

## How did you Learn Photography?



The Kodaslide Table Viewer, Model IA, Kodak Data Book © 1950

### By Pedro Meyer

We all have different stories of how we learned about photography. Many were dependent on where you lived and also what financial resources you could count on. I was living in Mexico City and there was no place you could learn formally about photography, fifty years ago.

That led me to subscribe to a correspondence course by the New York Institute of Photography, and therefore I taught myself. I still have those manuals, which when one looks back upon them today, they really are as poorly written and conceived as my recollection of how hard they were to follow at the time.

The entire process of photography was technically very complicated, the process of receiving by mail the courses was a lengthy one and by no means inexpensive.

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The acquisition of equipment was a nightmare in an era when the notions of world commerce had not yet taken on the fluidity of our contemporary world. Neither people or merchandise traveled as freely then as it does today. Think of a world of only propeller planes, radio, telegraph, and no Fedex.

I was a young kid who just wanted to see his photographic images not spend countless hours as a chemist, but that was not to be, I had to first spend days chasing chemicals all over town, going by bus to all the various places that sold them, coming home and then mixing them up properly to develop the film which had been hopefully exposed correctly, something not necessarily assured without the aid of a light meter, all of this in the hopes of finally being able to see a first stage of the image.

The world was not organized to make things simple. The courses took weeks to arrive between one and the next. My English was not too fluent so many things were, aside all the bad pedagogic notions of teaching in those manuals, a problem onto itself. Trying to find the correct translation to Spanish for some of the chemicals or the items described in the manuals was one of the things that befuddled me then. Today I look back upon all that, and I think it was an obstacle course in persistence more than anything to do with the art of photography.

Along rolls 2003 and we have the Internet, and people from all over the world have access today from anyplace they happen to live, to information one could only dream of fifty years ago. But this time and in this instance, the information is being brought to you from Mexico City. No longer are the traditional photographic power centers (New York-Paris-London) the only places from which the flow of information can emanate, it can come from anywhere.

As an interesting aside: if you place in your google.com search engine: "from analog to digital" you will have zonezero come up as number one, out of 1,990,000 searches; if you put "digital photography" it will come up as #10 out of 2,260,000 searches, even ahead of that great stalwart of photography: Kodak. So this tells you something of how the flow of information is changing in this era of the internet. Did I ever believe that we would have the potential to reach out to people all over the world, standing in that very same spot from where I was receiving those New York Institute of Photography correspondence courses fifty years earlier? of course not.

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Enclosed find what we consider to be a quite impressive [list of letters](#) from literally across the planet, both from professors and students alike, making observations about their use of ZoneZero as a teaching tool.

Let me point out, two particular instances of our relationship with such aspects of education. One was the thesis by King Tong Ho, from New Zealand, who asked me to be one of his thesis examiners for his Master of Fine Arts degree at the Auckland University of Technology. We were so impressed with the quality of his work, that we in time turned his work into an exhibition here in ZoneZero, and the document into a PDF that can be downloaded, and it has become one of the most accessed documents.

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

A more recent surprise, along these same lines of a thesis, was by a young Chinese photographer Jia Xiao who sent us his work amidst the SARS epidemic in his city of Nanjing.



We enclose the full document he sent us, in a [downloadable PDF document \(588 Kb\)](#). Below is an excerpt, albeit not legible to us, because it is in Chinese characters, however, we still can appreciate the references made to ZoneZero in western characters, and therefore we extend him our appreciation.

# How did you Learn Photography?

影作品也可以得到别人的打分和评价。

[www.zonezero.com](http://www.zonezero.com)

通过知名艺术家主页链接，可以看到这个网站的名字。它是数字摄影先锋，墨西哥裔摄影家 Pedro Meyer 主持的摄影网站 ZoneZero。ZoneZero 是 Pedro 先生献给未来摄影的礼物<sup>4</sup>。它探讨的问题 from analog to digital photography<sup>3</sup>。这个摄影网站为什么在因特网世界中如此享誉圣名？这与网站拥有的原创资料有关。Pedro Meyer 先生摄影经验丰富，同时又是一个出色的作家和哲学家。尽管他声称没有学过摄影，但是他是拉丁美洲最有声望的摄影家之一，并且是世界第一位将自己的摄影作品——《Truths and Fiction》刻入光盘作为出版物的摄影家。ZonerZero 每个月都以封面文章的形式刊登 Pedro 先生的文章，文章大多数探讨任何有关摄影的话题，其中很多探讨数字革命给摄影和世界带来的影响的文章。选题朴素，但论述富含哲理。值得每一位摄影人思考。另外，网上摄影展览也是 ZoneZero 的重要组成部分。在网站的 gallery 栏目中，经常可以看到世界各地最一流的摄影家的最新作品，同样，照片画廊还可以以不同的分类方式查询你感兴趣的摄影家和摄影作品。此外，网站还独具特色的出售 PDF 格式摄影书籍，这是开数字摄影书籍先河，成为为网站资金来源的另外一种方式。

In closing let us remind you that learning about photography has become easier, and photography itself has become a lot more fun than it used to be. The possibility to concentrate on image making (which will help us become great story tellers) seems to be more important than those other activities such as the chemistry, physics or optics, which granted a great deal of satisfaction to some people, and today have been supplanted by issues related to the computer.

Learning about photography has never been more exciting and more fun, and more accessible, with the technological changes upon us, we have become a generation were suddenly we have all become students again. Even those who are the professors, they are presumably learning as they go, only a few steps ahead of their students, not more. And they have to keep it up all the time, as there is no let up, gone are the days when you learned once and applied that know-how for the rest of your life.

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Of course I am referring to technological matters, as issues related to culture, that will remain with us for the ages. The interesting thing of course is the new mixture of cultures and technology, as the world is offering a cultural diversity through the internet that is unheard of anytime before. These combinations have yet to find their way into mainstream photographic printed literature and curricula.

In this respect we are also contributing with some healthy questioning of the basic tenets of the photographic establishment and the values and merits of the dominant culture. Just by the fact that the center of gravity no longer emanates solely, from the traditional centers of the photographic establishments, I believe we can develop new ideas around the cultural directions for photography in an era of great transitions.

**Pedro Meyer**

Coyoacan, Mexico

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