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*"The great writer Jorge Luis Borges was once asked what he thought about a certain translation of one of his works, "The original does not do justice to the translation" was his response. Today, Photography, is confronted by Digital Imagery in much the same way".*

Only a few minutes away from having the minute join the hour hand, and both of them turning to the hour zero, as if pointing in prayer towards the new year of 1993, in parallel, the odometer in the car also turned to zeros after displaying 99 999 kilometers. We have these wonderful and basically simple instruments to tell us how far we have gone, both in time and distance. They perform quietly and steadily, day in and day out, until that special moment which informs us of a new marker in the path of our lives. As I age, these changes in the year tell me there is less time ahead of me than there used to be, and as with my car, I also disclose the inevitable passage of time and how use takes its toll. My eyes are not as strong and focused as once they were, the vertebrae in my back are all bent out of shape and hurt after carrying heavy camera bags all my life, and I do get tired more frequently. I don't say this in a complaining mode, these statements are simply facts that I acknowledge for myself. Another such fact irrespective of any choice, and which I acknowledge in order to move on with my life, relates to the inconceivable speed with which technology is altering every single activity that I have been or will be involved with, in the years to come. Complaining about poor eye sight, does nothing to solve the problem, eye glasses do that; complaining about the rapid change of technology will do nothing to restore our placid past, learning about such issues in order to deal with them, might help much more.

The digital revolution, is going to have a much larger impact on the surrounding landscape, than did the internal combustion engine in its time. At stake is the way we produce, distribute and consume, everything related to communications, entertainment, education, travel, management. Photography is only a minute part within this tidal wave of change, and anyone who still harbors doubts whether the new technologies are going to change photography, is ignoring, if you will, the "larger picture."

It's not easy to see oneself age, as it's not easy to find oneself technically obsolete when one thought that a life's experience actually meant something. All of a sudden that which one knew from the accumulated experience of decades, is brought into question by all the innovations spawned by emerging technologies that alter the equation of the how, and the why, of an image. The rules of the past are no longer valid, a new set of values are taking over, and so they should. To our good fortune civilization has the promise of a new renaissance in the making.

It only took six years, to have the IBM corporation come tumbling down from being the world's pre-eminent leader in the world of computer technology, to become a fractured and disintegrating empire. IBM's income used to be larger than the gross national product of several sovereign nations combined. No one in their right mind, at least none of the eight hundred thousand stock holders of the company, considered it even remotely possible that their life savings invested in owning IBM stock, might be so savagely ravaged as was the case over the last few months, when the market value dropped up to 70 % from the level of its better days. This collapse has become a true testimony to the speed with which technology can pronounce obsolete an existing structure, no matter how important and large it used to be. Very few believe that the company has the slightest chance of ever coming back to its vanguard days. What happened? You might ask, and the answer is very basic: arrogance. They truly thought that their economic clout would enable them to hold back the threat from emerging technologies that would have forced them to change their traditional way of doing business, it only took six years

to prove that they couldn't.

Apart from the 100 000 employees that IBM had to let go over the past 24 months, they now have to fire an additional 25 000 people, nothing to say of all the plants, and research laboratories now programmed to be closed. When I hear such statistics, I can't get over the fact that so many photographers still question the fact that their livelihood is going to be affected by advanced technologies.

Lets face a few facts just as we had to do when confronted with the issue of age. We have to go back to school once again; there is no way around this if one is intent on remaining active in the world of image making. It's daunting I admit, to find the time needed to re-train oneself, but that, I'm afraid, is only the beginning. The lesson we can derive from observing IBM's debacle, is that trying to maintain "business as usual" will work only for a few years, after which it's going to be increasingly harder to play catch up with those that are ahead in the game.

Those entertaining the idea that acquiring the needed skills to face the technological revolution, can be accomplished without some major adjustment, are only deceiving themselves. Not only are there serious considerations with regard to the investments required, such as, time to learn on one side, and monetary resources for equipment on the other, but an even greater challenge is associated with the conceptual approach to ones work. One needs to rethink visual solutions vis-a-vis all the new possibilities of solving the ever present puzzle of form and content.

No longer are we held back in our creative solutions by the historic limitations placed upon us by chemistry and optics. The result is that we have new levels of creativity to reach for, and impressive as this might be, it only represents the beginning. The power of what is possible within the digital revolution increases by a factor of 100% every 18 month.

The changes we are thinking off, deal not only with how images are made, but how these will be placed into circulation as well. The historic notions of what we can do with pictures in order to either sell them, exhibit them or whatever the photographer has in mind, will be totally overturned before we reach the year 2000. The traditional formats will obviously not vanish, we shall continue to have books, magazines, gallery walls, etc., but these options will now be enlarged to include digital formats unknown until now, these conduits enable a faster, cheaper, and quite effective ways of distributing information, among these we can find CD-ROM disks, fiber optic networks, satellite transmission, cable networks, flash memory cards, compression technology, and so on. Every month one can find news with yet another twist and turn that allows for a more effective way of having digital information flow faster and cheaper, between the creator and the end user.

It used to be that the photographer, either working for someone or for him or herself, only represented a peg within a large cogwheel, with the photographers role clearly delineated. There were exceptions as when a photographer would venture beyond such lines, by including his or her text as a story to go with the images made, or when the photographer would participate in the layout or design of the work itself. These latter examples being more an exception than the rule, will probably become in the near future, more of a rule than the exception.

The reason seems quite simple to envisage. The access to the main markets for images, that photographers all over the world will have, will increase exponentially over the coming decades. This potential glut of images ( any time you read the word glut you can rest assured that it also

involves reduction in price) available to those buying for any publication, will be directly related to the greater ease with which any photographer can place his or her archive on line for direct access and review by those interested in acquiring images, half way across the world. There is going to be an unending spring of images that up to now were not available, and which will be brought forward all of a sudden. Those living in or near the vicinity of major markets will no longer have so much of an advantage over those working far away. As an example, just think of the dozens of first class photographers in Mexico City who at present do not have their work accessible to potential buyers in such markets. And how in the near future one will see all these photographers empowered to show their work with relative ease for both the buyer and seller, anywhere in the world. What is true for the photographic community in Mexico City, can be said, just the same, for any other group in the world, the potential for establishing contact with such talents anywhere, will inevitably lead to an erosion of the competitive advantage of those who were closest to the market. In the near future the photographer will have to deliver more than just the pictures in order to remain competitive. Those photographers that do not retrain will only be able to deliver images as "raw material" for others to transform and use, and we know from history all too well, how those who only delivered raw materials were treated: to say the least, not very well.

As we collectively face technological obsolescence, we should know that all photographers will have for a limited time only, a level playing field. The challenges that need to be met for retraining, are the same regardless of where the photographer comes from, be that San Francisco or Calcutta. A photographer working today in New York does not have that much more knowledge about the digital revolution as a photographer at the other end of the Continent, in Buenos Aires. Every one is in need of learning about the changing realities, and in that sense we're all faced with the same challenges as well as opportunities.

Interestingly enough, richer countries already have a certain built in advantage, with their more developed infrastructure, but this is a blessing in disguise, as developing nations will be able in the future to leap frog towards the latest technological breakthrough, landing with even better and more modern infrastructures than their wealthier neighbors. At the rate of technological innovations, it's almost impossible to predict what the exact scenario might be, however we can be sure that if we don't keep up with events and are knowledgeable about what is going on, instead of us making the needed decision for our well being, someone else will be doing it, and not necessarily to our benefit.

One almost inevitable outcome of all these changes has to do with a vertical integration of photographers' present day activities. Until very recently very few of us had even a clue of what a color separation consisted of, or for that matter how a half tone could be achieved to arrive at a good printed image, these were topics better left to the printer. Today, photographers, are beginning to deliver, instead of a set of pictures as in days past, a color separation or a half tone, and in so doing bypassing altogether the delivery of the print or transparency. Photographers will be able to edit their own publications in ways never before possible when the medium for distribution was the printed book. Digital video will become increasingly the means to capture images, and in so doing the territory for the photographer will expand. No longer will the photographer be circumscribed to a static still image. The moving picture will enter increasingly into the realm of the photographer's domain, and in so doing bring along the need to understand sound. Photographers will be capable of doing in video what before was essentially undertaken only by television crews, thereby altering the concept of reportage and whom it is done by, all of this will take on new meanings and so will the needs and realities of the clients that a photo agency or the photographer will have to deal with.

I've been considered to be a fairly good printer of my own work, so it was with great interest when I unpacked a recent exhibition of my images that had just returned from a two year tour. I was eager to compare a particularly difficult to print image done on a silver based emulsion photographic paper and one that I had recently produced with the aid of the computer and new digital technologies. A process that allows me to have absolute control over each single grain in the image, something unthinkable within the traditional chemical process. The outcome was so astounding when I compared the two, that I felt embarrassed with the terrible silver print I had produced earlier on and allowed to travel. In working with the tools I now have at my disposal, I'm able to reproduce what earlier had always eluded me. The wealth of a tonal range and the possibility to adjust every last detail to my own liking without making any concessions is something that does not cease to amaze me, especially when I compare the output. This was the first time that I had seen the same image produced in their two different technological moments. It was like comparing an old 78 rpm record to a new digital stereo CD recording.

I haven't used a dark room for the last two years, given that I'm only printing with a dye sublimation process or with an ink jet printer, (when I print with the ink jet unit, no longer do I use photographic paper, instead I use the traditional artist's paper such as the French Arches) the quality of the prints is so much richer than anything that I have ever done before, that I find it unthinkable to ever return to the darkroom. I'm one of those who used to work in the dark room enjoying the process very much, so I imagine how ecstatic anyone who didn't like working in the darkroom might be.

This issue of digital image making brings to a head, among many other topics, one that is particularly interesting to almost everyone in the world of culture, namely that of representing "reality." It has become increasingly clear that we can now alter an image at will, by including or excluding whatever meets our fancy, both before or after having made the picture. The interesting situation that emerges from all of this, is that documentary photography which all along was considered such a bastion of "integrity" when it came to representation, given that there was a negative as proof of something, is now an issue which is fading from the scene very fast. I for one, never thought that photography should have been burdened with this aura of being a reliable representation of reality, especially since it never was true. All too many photographers have used this fragile misrepresentation to fool the public into believing that their documentary images were that: a document, when in fact they were not.

LAWSUITS

## The French Kiss

**F**rench photographer Robert Doisneau's classic 1950 shot of Parisians kissing has now inspired lawsuits. A middle-aged couple say they're the featured pair—caught unawares—and are suing for \$100,000 because Doisneau denies it. Doisneau says he used models and that he has negatives to prove it. But that has spawned another suit. Françoise Bornet, an actress, claims *she* was the female model and has demanded \$20,000. Bornet says her husband is embarrassed by seeing her "immortalized" with a former lover. Doisneau's photo agency says Bornet's claim "is quite possible." ■

### Litigated lips: Doisneau photo



<http://www.zenozero.com/magazine/articles/meyer2/meyer02.html>