal parts inspiration and education, *Minus 2/3* is straightforward and succinct, yet filled with numerous takeaways from one of today's leading photographers. Packed with beautiful, effective, and moving images, *Minus 2/3* offers ideas, insight, and inspiration for photographers looking to subtly incorporate flash into their work. Please note: Some images featured in this book may be considered unsettling for some sensitive readers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Very disappointing book. Rocky nook is known for publishing great photography books so I didn't hesitate to order this one. I was expecting something along the lines of Hot Shoe Diaries or Creative Flash Photography but what I got was a printed portfolio that includes a single sentence describing the use of flash. A single sentence which sits in the middle of an empty page. There is no narrative quality to the book. There is no story telling or teaching going on in this book. The whole point of the book. According to the author's description, was to shine a light on the particular teachings of this photographer. That is not what this book does at all. The book doesn't even attempt to walk you through the author's admittedly genius use of flash. Every other page is completely blank except for the one or two sentence description I previously mentioned. Huge disappointment.

I've long been a fan of Gerd Ludwig's photography. I have every issue of his Geographic assignments. Along with David Alan Harvey, William Albert Allard and Joe McNally, Gerd is an inspiration. Unlike the other photographers, precious little is on the internet and YouTube featuring Gerd's techniques. Given that, his book is a phenomenal instructive work and long overdue. Not only to you get a nice collection of some of his iconic photographs, but also "how he did it" technique. DO NOT hesitate in adding this to your photo-book collection. The only suggestion would be perhaps some photos of his gear and how he attaches his color filters to his strobes. This is only a minor suggestion. Five Stars all the way.

Can't say enough good things about this book! I really learned a lot. I wish he'd gone into more of his camera settings but the book was about flash - so, there ya go. If I ever have the chance to take a workshop from the author I definitely will! He knows his stuff!

Gerd knows how to do it all and shares with others. Thanks, Gerd!

I can't believe I bought this expensive book. I would have expected some explanations of how to use the Speedlites. I am familiar with them and give classes but hoped to learn something new. All I got pictures and a few symbols underneath. If you want to see great pictures taken with Speedlite go ahead and buy it. If you would like to know a little bit more about it. The how to? Don't buy it in my opinion.

This is a lovely portfolio of the images of a great National Geographic photographer tied together by use of a common tool, small electronic flashes. It can also serve as a supplementary instruction manual for photographers interested in exploiting such flashes. The common theme in these photographs is the use of through-the-lens flash at a reduced power to fill in the dark spots in a photograph. I suspect that most of these images were originally organized in National Geographic to tell single stories, like the aftermath of the meltdown of the Chernobyl reactor or the operation of food trucks in Los Angeles. Yet the photographs seem to be deliberately presented in random order with minimal commentary as to the subject matter to force us to confront the individual image. The layout of the book presents a full page photograph on the left side of the gutter with a brief caption on the right, followed by an equally brief discussion of the use of the flash in the photograph (like "my assistant pointed a dialed down flash toward [the subject's] face, which opened up his features..."). At the bottom of the page are a series of symbols that tell the reader if the flash was aimed directly or bounced, the color of a gel used, the power setting and so forth. Ludwig grabbed my attention with the very first photograph, an image of Vladimir Putin, in the midst of a crowd of guests and bodyguards at a reception. Putin's face has a slightly brighter tonality than others, and unlike the others stares directly at the camera with a look of disdain. Even though he appears to be shorter than any of the other people in the frame, it is obvious that this is the center of power in the room. Selecting another image at random, there is the picture of the backs of a male and female-tattooed swimmer couple in bathing suits at Wannsee, a beach on the river in Berlin. The man's right arm is casually draped around the back of the woman with his hand on her right hip. The two figures have been illuminated with a flash on a low setting, yet they are brighter than the beach we see beyond them. I'm not certain what story is told here, but the photograph is arresting. In other scenes, Ludwig photographs a distant illuminated building at night, but has painted the foreground with just enough light so that we can distinguish, say, bushes, but not really see the individual

leaves. This illumination by flash (or strobe, as the photographer often calls it) is so subtle that we barely notice the foreground, and yet it contributes to the sense of wildness of the place. One might think that a documentary photographer would try to illuminate a subject evenly so that the light would appear something like the way our eyes see, although, because the extended range of the eye is greater than any photographic image, that is extremely difficult. However, Ludwig carries things a step further by shining a spotlight where he wants to direct attention, although a barely noticeable one. A similar effect can be achieved in post processing, but never one that blends so neatly with the rest of the image. Those looking for instruction in the use of flash had better understand how such equipment works and how it can be used, to derive benefit from Ludwig's technique. Then they will be able to understand how to shine a spotlight to reveal their vision, without really seeming to do so. Note: The publisher provided me with a review copy of this book at no charge

"Minus Two Thirds" presents some of Gerd Ludwig's most iconic images from his decades as a prominent documentary photographer, both from his assignment work for "National Geographic" and from personal projects, with a focus on his technical practices as opposed to story content. He shares brief captions explaining stories behind the images, but they are not sequenced into any kind of narrative or chronologically. Instead, through a unique system of icons, he shares the technical details behind how each image was achieved, demystifying his subtle and inventive use of off-camera flash. If you are looking for a step by step guide of how to use a flash, read the manual for your equipment. This book assumes photographers reading it have an understanding of how their gear functions, and they are looking for inspiration in order to up their game both technically and visually. Ludwig shows the myriad of ways that he uses small flashes to enhance the final image, and invites readers to think outside the box and be equally inventive in their own technique. Plus, even non-photographers can enjoy this collection of stunning imagery.

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