



We are reminded that “today the real has become the new avant-garde” by Nicholas

Rombes.

The irony is that as digital technologies are used to deliver ever greater special effects and fantasies, there is an alternative tendency to use digital video cameras not to transform reality into some special effect, but rather to describe the world with increased realism.

In a sense as Mr Rombes points out, the new aesthetics - evident in recent movies shot with digital cameras, such as ["Ten" \(Abbas Kiarostami, 2002\)](#) , ["Tape" \(Richard Linklater, 2001\)](#) and

["Time Code" \(Mike Figgis, 2000\)](#)

,
["Russian Ark" \(Aleksandr Sokurov, 2002\)](#)

- rely on a species of strict formalism (the long take, the divided frame, etc) to remind us that reality is the most experimental form of all.

"Russian Ark" constitutes an elaborate continuous 96 minute long take through the Hermitage Museum [only possible to achieve with digital cameras, since no film based camera could run for such a long period with out having to reload film]. "Time Code" is a series of four separate 97 minute long takes simultaneously shown in four quadrants. "Ten" is entirely shot (without the director present) from digital cameras mounted on the dashboard of a car as it is driven through the streets of Teheran. "Tape" take place en-tirely in one hotel room. In a sense, the special effect that the links these digital films to-gether is reality itself; they are considered experimental or avant-garde simply because they lack the jump-cut, speed ramp, freeze frame, CGI aesthetics that now form mass cultural media forms ranging from television commercials, to music videos, to video games, to television shows, to mainstream movies."

When watching the Trilogy of the Lord of the Rings with my nine year old son, Julio, he leaned over to me and asked if all those people marching were real as we were looking at one of those scenes with thousands of marching warriors. Some twenty years ago we would have been amazed to learn that indeed they were special effects. Today we are amazed to learn if such a crowd is, in fact, real. It is reality that astounds us these days.

As I have been traveling around the world these past months, what has astounded me is how universal the trend has been to view the world through the eyes of what has become understood as digital technologies. But these understood for their special effects and not at all for the possibility to view the real, in new ways.

We live in an increasingly fictionalized world. On the one hand we have politicians of every stripe possible, all over the planet, delivering the most preposterous manipulation of reality with words and images (they call them photo ops), and on the other hand we have the conglomerate of news media, from print to television, also on a world wide basis, contributing in no small way to fictionalize reality to the extent that news events are sometimes so deliberately distorted or dramatized that one has a hard time figuring out what was real.

However just as in cinema, digital technologies are coming to the aid in bringing new forms to the medium, we find that in still photography something similar is starting to emerge.

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Written by Pedro Meyer

Photographers who no longer have the need to cater to the demands by the news media conglomerates and their dictates for what can and can not be presented to the public, are starting to find new venues to show their work. In that sense the internet has allowed many such filters to be lifted, thus we can deliver information as close to the facts as that might even be possible.

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