



Jinan, China 2006
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A Changing World

After three months of traveling around the world, I find myself sitting on board of the plane on the last leg of the journey from Frankfurt to Mexico City.

This has been a trip that has taken me to many parts of the world, different cultures, and an immense array of visions. I have learned how much we are all alike and then also how different we really are from one country to the other. However, the issues of globalization are certainly a reality that will not be changing course, on the contrary, I think it will increase at an ever faster pace, notwithstanding all the concerns that are expressed all over the world. We are told that our worldly realities, as we know them today, are going to change more over the next ten years, than they did over the past one hundred years. I read this over the Internet, directly from a seat on board the airplane, and I send an email to a friend commenting on the above.



1500 year old Jiming Temple in Jinan, China, with Mickey Mouse.
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I have also come closer to issues such as pollution. I always thought that the air pollution in Mexico City was pretty bad, that is, until I reached China (Pingyao to be more precise), it made the air pollution in Mexico City look tame in comparison. But then breathing the air in Finland, towards the end of my trip, made me realize what purity of air really meant.

In Jinan (population 5.5 million), in China, the air was a dense fog which made breathing a real exercise in overcoming pollution, strangely enough, a young woman in her early twenties who was a student at the University and spoke quite good English and who was our guide and interpreter, could not quite understand what it was that I was talking about when addressing the issue of pollution.



Qufu, China 2006
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At first I thought that the problem we had in understanding each other was one of language, where the term pollution was not quite understood by her, until I realized that she had no reference, having never traveled beyond her city, a place that for the last twenty years has had very high levels of such air pollution.



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She had nothing to compare it to. The fact that the air she breathed could or would be any different, was not something that made much sense to her, it had always been like that.

Notwithstanding such realities, the Chinese authorities are planting trees and gardens as if the air already had the purity of that in Finland and as if gardening was a fashion statement, pointing obviously in the direction that over time they will probably resolve their need for clean air (the official declarations are that the problem of pollution in China will be resolved over the coming decade). I can well imagine this will happen earlier than in Mexico City.



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The evidence that digital photography is now in the mainstream was evident in every corner of the earth we visited. I truly wonder where all those cameras that used film have gone to, as I never saw more than ten cameras with film in all the months of traveling, however, I did see thousands upon thousands of tourists all over the world with digital cameras.



Nanjing, China 2006
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In Finland, home to the world's largest cell phone manufacturer, NOKIA, we discovered an astonishing fact. Guess who is today the largest camera manufacturer in the world? Yes, you guessed correctly. It is NOKIA. They sold over the last twelve months more cameras on cell phones, than all the sales of stand-alone digital cameras and film-based cameras combined. Talk about changes in the world, during the 1960's one branch of Nokia was a major rubber manufacturer, and it hit on the idea of making brightly colored rubber boots at a time when boots followed the Henry Ford principle - you could have any color, so long as it was black! They went from making rubber boots to become the largest camera manufacturer in the world.



Helsinki, Finlandia 2006
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Kodak was then the leading brand of photographic products in the world. Today the market value of Kodak is around 7 billion (US \$). While Apple Computer, which was only a fledgling garage operation in 1975, is worth today 70 billion (US \$), in other words, ten times the market value of Kodak. That is how things can turn around in ways that we could have hardly imagined. Google Corporation which was only founded until 1996, has a market valuation today of 152 billion (US \$). Twenty two times what Kodak is worth at this moment (December 2006).



Shanghai, China 2005
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China, during Mao's Great Leap Forward from 1958 to 1962, lost 30 million people who perished due to hunger. However, since that period it has turned around to become the factory to the globe, and as a result developed into one of the largest economies in the world.

Strangely enough, all these changes are intimately linked to the emergence of digital technologies. Those corporations whose fortunes ebbed (Kodak) as well as those that have emerged to create new paradigms (Apple, Google) are a good example; those who believe that China's development was solely because of cheap labor, ignore how much digital technologies played a role in their success.

Both Hasselblad and Leica went bankrupt and today under new management have started to bring out new digital cameras to replace the traditional film based models. I believe the cycle from analog to digital has now been fulfilled all over the world. Of course we are only at the beginning of this profound transformation, and the excitement is about to begin.



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Already next year, cell phones with 5 mega pixel cameras doing still images and video will be available, and the list goes on. My laptop from Apple takes photographs and does video, as if it was the most natural thing to expect from a computer. We can of course publish all of this instantly over the Internet, and even more surprising, to me at least, is that Google can actually find all of this material in seconds.

In closing, as the year also comes to an end, at ZoneZero we want to thank you for your continued support in keeping this site as one of your preferred places to visit for information about photography in this era from analog to digital. We want to reward your loyalty and interest with two special gifts, which are totally free to you with no strings attached, other than your entire satisfaction.

- You can download a complete PDF book by mexican photographer Raul Ortega. An absolutely unique book with an introduction by Elena Poniatowska (bilingual versions Spanish/English). With 80 pages of photographs and text. The title is “de fiesta” traditional celebrations in Chiapas.

<http://zonezero.com/magazine/e-book/ortega01eng.pdf>

- The other gift to you is a wonderful 52 page PDF magazine “FOTOPHILE” (issue # 51) published by Orville Robertson out of Long Island, NY, USA. This publication is available only in English... sorry folks! But it is rich in content and wonderful images, if you are not yet familiar with this publication, you will really like it.

http://zonezero.com/magazine/e-magazine/Fotophile_51.pdf

Finally, on behalf of the entire staff at ZoneZero and myself, let me extend to you our best wishes for a continued partnership in exploring the marvelous opportunities that lie ahead for all those interested in photography.



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