

“The impact of technology on content”



by Pedro Meyer

(This is a double editorial because it covers two months.)

We place a marking on the wall, at each one my youngest sons' birthdays, he is by now ten. He stands up against the wall and where the top of his head is, we draw a new line. That way we can visualize better how much he has grown from year to year. Of course we are aware of his changes as he outgrows his clothing and toys, however, these lines on the wall are what really provides us with a better perception of how he has been growing.

Although I have not performed an equivalent set of markers for all the equipment that I have used over this past decades' digital revolution, I have to admit that my studio is littered with all sorts of obsolete tools, that are constantly being superseded with more efficient tools that are always outgrowing everything else. **Nothing has lasted ten years that is still being used, which can give you some idea of the speed of obsolescence.** Any equivalent markers on the wall would only show us, that this a relay race, with the new items displacing the old at ever shorter intervals.

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Having to face this continuous obsolescence of ones' equipment has become a new source of irritation and frustration, however, one can't deny that there are indeed benefits from the improvements that can be had, very often at a much lower price ratio to what was offered before, providing new creative options which are after all the reason that all these tools get created and sold, in the first place.

There are a number of very well meaning people who have said to me, there is nothing “new” that is coming out in spite of all these digital tools (as in content of the photographs), which would justify all that is going on with digital photography.

I suspect that they are looking to find transformations delivered so fast because of the speed at which tools are appearing. Obviously this is not going to happen. This would be like expecting a tree to grow to it's full size in the space of twelve months. We need to understand that new content can not grow by leaps and bounds, but organically. What is more, if you inundate a sapling with water and fertilizer just to speed it's growth, it will most likely succumb to such a deluge of usually very helpful resources.

As we move forward, we are facing new challenges by the never ending diversity of new tools that are constantly flowing our way. The challenge is the time needed to learn about all the tools and possibilities they offer and how they work, and then putting it all into practice.

We have to also build a theoretical frame work, to understand the transformation of the image and how all these developments end up reshaping our social and cultural values in the process. We need to acknowledge how much around us has already changed, in order to deal with things in a way that helps us cope with this revolution . Who would have thought that the iPod would force the radio industry to rethink how they operate. To give just one brief example.



Lets face it, the main providers of our tools for photography (soft and hardware) are no longer those who were the leaders of the analog photo industry. As a matter of fact the majority of the most important players in todays photo world had nothing to do with photography not too long ago. Names such as Epson, who are in fact Seiko the watch makers, or Casio the makers also of watches and calculators, or Samsung, or Hewlett Packard, to name only a few of

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the main hardware makers did not even have photography as a business plan, nothing to say of Adobe the creators of Photoshop or Macromedia (recently swallowed by Adobe). Their presence in the world of photography is something new, and along with that, come new ways of doing everything, Just notice all those places that cameras are being sold that never before had sold a camera. Or all the objects that take pictures that did not even exist before. Cell phones, video recorders, computers. etc.

When someone addresses the expectations over the work being created and suggests that nothing really new has been produced so far, they are not factoring in that many of the tools that are in existence today, have only been with us, in their present level of sophistication, for only a scant few years. It's like expecting a toddler who is still struggling with his potty training, to have written Don Quijote de la Mancha. And if a mother were to feel guilty that her child had not yet written such a masterpiece, then you would probably question the mother for being so unrealistic, or the person posing the question, would have to be confronted for the lack of understanding of what they were actually requesting.

Today more than ever, the arrival of new tools will in turn bring with them, new options for producing new photographic work.

Quite possibly there are no more than a handful of people in the world, who have come to use and experience all the intricacies of a product such as Adobe's Photoshop. What this means is that the learning curve is quite huge, and to boot, is changing all the time.

Although I was working with digital images, a long time before Photoshop 1 came into being, and have used every new version since then (and we are now on version #9), I would venture to say that I don't know how to use 40% of this product. However, it might just be that we will never need to know it all either, because increasingly this tool has abilities to do things that not everyone needs to use all the time.

This can tell us something of the dimensions involved in learning all the ins and out, of just one software package. But if you add another fifteen applications, some that will allow you to make video, to use sound, and to publish books and over the internet, and to write, and on and on the list grows, I think you get the picture of what it means these days to stay up to date.

In the last thirty days, a new operating system, Tiger, for the Macintosh, came out, along with a new version of Photoshop CS2 (or version 9), Now expect to face a river of new upgrades by everyone as they adjust their software to work with Tiger, and you get the picture of how all of this is supposed to function. You have to be willing to learn new things from now on forward. This will never stop.

So in this editorial I will take you on a short ride of just a handful of new pieces to this puzzle of digital photography. And see how these tools are changing content.

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I will start out by the most surprising of them all, the [EPSON R-D1 model](#). This is the first digital range finder camera (In the link above, you can see in five languages a wonderful 3 D presentation of the camera that has all the functionality of the real camera) It



looks identical to a Leica M6, it even sound like one, and I am sure this is by design, as most of the Leica lenses will fit perfectly well. Even if the camera couldn't take a picture, it's already a terrific conversation piece, On a recent trip to New York, I got stopped everywhere there were knowledgeable photographers around. They would ask, is that the new Leica? I would have to tell them that unfortunately the company that made Leicas went bankrupt, had they produced such a model in due time they surely would have been doing well. It took an established watchmaker to create a camera that is as solid as the original Leica was. I am sure you get the idea of what the transition to digital photography represents.

As you all know the Leica M6, like it's predecessors, was the perfect camera to work in certain ways and places. It's simplicity was unique. With this being the first digital range finder camera, we might start to see some new work as well. Especially as digital technology allows us to work with poor lighting in so many ways that are better than ever before. I would not be surprised that this camera would bring some new images our way, just as [Dr. Erich Solomon](#) did in the early thirties.

This camera takes phenomenal quality pictures, 6.5 million pixels, and of course is almost silent, and light in weight. I don't think there is photographer alive who does not wish that all the equipment they have, be as light as possible. The images I took were taken in RAW format, letting me have a 72 megabyte size file, after working on the images in the new Raw file format, which allow us to make huge prints that look razor sharp. The noise factor at high ASA ratings, like 1600 were almost negligible. Compare that to the recent fiasco at Kodak with their top of the line model, which they had to take out of the market and suspend any marketing efforts because



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their five times more expensive camera could not make images of any quality above a 100 ASA rating exposure.

But back to the Epson R-D1, which costs around \$3,000 US Dlls. the images are of very high quality, the camera feels just right ergonomically, but then I believe in the excitement of getting the product to market, someone at Epson forgot to include, what even a \$ 200 US Dlls. camera has and that is the capability to connect the camera to some outside device in order to download the pictures that were taken. In the R-D1 you can only do so by taking the memory chip out of the camera and inserting it in some other device that then allows you to download the pictures. I did so by inserting the memory card, into a Casio camera. Here the \$ 500 US Dlls. camera had a solution the \$ 3,000 (body alone) camera, did not provide.

Imagine a BMW car, were they forgot to include the inside door handles so you can get out of the car, and you could only do so, by lowering the window to stretch out your arm to open the door from the outside. For sure that is one way of getting out, but for your money your probably would want a better solution.

Not withstanding this flaw, I am sure there will be lots of camera collectors who will want this first of a kind camera, and then also a good number who grew up with the look and feel of a Leica will want to make digital images while using their old Leica lenses. All of these will want this camera.

Epson has proven time and time again, that even though they were not in the photo business before, they patiently listened to comments they got, and steadily improved everything and thus built up their market lead for printers that cater to the photography world, something not even HP has been able to challenge, So I am sure that in version #2 of their R-D1, they will probably lower the prices and fit out the camera so you can download right from the camera. Judging EPSON by their track record, I think that this camera is going to become a Classic. Sadly not made by Leitz, gmbh, Maybe Epson decides to buy Leitz gmbh, it would be a very interesting combination.

We now move on to another price range, with equally stunning news. The CASIO Z50 Exilim, Here the story gets interesting in a different way. As I was flying on my way to Germany, I went through the catalog of the stuff they sold in their on board duty free shop, I was thrilled to see that now all of a sudden cameras were an item one could buy even on a plane. Not too long ago, cameras were items sold only in camera stores, today cameras are being offered of course in most super markets.



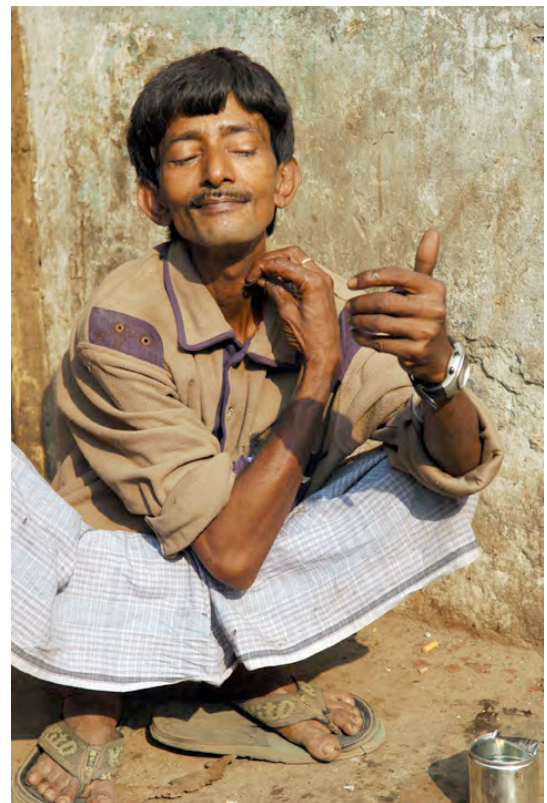
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So here was this CASIO camera, of which I had never heard off. It looked very interesting, the price was around \$ 500 US Dlls with a little leather pouch to protect it. I asked the stewardess if I had the right to open it, and see if the camera was worth the money, and if I was not satisfied that I could return it. Right away she said yes, brought me the camera, and I was hooked. It was a lot faster than the Sony T1 I had bought a few months earlier. I knew that I always had a lot of people who want to buy my used cameras, (they can get a good price and a camera that is almost new) so buying a new camera was less of an issue.

The camera was great, 5 million pixels, unfortunately not in raw format, (I expect will follow very soon). However, the camera had one major flaw, also in design. The buttons to change the settings all had been placed exactly on the same spot where my thumb would land when holding the body of the camera to take pictures, So inadvertently I would constantly change the settings. However aside from this flaw the camera made great images. Then in Madrid one day I lost the camera, and I was looking for it everywhere the following day when I missed it for the first time, when all of a sudden in comes this taxi driver who had taken me back to the hotel, from where I was teaching a work shop the night before. He had found it, but best of all, as he said, it was on the floor of taxi, and people did not see it, only he did so when he was cleaning his cab at the end of the day. As he said, if they had seen it, they would probably not have given it to him. I think he was right.

My next episode takes place in Dhaka, in Bangladesh, as my Sony T1 got lost there, Here I wasn't so lucky. After exploring all the possible places I could have left it, we came to the conclusion that while riding in a rickshaw with all the inevitable bumps in the road, it could have easily jumped out of my pocket. (Sad to say the person who might have found the camera, will not be able to do much with it, as I still had the power supply which is needed to charge the batteries, and for downloading the pictures) The Sony T1, did not have a view finder, only through the back monitor could you see what you were going to photograph, in a funny way it behaved more like an old bellows camera, with the rear pane acting like the usual matt glass to see the image you were about to take, or miss, as the camera was very slow in responding.

As you well know, the ever present debate that the still images do not reveal what is on the sides of that which is being shown to us in a photograph.



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I was taking this image of a man shaving in the old city of Dhaka, you can see here. However what you can not see is that I was surrounded by onlookers, where in fact I had become the object of attention, not the man shaving.

I took out my Casio camera and recorded a video of all that was happening on the periphery of the image being taken. As a testimony on the limitations of photography as a vehicle for showing “reality”. [Click here](#) to take a look and tell me which reality were we talking about?

Next stop: Singapore. Of course my friends there took me around shopping, and lo and behold I saw a new CASIO EXILIM Z57. This is now thirty days after I had purchased the camera on the airplane which was being presented as the latest and greatest camera in Europe, and here a month later was an upgraded version already with all the design flaws corrected, the camera coming in all sorts of decorator colors to choose from, and a larger monitor on the back. Same price.

This present us with the constant dilemma I have heard all over the world, When is the right time to buy a digital camera. My answer is always the same: NOW! because if you want to wait around for the return of the era when camera innovations happened over many years, that time in history is probably gone for ever. Your cameras should also be thought off in different terms. Since you are not spending on film anymore, you probably amortize the value of the camera in a relatively short period of time, allowing you to sell it for less than you paid for, in order to invest in the new models plus the savings you made from not spending for film.

The Casio Exilim, is fast, it has very good image quality. You can make videos with it, you can use it as a recorder as well. However, it does not work as a coffee maker nor can you use it to call someone at home. Those are the other type of cameras, called cell phones. Already phone cameras have arrived with a 2.5 million pixel capacity.

Well, I bought the new model, and sold promptly the one I had purchased 30 days earlier, you no longer can approach the ownership of your camera with the same emotional attachment of the past, unless you care more for the nostalgia bit, than for technological innovations. A camera is seen by me today in a totally new ways. I view them almost with the same detachment I have for a taxi. A taxi, I see as a way of getting me from A to B. I pay my fare, give them a good tip, and forget about the car (unless the taxi driver, brings me back my lost camera the next day). Essentially the cameras have become almost a use and discard item.

So what does the Exilim from CASIO bring to the creative table? With a built in flash that is very good, it can do things, that the Epson R-D1 does not without additional equipment. The spontaneity of having a camera with you at all times, that is both silent, even more so than the R-D1 as I can turn down all sounds to zero, also has a view finder option aside from the rear monitor, a big plus compared to de Sony T1. I just read that Sony already came out with a new generation of the T1 version, that is faster, and has

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seven million pixels. All of this, is just to point out how fluid all these comments are, and how however up to date a review is, you can not hold on to the information too long.

I find that these cameras will usher in a new form of taking pictures, because of their size, speed, and angles from which the pictures can be taken. Let alone making videos, You might want to see an article we published some months back here in ZoneZero, of how a musician, [Fredo Viola](#) did a small film from just such a small camera. I believe it becomes quite evident when you see such fine work, as the “Sad Song” by Fred Viola that indeed we are going places that are new.



If you are trying to figure out why one camera costs \$500 Dlls, the other one \$3000 Dlls, and the last one I will review which is the new D2X from Nikon, \$5,000. You can probably look at the car market as a reference. All cars no matter how much they cost, will take you from A to B. so you are not looking solely at transportation as an issue. You have prestige, comfort, security, and all other good reasons people like to buy one brand over the next one, or one model over another belonging to the same brand.

With cameras, there are of course certain very specific needs, such as very large file format, or certain speed, like

8 frames per second at any setting. So when people ask what camera do you recommend, the first question is always what do you want to do with that camera. If you need are to have one of the highest quality images in order to produce large size images, plus speed, then the new Nikon D2X, will fit the bill perfectly.

I find it quite amazing how in such a few short years, the increase in quality and size of images, has been made possible. To capture images at 8 frames per second, at 12.5 million pixels is quite a remarkable accomplishment.

The camera is however very heavy to carry around, at least for me. My wrists really feel it and so does my back, when I have gone out to take pictures for a long time. The Canon cameras I think are as much or more weighty, nothing to say of the digital Hasselblad camera. This to name only a few. Would I like to have all the bells and whistles without the weight, of course I would, But then the trade off is probably to have it lighter, is to have less options.

One thing that is quite wonderful with the Nikon cameras is that they have been very consistent in having almost the same interface and buttons from one model camera generation to the other. Making it very easy to pick up the camera and without reading too

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much of the manual figure out where everything is. There have been photographers who had to go on an assignment with their brand new DX2 camera, and being able to use it perfectly well, right out of the box.

The D70 from Nikon, which has now become the previous generation, is going to be replaced by a new model the D70S within a few weeks. The D-70 is considerably lighter and if you can, pick up a used one by all means try to do so, you will have great results and at a modest cost.

The benefits of instant feedback, has not been spoken about enough. I recall how we would waste an enormous amount of material with Polaroid tests, and aside from all the litter that was produced, it was always just a reference. Here the images are WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get). You get to see exactly what your camera will be photographing and too boot, at no additional cost. Now you understand why Polaroid went out of business.

“Popular Photography says that Canon’s 16 megapixel EOS 1Ds Mark II digital SLR edges out film”



SLR camera

Popular Photography Magazine, which isn't exactly an apologist for digital photography. Has declared that in tests Canon's new 16 megapixel EOS 1Ds Mark II, took better pictures than a regular shooting high quality ISO 100 film. They are saying that the better color and lower noise of the EOS 1Ds Mark II gives digital pictures the edge over film.

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Have you tried the new lens baby version 2? if not then do yourself a favor, and explore their web site, at <http://www.lensbabies.com/> these lenses are absolutely unique, they will fit most models of digital cameras, and it will convert your digital camera, in the equivalent of a Holga or cardboard pinhole camera, combined with a the old fashioned bellows camera, with the tilt

You will obviously ask why, would I want to do that? make such images with the digital camera. First because you are interested in the style of images that such cameras deliver, but most importantly because you have the benefit of instant feedback as to what you are taking being along the lines of what you would like to get. Lastly because you have a lot more production power behind you, as you clip ahead, and gather the images that will work for instance with your fashion assignment.

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NIK Pro2 filters. This is a set of filters that do make a difference in your photography.

<http://www.nikmultimedia.com>

Their most important advantage is that you can apply the effect with a brush. No more, applying a filter to the entire image, even in those areas you would not want any change.

You can appreciate the impact of such tools, if you look at the image on the cover of zonezero, and then look here at the original without any alteration.



Aside the fact that they are very good filters, with very powerful, controls. What I found that was quite stunning, is that you can apply any effect with a brush, and undo what you just did, and do it over again, with only a click of button.

The idea of applying filters by hand selectively, rather than have it land all over the image evenly, regardless of your intention, is something that soon will make itself present in more and more work. The difference in using filters in this way is outstanding, when you consider the level of control that we have today over every pixel.

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These filters are free to you if you buy the new Wacom tablet that has bluetooth connection, which frees you up from all the cable clutter around your computer.



this image STRAUGHT OUT
OF THE CAMERA



after applying filters to the
image, with a brush.

What comes across with all the new tools I have reviewed here, and this is just a small sampling of all the things that are available at present. is that content is just waiting to be transformed. I am convinced that we are but at the very beginning of a new era for photography.

Pedro Meyer
Coyoacan, Mexico City
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