

"Why the future (of imaging) is digital"

By Pedro Meyer



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Yesterday was mother's day, and the children in the school where my son attends had the usual gathering to offer all their mothers the due homage they deserve.

As these gatherings usually go, they are quite staged by the teachers who have spent countless hours preparing for such a special occasion. The children have learned to make gifts over the previous months, as well as learn songs in music class, all of these efforts come together for that special mother's day concert.

I have always taken my video camera, and my still picture camera (both digital), to register "for posterity" such a momentous event in the family history. In our case, it also coincided with the loss of Julio's first tooth. I am not the only one with such tools to register the event. Every mother there had brought her own camera or camcorder, as would be expected. The classroom was filled with cameras.

But then something happened, that I consider was very different from other such moments that I could recall. The children, without any prompting on the part of the adults, started to pick up the cameras and started to do the filming or photographing on their own.



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Some years ago, Francis Ford Coppola, when interviewed about his ideas with regard to the development of camcorders and their impact on cinema, said: " One day we shall see the work by a young little girl from Ohio, who will change the way we approach cinema". This quote, which is more or less exact, stuck in my head for years, so when I saw the image of these children in my sons classroom filming on their own, I immediately took a picture thinking that here was the idea of what Coppola envisaged.

Children are using these tools, which are so easy to use that any child can do it. But above all, they are having so much fun doing it. They are struck by the instant feedback that digital cameras provide. This ingredient of instantaneity alters the relationship to the process entirely. It is harder for a five or six year old to grasp the image making process, when it is made on film. The time lapse between taking the image, and then getting it back in a print, when traditional film formats are used, is way too long for a child to apprehend in a meaningful way.

If children are stimulated to use visual literacy from their earliest moments in life, this will become part of their tool kit with which they can communicate their own ideas. To have children discover the nature of images is only a natural extension of what are other forms of learning and expression.



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The prices for digital cameras are coming down at a continuous pace, with the added benefit that no further costs are involved, no film, no printing, etc. And still the images can be shared over the Internet in electronic format.

This notion of the importance of instant feedback and how that can alter forever all that is being photographed and recorded on tape, should not be underestimated. We should remember how cinematography changed forever, with a very simple but significant act, the day that D.W. Griffith took the camera off the tripod mount, and started to alter the angle from where the picture was shot.

Something similar happened in photography with the advent of the Leica camera, which introduced 35 mm "miniature" photography. This camera invented in 1914 by Oscar Barnack and then made available commercially in 1925, brought new flexibility to photography and altered from then on, all contemporary photography.



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It dealt a telling blow to the pictorial school by enabling photographers to see commonplace everyday object in new and bolder perspectives, and it gave a new freedom in treating shapes and forms in space. The miniature camera especially changed the photojournalistic endeavor.

Today children want to use digital cameras, it is the teachers however, that need to take the first bold steps in this direction. I have full understanding that they might be overwhelmed by the issues and technologies involved, and many times the lack of budgets with which to deal with their most immediate needs. I am certain however that these problems will be resolved sooner rather than later, if for no better reason that I can see that private corporations are going to discover that they need to provide all the needed support for these educational activities to bloom.

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Yes, photography has already been transformed by the presence of digital technologies, so as the ever-younger generations become part of this transformation, we will discover ever-new directions for image making.

Much as the pictorial school of yesteryear was caught off guard by the changes introduced by the 35 mm camera, so will the traditionalists of today find that our present day youngsters armed with digital cameras will have an entire new world to offer us. Francis Ford Coppola, was right.



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