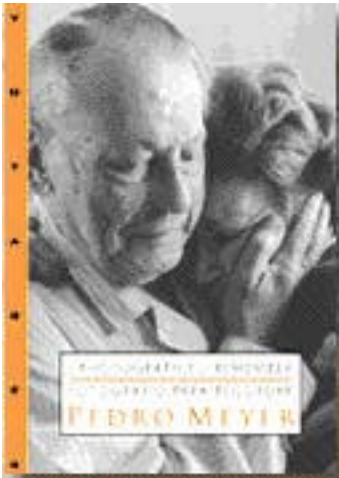


# “.... some background thoughts”

by  
PEDRO MEYER



A decade after the first presentation of “I Photograph to Remember” which was originally designed to be viewed on a computer screen and delivered by means of a CD ROM, [ by the way, this was the first CD ROM with continuous sound and images that had ever been produced anywhere], we can now with present day technology bring you over the internet what was initially available only via a CD ROM.

I will examine here from the photographer’s point of view, some of the experiences and thoughts associated with the making of this work; I will also discuss some of the problems inherent with the vehicle itself, the CD ROM, and how it evolved.

I will touch upon some of the issues that were brought to my attention over the years by some of the people who saw IPTR (I Photograph to Remember).

For instance, I have been asked many times, how I was able to photograph my parents in the way that I did. Some have brought up issues of privacy, of intimacy, even challenging my decision of being present with a camera during all those times.

Those who have asked me probably never knew that I always had been taking pictures of my family, so that the camera became in our midst a very ubiquitous instrument, almost transparent to our eyes. Then there was also a large degree of trust, and something which only in time would I learn to appreciate to its' full extent, namely the absence of wanting to control the image by my parents. In many ways it was a testimony to their forthrightness, never wanting to conceal or to hide anything. Even when my mother wanted to do so, she was very open about the issue of "wanting to look good for the picture".

As a photographer, I have worked in many parts of the world and in an array of circumstances that would lead me to capture images of "the other" facing situations all the way from birth to death. I felt it a matter of integrity on my part that my camera should be capable of grasping images of my own family as much as I would photograph the lives of those who I had never met before. What right would I have to photograph others, if I was not capable of addressing those same issues with my own people? If my own family was beyond reach of the camera, why shouldn't all other families anywhere in the world be the same? This led me to never consider my own family as being off limits, and for that matter, neither did they. After all no one thought there was something to hide.

The fact that I took those pictures in the first place, did not mean that I intended to publish them later on. This came about many years after having taken them, and after a lot of soul searching on my part, where I concluded that in making this work public I

would actually be honoring my parents. That became, the sole motivation in allowing those photographs to be published.

I took all those photographs for myself as a way of dealing with death itself. Jean Cocteau commented once, “Photography is the only way to kill death”. After all, memory is precisely that, a way of making a moment permanent. I knew full well that my emotions at the time would not allow me to recall further on, the specifics of any given moment. The photographs have indeed allowed me to return many times to those captured slices of my experience, and flawed, as those pictures inevitably are, due to the limitations inherent to the photographic medium, I do get a sense of the way it all happened.

These days I am blessed with a new little boy, who at the time of this writing is already six years old. My parents obviously never met him as they died before he was born. I thought many times in recent years that this work might some day function for him like a family album. His grandparents would be introduced to him much as they will be for my three granddaughters, who also never met my parents. The story of my father and mothers’ last years, and the way they lived through them, also have become a source of reference for my wife Trisha, as she was confronted in recent weeks with the passing away of her own father.

While Trisha went off to London to be at her fathers’ bedside during his last days, Julio my smallest son and I remained at home. During those days, he asked to have at close hand a picture of his mother because he was starting to forget what she looked like. I fully understood what he was saying. When I look back at the pictures in *I Photograph to Remember*, they summoned up for me what my parents looked like, especially towards the end of their lives with all the changes brought about, consumed as they were, by illness. Their images in my mind would be but fleeting and formless memories without the support of those photographs.

The experience of creating *I Photograph to Remember* was instrumental for another project of mine, that of defining how ZoneZero would operate. Two things became clear to me over the years after IPTR was published.

The first one, was the importance of audio next to the images themselves. The narration, and the use of my voice, made a huge difference in how this work was perceived. It is precisely because of the inherent limitation of the photographic medium, that the presence of the voice picks up where the photograph couldn't tread. I made sure that the narration would always be a complement to that which was self evident in the picture, thus adding to the story being told while not competing with the image.

The second aspect that I realized soon after Voyager published this work initially, was how few other photographers were ready to publish their work –with strictly photographic projects.

Voyagers' perspective on this matter, was that the costs of production and distribution made it unattractive to create further CD ROMs. This of course was true to a large extent, but it was not the whole story either. At least not how I saw it. From my own experience as a photographer, I knew that the photographic community was in general not quite ready to jump into the ring with new technologies. A lot of assistance in crossing the bridge to these new realms was required, but Voyager, rightly so, identified such needs with costs, believing that it was solely a matter that the software needed to produce them was too complicated and thus required costly programmers to create a new CD ROM.

The problem, I sensed, was not fully identified. It was not solely a matter of production costs, in essence the CD ROM was the

wrong platform for small projects, and because of that it would be always too expensive.

When I started ZoneZero, I understood that we had to bring two solutions to the table that had not been available before. We had, by using the Internet the potential to deliver with relatively low costs, small stories, and we could produce them ourselves, rather than the photographers, thus getting around the technology barrier which will be resolved gradually over time.

To borrow the metaphor from literature, I knew that a lot of photographers had a wide body of work that was based on short stories, but very few of these talented colleagues had the equivalent of a long story in multimedia format, that could be justified for the new electronic design of the CD ROM.

As the Internet matured we were able to bring audio to the images as well and thus enrich the viewers experience with regard to the photographs. I was able to animate some of my photographer friends to bring their personal narrations to their pictures, much as I had explored with IPTR years earlier. In each of the various instances, the photographers found that their work was enriched through this process.

This allowed us to offer in ZoneZero short stories that were accompanied by their audio narrations. Here is a list of those works that would probably have never been published under the old production formula of the CD ROM:

Lauren Greenfield

<http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/lauren2/portada.html>

Muriel Hasbun

<http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/muriel2/default.html>

Maria Teresa Garcia

<http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/materesa/default.html>

Judy de Bustamante

<http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/judybust/default.html>

Vida Yovanovich

<http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/vida/default.html>

Doifel Videla

<http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/videla/default.html>

Carlos Jurado

<http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/jurado/index.html>

Jesus Quintanar

<http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/quintanar/index.html>

Marco Antonio Cruz

<http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/cruz2/index.html>

Evgen Bavcar

<http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/bavcar/index.html>

In having done what we did, we bridged the technological handicap of those photographers not yet able to do these productions on their own, and we were able to do so at a relatively low cost, thus overcoming the considerably higher investments of a traditional CD ROM; we also brought an efficient form of distribution, on a worldwide basis, by using the inherent traits of the Internet: a world wide network. And lastly, we brought to life numerous works that, as short stories had previously not found the appropriate format for their presentation.

Interestingly enough, Bob Stein, from Voyager days, who was behind the idea of getting me started with this work in the first place (I Photograph to Remember), does not see this transition to

the Internet with much enthusiasm. I quote from a recent letter he sent me: “Frankly I am not especially interested in the transit of IPTR from the CD ROM to web. I consider the move a degradation of the original, not the quality of the images or the narration, but the experience of the viewer, which is now in the thrall of Internet connections and bandwidth issues. I come from a generation, which still likes to "possess" local copies of its intellectual property. I presume that will change in the next decades, but it is the way I feel now”.

Such a statement coming from a “visionary” as he has been called is quite astonishing for me. Had he entertained equivalent hesitations a decade earlier, he probably would not have been involved with the pioneering work that IPTR represented at that time. Especially in a format that was very new then (the CD ROM and the computer screen) and for which critics had little understanding and viewed with what appeared to be equally unacceptable opinions, as those that Bob Stein entertains today with regard to a presentation over the Internet.

For me one of the initial most frustrating experiences of using the CD ROM as a vehicle for publication was the constant problems related to the physical distribution which would render the work inexistent because it was so difficult to find anywhere. At first, very few places would sell a CD ROM, as it did not fit into any traditional category within the channels of distribution, neither books nor music CDs. Later on as the momentum for CD-ROMs grew, entire sections were built within books stores, record stores, department stores, etc. that would carry these new products. At that stage, however, the competition for shelf space became fierce, as tens of thousands of titles came out, and obviously, the shelf space available did not grow in similar proportions. In addition, one had all the problems usually associated with restocking those discs that had been sold. The process would take forever, if done at all.

Nothing to say of what happened in countries other than the United States, where the problems of distribution were exponentially worse.

Just as with the dot.com mania of recent vintage, a decade ago it was the multimedia production craze, every one I knew had started a multimedia production house, garage or loft. When all of a sudden, with the advent of the Internet the market collapsed for CD-ROMS, and all those stores that used to sell them, stopped doing so altogether. In their place, on line stores such as Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble, became the ideal solution to sell the works of those that continued to produce after the debacle. The model for distribution had become much more efficient than at any previous time before. However, Voyager also missed the boat at that time, not recognizing the importance of the Internet as a vehicle for production and distribution, notwithstanding that they had early on a very solid web site.

The problem of shelf space, reordering and carrying inventory was at long last resolved in ways unimagined earlier. If someone now wanted to buy a CD ROM, they could comfortably go to those addresses on the Internet knowing that it was always possible to find what he or she was looking for. The drawback that remained however was still the production of the CDROM itself.

I suspect that for someone like Bob Stein, the main objection that he found for bringing IPTR to the Internet was that if successful, it could possibly undermine his economic model based on selling the object. As with so many other aspects that are constantly being challenged in the digital era, I can easily imagine that both options will live side by side (the objects and the internet), and as time matures they can become more efficient depending on what their respective formats have to offer.

There are definitely productions best suited for a CD ROM, and in the future DVD. In fact I think that a large portion of the excellent



works that Voyager published under Bob Stein's guidance were always more appropriate for a CD ROM, but then quite a few others would have been better served had they been directed to towards the Internet early on.

But why are we talking about such matters of technology and distribution, in the context of a body of work so closely related to poetry? The only reason I can come up with, is that in this age of transition, where digital solutions are constantly evolving, we are in need to evaluate all that has something to do with how our content is affected. After all, we do not create in a vacuum, we produce and we address our creative energies hopefully in the direction of that which is plausible. We need to understand how these technological changes influence that which can be produced.

In this context several things have become clear to me. The computer screen will in time become so ubiquitous that it will no longer draw much attention to itself, and people will no longer bring their initial prejudices to bear on viewing our work on such displays. If the content is to be delivered in an efficient manner, and thus the screen rendered transparent the only thing remaining will be the nature of the content itself.

With this objective in mind, we have been able to observe now over several years, how the audiences that came to ZoneZero expressed their views towards receiving short stories such as the ones we have produced delivered over the Internet. Their approval seems to bear out our theory that the experience is a satisfactory one.

The pioneering work that *I Photograph to Remember* represented will have come full circle, having been the initial project that gave it's genesis to ZoneZero, this site is today the host that brings this specific work to a world wide audience over the Internet.

Pedro Meyer  
Mexico City  
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