

ABSTRACT AND INTRODUCTION

In the late 1930's, Donald W. Norwood introduced a new principle of incident light photographic exposure metering in which a translucent hemispherical shell (a "dome") collects the ambient light incident on the scene for measurement by a photoelectric cell. It was found that exposure meters following this principle could, with a single measurement, consistently develop an exposure recommendation that would be highly appropriate over a range of multi-source lighting setups, especially those of interest in cinematography and portrait photography.

Today, the preponderance of exposure meters exploit Norwood's principle in their basic configuration for incident light exposure metering..

But it is not at all obvious, even after considerable study, just how and why meters following Norwood's principle give this long-acclaimed performance. In this article, we will look "under the dome" and see just what is going on.

Background is given in various pertinent aspects of the topic of exposure metering. Appendixes discuss in detail various pivotal technical issues.

1 EXPOSURE METERING

1.1 The concept

In exposure metering, we use a special instrument which determines either the average luminance of the scene to be photographed or the illuminance of the illumination on the scene, and from that (along with the known or assumed sensitivity of the film or digital sensor system in use) provides us with a *photographic exposure recommendation* (PER). By that we mean a continuum of combinations of exposure time (shutter speed) and aperture (as an f-number) that would all produce a certain photometric impact on the film or sensor. Our aspiration is that by using that exposure recommendation for our "shot" we will attain the desired *exposure objective*.

1.2 The exposure objective

What do we mean by *exposure objective*? The "scene" being photographed, from an exposure standpoint (and let's assume a "monochrome" camera) presents to the camera as a mosaic of varying *luminance*, with a certain overall range. The lens transforms this into a mosaic of *illuminance* upon the film or sensor.

We would like the range of illuminance in that mosaic to be "planted" so that, in combination with some exposure time (shutter speed), the resulting range of *photometric exposure*¹ will fall in an appropriate place in the acceptable range of photometric exposure of the film or sensor.

But what is "appropriate"? There are several strategies we might adopt. Three commonly-chosen ones are:

- A. Consistent average photometric exposure. Here we seek the average photometric exposure to be some established fraction of the saturation photometric exposure. This is the approach taken by basic "reflected light" exposure metering, which works from the average luminance over an field of view that ideally is the same as the field of view of the actual shot. It is not so much the result of a desirable "objective" but more of convenience in execution.
- B. "Expose to the right"². Here we seek to have the "brightest" spots in the scene receive a photometric exposure that is "close to saturation"—that is, close to the photometric exposure above which changes in photometric exposure do not result in very much change in the response. Attaining this generally depends on metering of the luminance of a spot on the "lightest" area of the scene.
- C. "Reflectance-based"³. Here we seek to map the portions of the scene having different reflectances approximately onto proportional values of photometric exposure (on a scale that runs to 100% reflectance at the "saturation" photometric exposure).

¹ *Photometric exposure* is the phenomenon to which the film or sensor responds, the product of the illuminance on the film or sensor and the exposure time.

² So called because "to the right" is the usual direction of increase in photometric exposure, exposure result, and such in various charts, histogram displays, and so forth.

³ This very much follows the underlying concept of the Zone System, a doctrine of exposure planning devised and promoted by Ansel Adams and others.

Attaining this generally depends on measuring the illuminance on the scene ("incident light" metering).

A common parable for an important disadvantage of A is that, if we achieve it, the image of a "black cat on an coal pile" (nothing else in the scene) and the image of a "white cat on a snowdrift" will both look like a "gray cat on an ash pile."

An advantage of B is that the range of the film or sensor is best exploited with regard to such performance properties as dynamic range and noise performance. A common parable for an important disadvantage of B is that, if we achieve it, the image of a "gray cat on an ash pile" (nothing else in the scene) will look like a "white cat on a snowdrift".

An advantage of C is that, following the parable above, the images will reveal the various objects (cats, what the cats sit on) as we expect to see them. Stuff we know to be "gray" will in the image look "gray", regardless of the overall scene content; stuff we know to be "white" will look "white", and stuff we know to be "black" will look "black".

1.3 Reflected-light exposure metering

The earliest approach to exposure metering, still widely-used, is *reflected-light metering*. Here our instrument measures the average luminance of the scene (over a certain field of view, which may or may not closely conform to the field of view of the camera as it will be used to photograph the scene). We also feed into the meter an *exposure index*⁴, which in basic practice today would be the advertised *ISO speed* of the film or digital sensor system. The instrument then gives us an *exposure recommendation* (defined earlier).

If we actually follow that recommendation in setting the camera for our shot, the result will be that the *average* photometric exposure on the film or digital sensor will be a fixed value (with reference to the sensitivity of the film or sensor).

This achieves exposure objective A, not really a desirable one. Then why do we use this metering technique? Because it is easy to do.

⁴ The term "exposure index" intimates a film speed value, not necessarily the rated film speed, used as an input to an exposure meter. It may be chosen as different from the rated film speed to cause an intentional offset to the *exposure recommendation* issued by the meter. I use this label for the input to the meter rather than "film speed" since there is no guarantee that the photographer will enter the actual rated film speed (if only for the reason discussed just above).

1.4 Incident light exposure metering

Here our instrument determines what we for the moment will describe as the *illuminance* of the light that is incident on the scene. We also feed into the meter an *exposure index*, discussed above. The instrument then gives us an exposure recommendation.

Ideally, if we actually follow that recommendation in setting the camera for our shot, we will attain exposure objective C. In the image, for each scene element, the relative luminance of the image will be that proportion of the maximum recordable luminance that is the reflectance of the scene element.

But in fact, if the illumination of the subject does not come uniformly from all directions, this tidy result will only be achieved if all surfaces of interest in the scene have the same orientation (are all parallel to a certain plane), and the incident illuminance is measured with respect to that plane.

That is hardly the case in most photography and cinematography. For a human subject, a small region in the center of the forehead is in a quite different plane than a certain small region on one cheek.

1.5 A further complication

A further complication is that often we do not really want to attain Objective C. A powerful example of why is if we photograph a spherical object of uniform surface reflectance (perhaps a decorative "matte finish" gray stone ball). If we perfectly attain objective C, the result will be as seen in figure 1.

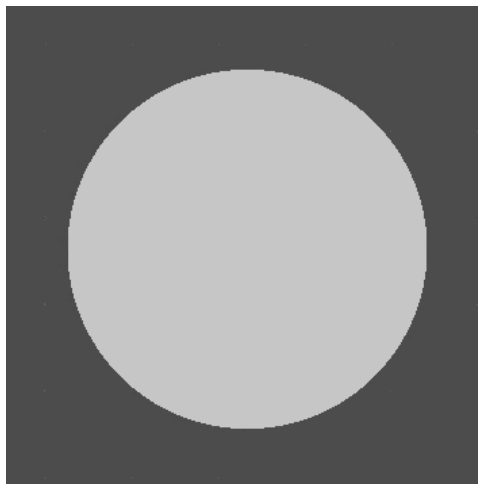


Figure 1. Sphere under uniform omnidirectional illumination

Here the "implied relative luminance" of the image of the sphere would ideally be (as part of objective C) the same as the reflectance of the sphere itself—uniform for the entire sphere (at least the part the camera can see).

But, sadly, that doesn't look so much like a sphere. We might expect a photo of a sphere to look like one of the images in figure 2 (taken under various illumination setups).

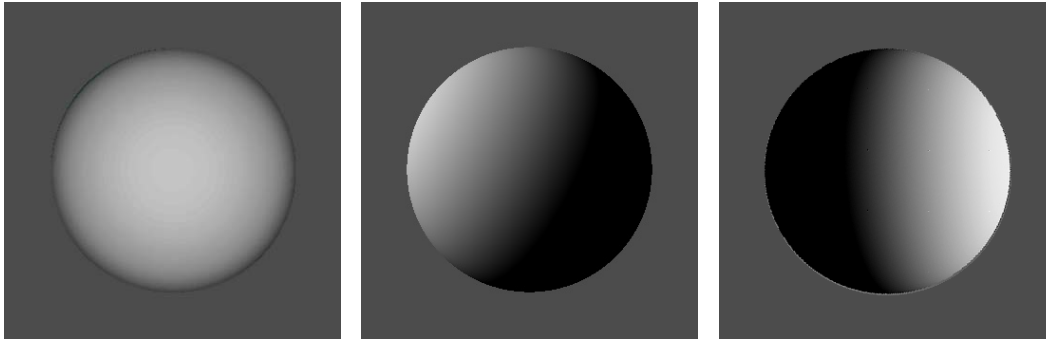


Figure 2 a, b, c. Sphere photographed under various illumination setups

And to attain any of these, we would have to use some scheme of illumination other than "uniformly omnidirectional".

Now, to get a little ahead of the story, let's imagine three scenarios in which the photographer uses one of the three lighting plans represented in these images. Now for each one, what would be the "ideal" exposure result? If we knew that, then we could think in terms of some metering technique that would lead us to the photographic exposure settings (combination of aperture and shutter speed) that would give us that exposure result.

Well, our objective can't be the tidy one expressed under C, above. That objective would be attained with an image that looks like that in figure 1, and we decided that wouldn't be very desirable.

And in fact, there is no "tidy, automatic" way to conclude what exposure result would be "ideal" for one of our sphere photos—that would be a matter of the artistic judgment of the photographer. For example, maybe some of the ones in figure 3 would be "better" than the corresponding ones in figure 2. Or maybe not.

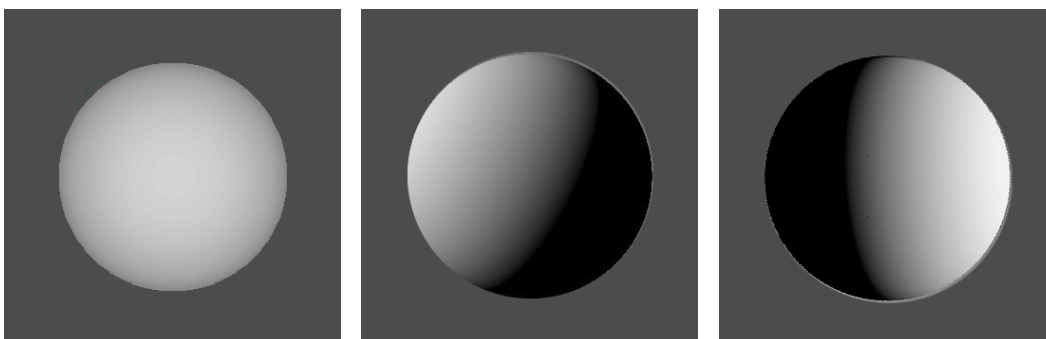


Figure 3 a, b, c. With a greater exposure

Hold that thought.

1.6 Cinema/portrait lighting technique

Typically in close-up cinematography and in portrait photography, as with the sphere in our example, we rarely want an image resulting from the use of uniform omnidirectional lighting. Rather, we will generally want to use a more sophisticated lighting technique that will "sculpt" the features of the subject.

Very often, in this situation, the subject of the shot is illuminated by two light sources, under the so-called "key-fill" technique. The *key light* is typically directed to the subject from the side. It serves to create shadows that "sculpt" the face. The *fill light* is often (but certainly not always) directed to the subject from near the camera position. Its job can be looked at as "diluting" the shadowing from the key light to retain just the degree of sculpting desired by the cinematographer or photographer.

Figure 4 shows an example of relatively severe "sculpting" on the model's face and a lesser sculpting on her torso.



Figure 4. Sculpting

The result of course departs dramatically from the premise of Objective C, which is that in the final image, the illuminance of each element of the image is proportional to the reflectance of that element. With the lighting technique I mention above, the left cheek of our subject (on our right) may have a high reflectance, but we intentionally light the subject so the left cheek is "in shadow", and is thus given a low luminance in the image.

What should be our objective for the "distribution" of photometric exposure over the image in such a case? As with our little exercise in

photographing the stone sphere, there is no simple answer. (This is a dilemma we will encounter repeatedly in this area of study.)

Thus clearly we cannot devise an single exposure metering technique that will, on a theoretical basis, deliver the "ideal result", since we can't even define what that would be.

1.7 Duplex metering

Nevertheless, faced with this conundrum, over the years cinematographers (and portrait photographers) found, empirically, that an exposure result in the image that they considered "desirable" could usually be attained by what came to be called the "duplex" technique of incident light exposure metering.

Here, an incident light exposure meter is used to take separate readings while its receptor faced the two principal light sources. The average of the two meter readings is used as the input to the exposure calculator on the meter to develop the exposure recommendation.

Is there some theoretical model that can suggest why this works in what is often considered a "desirable" way? No.

2 THE NORWOOD PRINCIPLE

2.1 Donald W. Norwood

Donald W. Norwood had been a photographer in the US Army Air Corps in the period after World War I, and had in fact during that service devised some improvements in photographic processing. After he left the service, it seems as if his attention was directed to cinematography (although it does not seem that he actually practiced that craft professionally).

2.2 Incident light exposure metering in the mid-1930s

In the mid-1930s, incident light metering had become common in cinematography, as is was seen as leading to the "most consistent" results over a range of scenes. Typically, when multiple source lighting (for example, key-fill lighting) was used, the "duplex" metering technique (see section 1.7) was used, requiring two or more measurements to be used to prepare for each shot, a burdensome matter where "time was money".

2.3 Norwood's vision

Don Norwood, pondering this inconvenient situation, had a vision of a scheme by which a single measurement would directly give an "appropriate" exposure recommendation over a range of key-fill lighting setups.

The scheme revolved around a measuring instrument in which the photosensitive element had the form of a hemisphere (as contrasted to the "flat" photosensitive element typically used theretofore in incident light exposure meters). He later realized that the same behavior could be attained at less manufacturing cost by using a translucent hemispherical "light collector" [my teem] (a "dome") mounted over a conventional flat photosensitive element.

Norwood received a patent on this system in 1940.

2.4 A great success, to this day

Work done with prototypes of exposure meters following Norwood's principle seemingly gave highly satisfactory results, and soon commercial meters (made under Norwood's patent) were "all the rage" among cinematographers.



Figure 5. Norwood Director exposure meter ("Model A")

In figure 5, we see the first "Norwood Director" exposure meter, made, under Norwood's patent, starting in 1947. (The design work had started in 1941, but the company became devoted to the war effort, which delayed the completion and release of this product.) This product came to be called, by meter aficionados, the "Norwood Director Model A", even though that model designation was never used by the manufacturer.

We can hardly miss the "dome" (actually about 1.5 inch in diameter).

A short while later, a second manufacturer was also licensed under Norwood's patent, and developed the meter we see in Figure 6 (introduced in 1948). It also carried the name "Norwood Director", and was identified as "Model B" out of respect for its progenitor, often

called the "Model A" (even though that was made by a different company and that designation was never official).





Figure 8. Sekonic Model L-398A exposure meter

From the collection of Carla and Doug Kerr
Photo by Douglas A. Kerr

Sadly, this is likely the last of the “direct descendants” of Norwood’s original meter. But the dome lives on.

3 BUT HOW DO IT KNOW?

3.1 A photometric model?

Understandably, upon the emergence of the Norwood-type meter, engineers and scientists interested in this area were anxious to recognize a model, based on known principles of photography and photometry, that would explain how and why a “Norwood” meter could consistently yield exposure recommendations that were felt to be “highly appropriate” over a range of lighting situations.

This quest for insight was greatly burdened by the fact that we had no objective “metric” by which we could judge the “appropriateness” of the exposure result in an image, and thus objectively score how “appropriate” was the recommendation of the exposure meter.

3.2 No real help from Norwood

Those seeking to develop such a model got little help from Norwood, who for many years did not offer any technically-meaningful “rationale” for the working of his system. (He later suggested that this reticence was because the protection of his principle by patents was not yet complete.)

In fact, the only early insight into the rationale comes from this introductory passage in Norton’s definitive patent on his system, issued in September, 1940:

"One of the particular objects of the invention is to provide an exposure meter which is substantially uniformly responsive to light incident upon the photographic subject from practically all directions which would result in the reflection of light to the camera or other photographic register."

Now this sounds nice, but is not too helpful in understanding why this should lead to the useful performance we associate with Norwood-principle meters. And in fact (as we will see later) it is not even true. The theoretical response of a hemispherical "receptor" is not uniform from all directions of interest, but rather declines with increasing angle of arrival of the light, following a mathematical curve known as the *cardioid*. The derivation of this is given in Appendix B.

But it certainly possible that early in his work, Norton assumed that the response of a hemispherical receptor meter would be uniform from all directions (at least all directions of interest). Later, in a seminal paper (discussed at length in Appendix A), we find him expressing a different (but still not quite correct) view of the expected response of a hemispherical receptor.

3.3 An elaboration of that outlook

Not too long after the introduction of the Norwood system meter, Norwood pointed out that the hemispherical light receptor was an approximate proxy for the human head—that is, the part of it that can be seen from the camera. If we follow the photometric trail (based on the incorrect notion of uniform sensitivity of a hemispherical-receptor meter for all angles of arrival), that means that the meter reading would indicate the average⁵ illuminance on the part of the subject visible to the camera.

This notion was elaborated upon in a paper by Norwood published before the Society of Motion Picture in 1941 ("Negative Exposure Control", *J SMPE 1941, 36:389-402*), which (among other things) was intended to give a rationale for the working of the hemispherical receptor incident light exposure meter

But seductive as this model sounds, it still leaves us with the question, "Why would an exposure based on the average illuminance on the part of the subject visible to the camera lead to an 'appropriate' exposure result (whatever that is) for a range of lighting setups?"

3.4 Something more "scientific"

In 1950, perhaps in response to continuing pressure from the community for a "scientific" explanation of his principle, Don Norwood

⁵ Average by surface area, to be precise.

published a paper before the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers ("Light Measurement for Exposure Control", *J SMPTE* 1950, 54:585-602) that gave a helpful outlook into that mystery, not through an abstract mathematical model but rather through analysis of empirical observation in a test program. The presentation has a number of (to me disappointing) lapses of rigor (perhaps even of candor), but fortunately these do not invalidate the practical conclusion.

I discuss (and critique) this paper in some detail in Appendix A.

Briefly, Norwood found that, in a key-fill lighting setup, for a given angular position of the key light, there was a certain exposure setting (greater than the exposure used for a metered reference shot with the key light at the camera) which produced an image which observers adjudged to be "comparable in exposure result" to the head-on lighting reference shot (whatever "comparable" might be).

Norwood then went on through several stages to purportedly demonstrate that the response of a hemispherical-receptor meter vs. the angle of the light hitting it⁶ would be such that the meter would give an exposure indication that would exactly be the exposure which the subjective tests had shown was needed to produce a consistent "visual appearance of exposure" of the image.

Sadly, the development of this conclusion is burdened with the kind of gaffes that would probably have caused the paper to be sent back by any credible peer review board. I describe these gaffes in Appendix A.

But the good news is, despite the lack of forensic credibility created by these gaffes, the ensuing numerical discrepancies are not probably large at all, and overall this paper still demonstrates that the readings of a Norwood system meter are a good practical guide to exposure over a range of situations of key-fill lighting—possibly even over a far wider regime of photographic lighting situations.

4 COMPARISON WITH THE "DUPLEX" TECHNIQUE

We started by pointing out that, prior to the emergence of the "Norwood" metering concept, the "duplex" technique was often used to develop an exposure recommendation in such cases as key-fill lighting. Seemingly, there was general satisfaction with this technique, other than that it was time-consuming.

⁶ This is technically referred to as the *directivity pattern* of the meter.

The Norwood system allowed the exposure recommendation to be determined with a single measurement, clearly an improvement in efficiency.

It is then interesting to ask, "For a given key-fill lighting setup, would the duplex technique and a Norton system meter theoretically yield approximately the same exposure recommendation?"

Yes. Table 1 gives the results of a simulation done here, comparing the exposure recommendations developed with the duplex metering technique (assuming an exposure meter with *cosine* directivity) and an ideal "Norwood" meter (with *cardioid* directivity⁷). The assumed key:fill ratio is 8:1 (as in Norwood's paper).

The relative exposure recommendations are shown first as the actual relative numerical value, followed (in italics) by the equivalent in stops.

Key light angle	Relative exposure recommendation (duplex)	Relative exposure recommendation (Norwood)
0°	1.00/ <i>0.00</i> *	1.00/ <i>0.00</i> *
45°	1.17/ <i>+0.23</i>	1.15/ <i>+0.20</i>
90°	2.00/ <i>+1.00</i>	1.80/ <i>+0.74</i>

* By definition

Table 1.

As you can see, the agreement between the two techniques is quite good in this case. The agreement declines for greater key light angles and (although not shown here) declines for smaller key:fill ratios.

5 RECOGNITION

Norwood's introduction of the hemispherical receptor exposure meter, almost certainly at first based more on intuition than scientific principle, made a gigantic and long-lasting improvement in the art of incident light exposure metering, initially especially in the cinematographic arena. It seems quite fitting that, in April, 1969, he was given an Academy Award for this work.

⁷ The directivity theoretically exhibited by a hemispherical receptor meter. This is not the directivity posited by Norwood.

6 GENERALITY?

Norwood tells us that a light source located at an angle from "head on" has an "effective illumination factor" that decreases linearly with the angle, starting at 1.0 at 0° and reaching 0.5 at 90°. "Effective" refers to the influence of the light on the visually-perceived overall exposure result.

When the light is where its effective illumination factor is 0.5, then we need to use twice the exposure we would need if the same light were where its effective illumination factor was 1.0 (at 0°) in order that the overall visual impression of exposure would be the same on the images taken with the two lighting situations. Fair enough.

But, so far as we can read in Norwood's paper, this particular "effective illumination factor" as a function of angle was only observed in the situation in which one of the lights (the "fill light") was at 0° and it had a luminous flux 1/8 that of the other light (the "key light").

So is that effective illumination factor function universal, over situations where neither light is at 0°, and over situations in which the ratio of the luminous flux density of the two lights was other than 1:8 (and in fact, in situations in which there are more than two lights?

We cannot answer that analytically, since we are dealing with the subjective visual perception of "the same overall exposure" between images in which the shadowing of the subject's features is not consistent. How that difference in shadowing affects the observer's perception of "overall exposure" cannot be modeled.

Yet the recommended usage of meters based on this principle is usually general. And, from the seemingly-broad acceptance of Norwood-system exposure meters over the years, we must assume that this generality is at least approximately in effect..

And note that whether or not this at least approximately true may well have been obscured, over the years, by the fact that, as is widely recognized in photography, no metering system of this simple type can always produce the "desirable exposure result", even if only because there is no universal metric for "how desirable" is the result (from an exposure standpoint) on a particular image.

7 MEASUREMENT OF ACTUAL ILLUMINANCE

In certain cases (some photographic, some not), we may wish to use our exposure meter to determine the actual luminance on a surface (Not what the implies as an optimal photographic exposure setting). After all, It has most of the necessary ingredients to do that. Three common such situations are:

- In some photographic situations, it is known that a “better” exposure recommendation will be gotten by measurement of the actual illuminance on the subject rather than with a “Norwood” measurement. The classical example is when the subject is the (flat) wall of a barn.
- When we wish to determine the ratio between two photographic light sources, which is said to be best done in terms of the actual luminance they would deliver on a surface perpendicular to their direction from the subject.
- Wholly outside of photography, in such situations as verifying that the illuminance on an industrial workbench was at least the amount recommended for the type of work being done.

Determining illuminance rigorously requires the meter to have a *cosine* directivity pattern.

Essentially all exposure meters in the Norwood Director series provide for this by having an alternate receptor, this one generally in the form of a disk, which can be put in place by the user instead of the dome receptor.

In Figure 9 we see both the receptors on a Sekonic L398A meter, the dome on the left, the disk on the right..



Figure 9 a,b. Sekonic L-398A with dome and disk receptors

In other exposure meters (such as many of the Sekonic digital exposure meters, including the one seen in figure 7), the dome can be pushed down to play a role in a complicated structure that essentially has a cosine response.

There are, however, some discrepancies in this mode of use, which are beyond the scope of this article. The reader interested in more information on this topic is commended to the companion article cited in section 10 (in Appendix B of the current issue).

8 BROADER APPLICABILITY

Norwood's original work related primarily to closeup cinematography and the parallel field of portrait photography, and this article essentially hews to that context.

It is said by certain incident light exposure meter manufacturers that the use of the dome collector as the basic configuration of their instruments is desirable as to exposure metering in such contexts as landscape photography. I have done little thinking about, and no actual investigation of, that.

9 AN "ENCYCLOPEDIA" OF (ALMOST) ALL THE "NORWOOD DIRECTOR" METERS

A detailed discussion of almost all the exposure meters, made by various firms over the years, that by ancestry deserve to be considered members of the "Norwood Director family" is given in the companion article by the same author, "The "Norwood Director" family of photographic exposure meters", probably available where you got this.

10 APPENDIXES

Additional detailed technical discussions of various matters relating to Norwood's principle are covered in the appendixes.

Appendix A. Norwood's 1950 SMPTE paper

Appendix B, Derivation of the cardioid directivity of the hemispherical dome

Appendix C, Typical actual directivity pattern

11 ABOUT "90TH BIRTHDAY SERIES"

This issue of this article is one of several publications made around the time of the 90th birthday of the author, which is May 8, 2026.

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Appendix A

Norwood's 1950 SMPTE paper

A.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1950, perhaps in response to pressure for the industry for a technical presentation of the rationale behind his "dome" exposure meter, Donald W. Norwood published a paper before the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE) ("Light Measurement for Exposure Control", *J SMPTE 1950, 54:585-602*) that gave a helpful outlook into the way in which the hemispherical-receptor exposure meter gives appropriate exposure recommendations over a range of lighting situations.

It did this not through an analytical model but rather through analysis of empirical observations in a test program.

The presentation has a number of (to me disappointing) lapses of rigor (perhaps even of candor), but fortunately these do not invalidate the practical conclusion.

A.2 THE TEST PROGRAM

A.2.1 Introduction

The cited paper presents a "demonstration" of the working of the "dome" exposure meter through the analysis of a test program involving subjective comparison of prints made from a carefully-controlled series of test exposures.

A.2.2 The overall scheme

The test program pertains solely to photography of the human face using key-fill lighting technique (certainly a preoccupation of cinematographers as well as portrait photographers, then and now).

In the tests, for each of several human subjects, shots were taken with a key-fill lighting setup, with both light sources delivering consistent illumination on the subject at a key-to-fill luminous flux density ratio of 8:1. The key light was placed at angles (from the camera) of 0° ("head on"), 45°, 90°, and 135°.

The exposure settings used for the "head-on" shot with the key light at 0° were based on measurement, with that lighting setup, of the composite illuminance on a camera-facing plane at the subject, using a basic incident light exposure meter following the generally-accepted incident light exposure metering equation (albeit with the value of the

calibration constant, C , for the meter not mentioned).⁸ I will call this the "reference shot".

Then, for each subject, the key light was moved successively to the other positions. For each position, several shots were taken with various levels of exposure greater than that used for the 0° shot. We do not know the increment in exposure used between these shots, but suspect it was 1/2-stop.

Presumably, the film was all developed in a standardized way and prints made with a standardized exposure in the enlarger.⁹

Then, for each series of shots for a certain subject at a certain key light angle, a group of observers were asked which shots best "matched in appearance" (in the sense of exposure) the reference shot of the same subject.

Here we run into a problem. Clearly none of the side-lit shots would truly match in appearance any of the reference shots, as the "sculpting" of the face would be quite different.

We have no idea what the instructions to the observers actually were in this regard. Perhaps the observers were actually asked which of the side-lit shots "looked to have the same overall exposure result as the reference shot", or perhaps, even better, "looked to have an overall exposure result that was 'equally as appropriate' as that of the reference shot", or maybe even "equally nice".

For conciseness in the remainder of this appendix, I will consider the property that the observers compared as the "visual impression of exposure result" and abbreviate it as "VIER"

A.3 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A.3.1 The basic concept

In any case, statistical analysis of the response data led Norwood to the conclusion that, over the range of subjects used, the average exposure required in a side-lit shot to get the same VIER as that of the reference shot was consistently greater than the meter-indicated exposure for the reference shot by an amount that increases consistently with the angle of the key light.

⁸ Which would approximately fulfill "objective B" as expressed in the body of this article.

⁹ I assume. Norwood does not trouble us with such details.

The degree of that needed additional exposure is shown in column 2 of table A1 (in the form stated in the paper) for the four key light locations used in the test program:

1. Key light angle	2. Needed additional exposure (stops)	3. Implied relative effective illumination
0°	0*	100%*
45°	½ –	75%
90°	1	50%
135°	2	25%

* By definition

Table A1

The entry for 45° presumably means “a little less than 1/2 stop”. (To match the value in column 3 it would have to be about 0.42 stop.)

Norwood says we can consider this behavior as that the contribution of the key light to the attainment of a consistent VIER (which he calls its “effective illumination”) declines with an increase in the angle at which the key light was placed. This outlook is shown in column 3 of the table. We can think of this value as the *effective illumination factor* for that key light angle.

He then says that if the relative response of the exposure meter, as a function of the angle from which the light arrives, follows that pattern of decline, then the exposure indicated by the meter will take into account this variation in the effective illumination from the key light, and the exposure recommendation will be the “appropriate” one for that lighting situation.

Column 4 of Figure A2 shows that needed directivity of the meter.

1. Angle	2. Implied relative effective illumination	3. Needed relative meter reading	4. Needed meter directivity
0°	100%*	100%*	1.00*
45°	75%	75%	0.75
90°	50%	50%	0.50
135°	25%	25%	0.25

* By definition

Table A2

A.3.2 That pesky fill light

A.3.2.1 *Introduction*

The entire motivation for Norwood's work was to seek a way to take a single exposure meter reading that would, in the case of a subject illuminated by both a key light and a fill light, indicate the "appropriate" exposure.

In actual photographic practice, the ratio between the illuminance of the key light and that of the fill light may be varied. A relatively more potent fill light serves to further "dilute" the shadowing from the subject's features cause by the key light being off to the side. The photographer will chose the key:fill ratio so that "diluting" produces the artistic result he desires.

The test program that "disclosed" the concept of the effective illumination of light arriving from an angle invariably used both a key light (at a variable angle) and a fill light ("head-on"), with the two always having a consistent ratio in the illuminance they delivered (8:1 for key:fill).

A.3.2.2 *Review of the test program*

For each subject, the process began with a "reference shot" with the key and fill lights having their standard "potency" and both located at 0°.

Then, for each angle of the key light a number of shots were taken with different exposure settings. The panel of viewers considered those multiple shots for the given angle and concluded which one was "most like" the reference shot as to VIER.

A.3.2.3 *The influence of the fill light*

For the key light at 90°, for example, the "average" viewer reaction was that a shot with 1.00 stop exposure greater than for the reference shot produced an image that was "most like" the reference shot as to VIER.

We can think of this as indicating that the overall visual exposure result cased by the new light setup was 1.00 stop "less hot" than the overall VIER for the reference shot.

In turn, Norwood then tells is that from this we can conclude that the key light at an angle of 90° gave an effective illumination of 1.00 stop less than when it was at 0° (that is, 50% of its value at 0°).

But there is a flaw in this rationale. Consider again the case in which th key light had been moved to 90°, and we find that an exposure of

twice that for the reference shot was needed to give an equivalent VIER.

For the exposure meter to call for twice the exposure, the stimulus to the of the meter movement would have to be half that that for the reference situation.

But the stimulus on the meter movement only partially comes from the key light. The rest comes from the fill light. And that stimulus is not changed when we move the key light to 90° .

Accordingly, the stimulus from the key light must fall to less than half its value for the reference shot. Thus, the meter directivity at 90° would have to be less than 0.50 (about 0.43, actually). This is of course not a great discrepancy.

But if the key:fill ratio is less than 8:1 (4:1 and even 2:1 ratios are commonly used), this discrepancy becomes greater. We cannot quantify this greater discrepancy analytically, since we don't know how the different visual impact of these greater fill light contributions affects the observers' opinion of how much more exposure is needed to retain the same VIER as that of the reference shot.

For example, for a key:fill ratio of 4:1, we cannot be sure that, when we move the key light to 90° that the observers would feel than an increase in exposure of one stop would be needed to retain the same VIER (as was found to be the case with a key:fill ratio of 8:1).

A.3.2.4 *Disposing of these concerns*

Norwood does not discuss this matter directly in the part of his paper devoted to the "dome receptor" meter. But earlier in the paper, as he discussed exposure metering broadly, he makes this observation: "The fill-light is useful and necessary to achieve acceptable pictures but is distinctly secondary in exposure control matters."

He may rely on this in disposing of the discrepancy I discuss above.

I am not wholly impressed by that assurance. For one thing, even if the key:fill ratio is 8:1, with the key light at 90° (still assuming a meter directivity there of 0.50), the effective illumination afforded by the fill light would be 0.25 times that of the key light (which we can think of as adding "0.3 stop" to the overall stimulus on the meter.

For lesser key:fill ratios (4:1 and 2:1 are commonly used in still portraiture), the effective illumination effect afforded by the fill light would be an even greater fraction of the total effect. Again with the key light at 90° (still assuming a meter directivity there of 0.50) and a 2:1 key:fill ratio, the fill light would contribute fully half of the total stimulus on the meter. That would substantially disrupt Norwood's

derivation of the needed directivity of the meter. But again, we cannot analytically quantify that.

A.3.3 The directivity of the meter

Recall first that Norwood, at this point in the story, is (correctly or not) looking for the meter directivity function to be that which we describe as the *Archimedean spiral* function.

Norton then looks into the theoretical directivity of a meter with a hemispherical receptor (which his intuition had initially told him was what is needed here). "By inspection" he (correctly) observes that for an angle of incidence of the light of 90° to the "peak" of the dome, only half of the dome would be illuminated. Thus, we would expect the meter directivity at that angle would be 0.50. Fair enough.

But he then just interpolates to conclude that for an angle of 45° , the theoretical directivity would be 0.75.

He then extrapolates the initial observation to an angle of 135° , concluding that the theoretical directivity there would be 0.25.

This directivity function, if plotted in polar coordinates, is a geometrical figure called the *Archimedean spiral*. Just what is needed.

A.3.4 No quite so

But this derivation is flawed. The derivation of the actual directivity function is given in Appendix B. That function, if plotted in polar coordinates, is a geometrical figure called the *cardioid*.

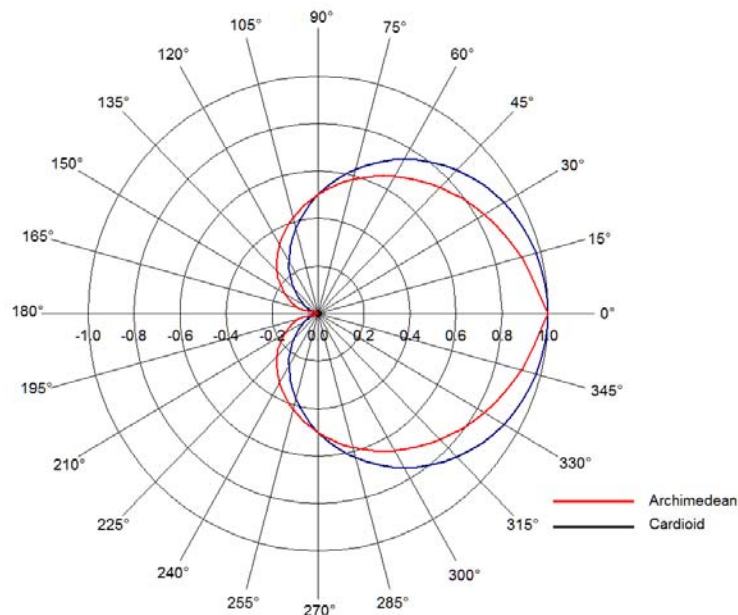


Figure 10. Archimedean spiral and cardioid directivity patterns

For comparison, we see in figure 10 these two functions plotted in polar coordinates:

The difference between the two is greatest somewhere near 45° . At 45° , the value of the cardioid function is about 14% greater than that of the Archimedean spiral function.

This erroneous derivation of the theoretical directivity pattern of a hemispherical-receptor meter must be considered a flaw in Norwood's presentation. But fortunately, the numerical error is very modest.

A.4 THE WRAP-UP

A.4.1 Summary

In his paper, Norwood tells us:

1. With key-fill lightning, the optimal exposure (in terms of visual comparison of the result with the result of a "head-on" lighting setup) increases as the inverse of a linear decrease with the angle of the key light.

Comment: I will accept that at face value.

2. The corresponding exposure recommendation will be given by a meter whose directivity decreases linearly with the angle of the key light. [That function is, if plotted in polar coordinates, an Archimedean spiral.]

Comment: True only if we ignore the effect of the fill light on the meter (which Norwood assures us will be inconsequential.)

3. A meter with a hemispherical receptor will theoretically exhibit a directivity that decreases linearly with the angle of the key light. [That function is, if plotted in polar coordinates, an Archimedean spiral.]

Comment: Such a meter will actually theoretically exhibit a directivity that, if plotted in polar coordinates, is an cardioid.

A.4.2 Grading the paper

The lapses from thoroughness and rigor in the trail of Norwood's "derivation" are intellectually disturbing, and might well have earned this paper an initial "thumbs down" had it been subject to peer review. And to the cynical forensic engineer (who, me?), they raise serious questions as to whether this story with its amazingly-tidy result was formulated in fully good faith by the author.

Did Norwood by any chance "work backwards" from a perfect result, taking artistic liberties with the mathematical relationships actually

involved on the way? Or was he just uniformed, or careless with his work, and lucky as to his result? I leave it to the individual reader to contemplate that.

In any case, Norwood's paper is a forensically-flawed demonstration of why a meter according to his design should be expected to consistently recommend an exposure that leads to an image result the photographer or cinematographer deems "good".

A.4.3 The good news

That indictment aside, I first note that the actual lapses in Norwood's presentation appear to likely have modest numerical impact. And in any case, we are speaking of a situation in which there is no "inherently exactly correct" result anyway.

Many years of actual use, often in the demanding regime of cinematography, of meters based on Norwood's design have seemingly shown that the exposure settings indicated by these meters very often lead to an exposure result that the photographer or cinematographer deems "good".

So, is it better to be lucky than rigorous?

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Appendix B

Derivation of the cardioid directivity of the hemispherical dome

B.1 THE DIRECTIVITY RESPONSE OF THE HEMISPHERICAL RECEPTOR

Of interest is the "directivity pattern" of a hemispherical incident light metering sensor (implemented with a flat sensor covered by a translucent hemispherical dome "collector". I make two assumptions (the first one actually being more of a "condition")):

- The light source is sufficiently small, and at a sufficient distance, that all rays from it striking any part of the collector will come from the same direction (will be parallel).
- A fixed fraction of the luminous flux striking the collector at any place and at any angle will impact the actual sensor.

That having been said, then the relative sensitivity of the meter to light arriving from any direction will be proportional to the projected area of the collector as seen from that direction.

B.2 THE PROJECTED AREA OF A HEMISPHERE FROM VARIOUS ANGLES OF OBSERVATION

I will work from figure 11.

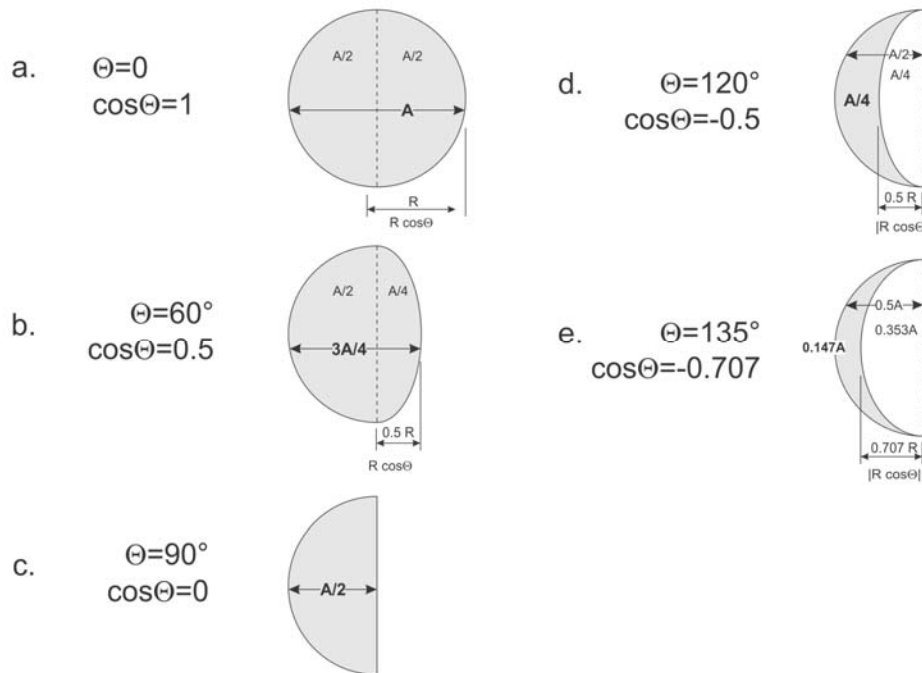


Figure 11. Projected area of the hemisphere from different viewing angles

Panel a— "head on" observation

In panel a of the figure, we see the projected area of the dome as we would see it "head on" from a point on its axis. Here Θ , the angle of observation, is 0. The cosine of Θ is 1.0. We use A to represent the projected area as seen from $\Theta=0$ (that is, as seen in this panel). A will mean that very same area in future panels.

In order to set the stage for our future work, I divide the projected area into two equal portions by a vertical dotted line. The area of each portion is $A/2$.

Note that in this case, the boundary of the projected area is in fact identical to the "rim" of the hemisphere as seen from our vantage point. Accordingly, in this view, the area of each half of the projected area of the hemisphere is half the area of the circle defined by the rim of the hemisphere. This area is in turn determined by the radius of the hemisphere, R .

Panel b— observation from an angle of 60°

In panel b, we have moved our vantage point to the right by 60° , so that Θ , the angle of view of the hemisphere, is 60° .

The left boundary of the projected area is no longer the left half of the rim of the hemisphere, which has moved "around back"—just the leftmost "limb" of the hemisphere. But the left boundary is still that same curve. The right boundary of the projected area is still the right half of the rim, which has now moved "a bit to the front". That half of the rim is a semi-circle in 3-dimensional space, but, since we see it from an angle to its plane, we see it foreshortened as a semi-ellipse, with a semidiameter that is $\cos 60^\circ$ (0.5) times its actual semidiameter, R .

And thus the area itself is reduced by the factor $\cos \Theta$, to $(A/2) \cos \Theta$, or $A/4$. Thus the entire projected area of the hemisphere, the sum of the two sections, is $3A/4$. (That area is shown outlined in bold.)

Panel c— observation from an angle of 60°

In panel c our view is from 90° to the right. We note that for $\Theta=90^\circ$, $\cos \Theta=0$.

Now the "near half" of the rim of the hemisphere is seen "head on", and collapses to a vertical line.

Accordingly, the entire projected area of the hemisphere is just $A/2$.

Panel d— observation from an angle of 120°

In panel d, our view is from 120° to the right. We note that for $\Theta = 120^\circ$, $\cos\Theta = -0.5$.

As in panel b, the right boundary of the projected area is the projection to us of the "near" half of the rim of the hemisphere, now "flipped" left of the dotted centerline. Again, its horizontal semidiameter is $R \cos \Theta$ (but, to be rigorous, since $\cos \Theta$ is negative, we must state that (positive) distance as the absolute value of $R \cos\Theta$).

Thus, the total projected area, A' , is the "left portion" area, $A/2$, diminished by the area in the semiellipse, $(A/2) \cdot |\cos \Theta|$ (which comes to $A/4$), a net area of $A/4$.

Panel e— observation from an angle of 136°

In panel d, our view is from 135° to the right. We note that for $\Theta = 135^\circ$, $\cos\Theta = -0.707$.

As in panel b, the right boundary of the projected area is the projection to us of the "near" half of the rim of the hemisphere, now "flipped" further to the left of the dotted centerline. Again, its horizontal semidiameter is $R \cos \Theta$ (but, to be rigorous, since $\cos \Theta$ is negative, we must state that (positive) distance as the absolute value of $R \cos\Theta$).

Summary

We see that in every case, geometrically, the net projected area of the hemisphere is an area of $A/2$ to which we add an area of $(A/2) \cos \Theta$ (noting that for $\Theta > 90^\circ$, $\cos \Theta$ is negative, so that area then would actually be subtracted).

Algebraically, then, the projected area of the hemisphere from a point at angle Θ is consistently given by:

$$A' = \frac{A}{2} + \frac{\cos \Theta A}{2} \quad (1)$$

or

$$A' = \frac{1 + \cos \Theta}{2} A \quad (2)$$

Thus the relative sensitivity of the receptor, s , which we have assumed is proportional to the projected area of the hemisphere from the angle of interest, is:

$$s = \frac{1 + \cos \Theta}{2} \quad (3)$$

But this is the expression, in polar coordinates, for a cardioid curve:

$$R = \frac{1 + \cos \Theta}{2} \quad (4)$$

Quod erat demonstrandum.

B.3 IN REALITY

In an actual typical implementation, as soon as the angle of incidence gets beyond perhaps 90° there would unavoidably be some obscuration of the dome by the meter housing. Thus we might expect for such greater angles the actual response would decline faster than as predicted by the cardioid curve.

B.4 GRAPHIC PRESENTATION

The theoretical response curve function (cardioid) derived above as plotted in polar coordinates (as a directivity pattern) is seen in figure 12.

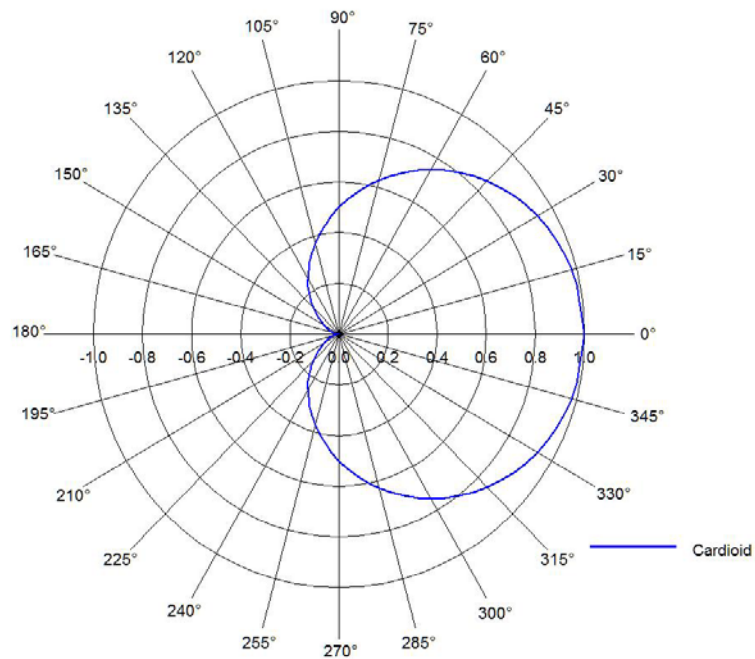


Figure 12. Cardioid directivity pattern

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Appendix C

Typical actual directivity pattern

Field tests were made here [in 2014] of the directivity function of a Sekonic L-398M exposure meter in its "Lumisphere" (dome receptor) mode. This meter is a fairly recent member of the exposure meter line of succession that descended directly from Norwood's work.¹⁰

We see here that directivity function (in the by-now-familiar polar plot), along with the theoretical cardioid pattern for comparison.

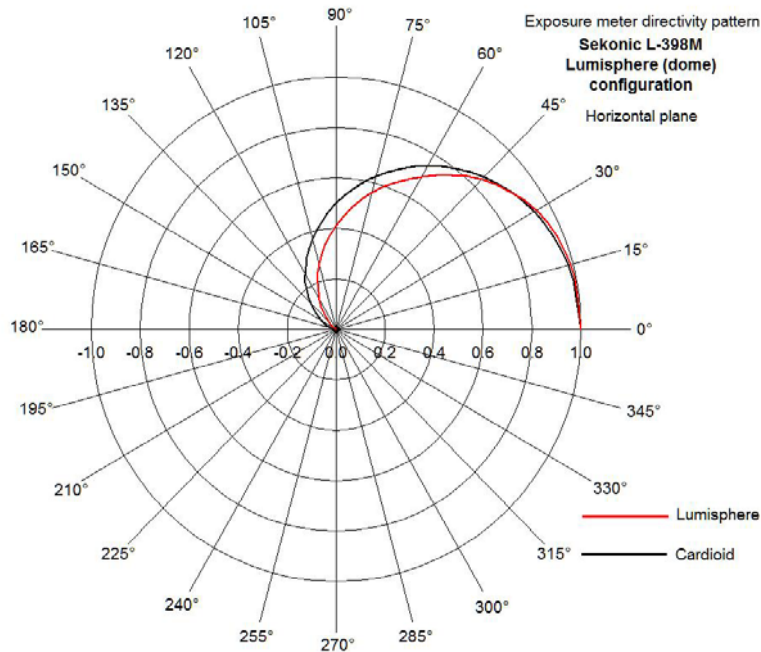


Figure 13. Sekonic L-398M–Cardioid directivity pattern

We note that the pattern exhibited by the meter very closely follows the theoretical cardioid pattern.

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¹⁰ In fact the penultimate member of that line of descent, which ended with the Sekonic L-398A (still sold as of this writing, in 2026).