

To Converge or not to Converge... that is the Question

By Blair Evan Ball

Many of us were transfixed to our TV sets in 1963 as we heard the infamous sound of the Zapruder 8mm film being played back on the death of J.F. Kennedy. For those of us old enough to remember...I guess I don't recall that, but I'm told about it by some of my peers. Anyway, digital technology continues to push the envelope leaving many a photographer to ponder where all this might take us. Does anyone really know?

Let's talk about the future by looking at the past. Five years ago, digital cameras were finally coming into their own, with good quality and good images. At that time, there were people still clinging to the belief that film would never be replaced by digital. I think the same discussion is happening now with stills and video. The future is not one or the other, it is both.

High-speed video allows consumers the opportunity to see things they could not see before with the naked eye. There's also a term for it in the output, merging stills and video into one result is now called **"fusion"**. Think back those five years ago and there barely even a thought of something like YouTube (note: it launched in 2005) and now look at the use of video by just about everyone and the growth is stunning. Video used to be expensive. Video used to be only for those who could afford expensive equipment. Now, you can buy a Flip for \$200 and record 720 HD video anytime, anywhere.

Software programs can create video from stills, and pull stills from video. With the high speed still capabilities of this camera, and the HD video capability as well, do you think the line is being blurred between still photography and video?

It's true that photography has "lost" some major figures to brief or long intervals when they've been distracted by film. Henri Cartier-Bresson was an assistant to Jean Renoir early in his career; Robert Frank and William Klein both devoted long portions of their careers to making mostly forgettable films.

Then again, a number of fine directors started out as still photographers—Stanley Kubrick, Ken Russell, Arthur Penn, Zhang Yimou, Gordon Parks. None of those save Parks kept going as both. So who knows? Maybe some great directors of tomorrow will "find themselves" in the video capability of their still cameras, and go on to great things. In fact, it's probably inevitable—it will happen, at least in a few cases.

Most of us have gone from being a "film photographer" to being a "digital photographer". In the future will our persona be a "still photographer", "videographer" or something yet to be determined?

Imagine with me for a moment that all DSLR's in the future will have video capability with most being HD. No need for a mechanical shutter, a recycling memory buffer to constantly record images at speeds of 100+fps. The photographer finds moments in time and space and freezes them to share with others.

You then utilize software to take a slice out of the video and convert it to a still picture! Whether we are still photographers or videographers, we are at the core *story tellers*.

Let's take another journey into what the future might hold with this convergence. Electronic paper has been talked about and is a reality today. This is a malleable plastic sheet as thin and flexible as paper that is capable of displaying changeable text and images. Now imagine a newspaper or a magazine where the pages are made of electronic paper and where the content is transmitted and updated wirelessly.

The Amazon Kindle electronic book is one such device – an opening salvo if you will. Ultimately we will have multiple screen pages instead of just one, and in colour and with motion instead of B&W and just text. If you can visualize such a magazine / book / device, now think about what its content would be like.

Imagine if you will one of our gallery showings in the year 2012 where instead of a glossy still image of a river stream in the Smoky Mountains you actually have a mini-video. It looks like a still image, but swipe your finger on the page, or leave the page open for more than a few seconds, and a motion video versions begins to display.

It will be forward-thinking photographers who can visualize how these new media will converge, and who will in turn invent the new visual language that will be needed while utilizing the exciting tools that are on their way.