Chapter Fifteen: The Camera Arts

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- Photography
- Film
- Video

Works in Progress
Bill Viola’s Greeting

The Critical Process
Thinking About the Camera Arts: Jeff Wall’s A Sudden Gust of Wind

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This Chapter Will:
- outline the history of photography and photographic processes
- discuss the characteristics and purposes of photography
- identify and illustrate the contribution of color to photography
- discuss the beginnings of film as an artistic medium
- identify and explain filmmaking processes
- discuss the medium of video and its relation to television

KEY TERMS

camera obscura  the “star” system
photogenic drawing  film genres
daguerreotype  auteur
calotype  video art
wet-plate collodion process  Sony Portapak
the “decisive moment”  video installation
Polaroid SX-70
editing
full shot
medium shot
close-up
iris shot
traveling shot
flashback
cross-cutting
montage
LECTURE AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. The Fourth Dimension
Review the previous media chapters in terms of their two-dimensional and three-dimensional characteristics. Introduce the Camera Arts chapter as one that describes a medium that explores yet another dimension—time. Attempt to describe the theory of the fourth dimension pointing out that there is a lot of speculation about what exactly the fourth dimension is. The most logical and most convincing argument there is about the fourth dimension is that time is a convention we use to describe events. Time gives us order and proximity. We use time to say that this happened "first" and this other event happened "almost immediately after" this event. However, unlike length, area, and volume, time does not measure a dimension, but can be represented in art. Walker Evan’s Roadside Store between Tuscaloosa and Greensboro, Alabama (fig. 442), for example, captures one moment in time and space. Discuss other photographs in the chapter as well as paintings (Sasetta’s Meeting of Saints Anthony and Paul, fig. 214) and sculpture (Calder’s Dots and Dashes, fig. 99) to illustrate the variety of ways time is represented in art.

2. Early Photographic History
Remind students that photography is a relatively new medium. The ancient Greeks were able to capture an image using a type of camera called a camera obscura, but it was not until the 19th century that the necessary chemistry made it possible to retain an image on a light sensitive surface. To facilitate an understanding of the camera and the process of making a photograph emphasize the relationship between a human eye and the camera. Explain the different types of supports, such as glass and metal, and the tedious (and time-consuming) chemical processes used for creating early photographs in the 19th century. Many early inventors were able to temporarily capture an image, but it was the French inventor Joseph Niepce who is credited with having made (and kept) the first image on a light sensitive surface—a photograph. In 1826, his View from His Window at Gras took eight hours to expose. Another Frenchman Louis Daguerre perfected Niepce’s process, significantly reducing the exposure time from hours to minutes. Daguerre announced his photographic process to the world in 1839, which ultimately transformed the art world. His one-of-a-kind photographs made it possible for anyone to have the likeness of themselves and their family preserved. The only disadvantage of what Daguerre modestly called the Daguerreotype was that it could not be reproduced. A few years later, though, Englishman William Henry Fox Talbot invented the Calotype, a negative image, which allowed multiples to be made. Illustrate the significance of these early photographers and their photographic processes using Daguerre’s Le Boulevard du Temple (fig. 445), Richard Beard’s Maria Edgeworth (fig.446), and Talbot’s Mimosoidea, Acacia (fig.444).

Discuss how the invention of photography was not well received by painters. Many portrait and landscape artists felt their careers were doomed, due to photography’s capability of representing the world. Ironically, photographers, such as Julia Margaret Cameron (see fig. 448), interested in the artistic potential of the medium used techniques such as deliberately shooting an image out-of-focus, to make their photographs appear
more painterly. It was not until Alfred Steiglitz (see fig. 451 and his The Steerage) in the early 20th century that photography becomes accepted as a legitimate fine art form.

3. Truths and Photography
Of all the arts, perhaps none seem to have more elements of realism and objectivity than film, video, and photography. And, because photography can make an objective record of the world, it has many uses besides art. In fact, photography has been put to more uses than any other fine art medium. Have students discuss their experience with cameras and photography. How many of them own cameras? What kinds? Have they ever purchased a disposable camera just to “capture a moment?” What kinds of photographs do they take? Family? Vacation? Ceremonies? Have them explain the importance of photography in their lives.

The photograph’s potential to capture an objective record is fundamental to documentary photography. O’Sullivan’s Harvest of Death (fig.449) and Green River (fig.450) document two very different types of imagery. One, the aftermath of the Gettysburg Battle during the American Civil War, and the other the pristine American landscapes. Have students discuss the role of the photographer and the photograph posing the question: Are all photographs truthful?

Discuss the artistic qualities of photography, emphasizing that we often look to art for subjective expression, and we seek in photography for subjective choices from the formless stream of events. Charles Sheeler, a leader of a 20th century art movement called Precisionism (due to its clean, crisp, and clear painting style) created photographs that expressed more aesthetic than documentary concerns. Sheeler’s Criss-Crossed Conveyors—Ford Plant (fig.452) and Alfred Steiglitz’s From the Shelton, New York (fig. 451) emphasize formal elements over documentary concerns. Ask students to explain the differences between the aims of Sheeler and Steiglitz to those of Eddie Adams? Can an “art” photograph be journalistic or function as an historical document? Discuss the social role of photography and journalism using Adams and the work of Margaret Bourke-White (Louisville Flood Victims, fig. 455).

A photograph has the potential of capturing reality, however, the reality it portrays is often highly fabricated. Discuss the manipulative aspects of photography using Lucas Samaras’s Photo Transformation (fig. 459), Cindy Sherman’s Untitled #96 (fig. 746), or Andreas Gursky’s 99 Cent (fig.460) photographs. Show examples from other photographers, such as Jerry Uelsmann or Sandy Skoklund to illustrate alternate types of represented realities. Ask students if these photographs are authentic representations of truth.

4. Color Photography
Joel Meyerowitz is an internationally known photographer who has published numerous books of color photographs as well as a book on the history of street photography. Discuss color photography using the photographs of Joel Meyerowitz (figs. 456-458). As an early advocate of color photography, Meyerowitz was instrumental in changing the attitude toward the use of color from one of resistance to revelation. Refer to page 331 to
the artist’s quote concerning Meyerowitz’s interest in color photography. For more information, go to the Joel Meyerowitz website http://www.joelmeyerowitz.com/ to view additional photographic series, including his most recent After September 11: Images From Ground Zero.

5. Film
Describe how moving pictures and experiments in stop-action photography contributed to the development of film. Show clips from Surrealist artist Fernand Léger’s Ballet Mecanique (fig.461) to illustrate how artists were attracted to moving pictures. Cinema brought a new level of psychological narrative into photography, with editors playing an important artistic role. In cinema, the editor plays a vital part, interpreting the director’s point of view, but seeing the film from the audience’s standpoint too. Cutting from one shot to another and to tell the story is the key to narrative continuity, which is almost the opposite of real time. To actually see the work of a film editor one must run the film without sound and concentrate on the cuts that shift the viewpoint of the camera. All photography, even still photographs, imply a story, but in cinema, images are linked by the editor into sequences that dramatize the story. Show a long sequence from any film (Alfred Hitchcock is a great example to use—the chase scenes in North by Northwest or the shower scene in Psycho) and ask students to imagine themselves as the camera. Have them identify the editing techniques, as well as the variety of camera shots (close-ups, long shots, medium shots) and angles (aerial, worm’s eye, eye level). Have students discuss how the arrangement of the filmed sequences and the use of angles and shots contribute (or take away from) that narrative of the film.

6. Popular Hollywood Cinema
Editors have the capability of representing different kind of time within the film. Flashbacks and crosscutting, for example, may be utilized to enhance the plot of the film. Ask students to recall the last film they viewed and how time was represented. The average actual time it takes to watch a movie is two to three hours, yet the time that is represented within the film may be 2 days or two years. Consider Andy Warhol’s films Sleep, Empire (fig. 464), or Eat as representations of both “reel” as well as “real” time. Warhol’s Sleep is eight hours long and simply shows a man sleeping. Connect the concept of duration, as discussed in the previous chapter with performance art, in relationship to this kind of film.

Warhol’s avant-garde films fall outside the popular Hollywood narrative film genre. For many film directors, such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Federico Fellini, and Jean-Luc Godard, story structure became less important than attempting to create a kind of non-narrative and psychological cinema using complex camera work (see Antonioni’s Blow-Up still, fig. 469). Antonioni is a writer and painter who has published novels such as That Bowling Alley on the Tiber and a painting collection The Enchanted Mountain. He does not see writing and painting as alien to film, but rather, that they are "a study of the way we observe." Antonioni is usually described as an independent filmmaker, a relatively recent phenomenon. For the first part of the 20th century, Hollywood held a monopoly on the film industry, controlling both production and distribution of films. If a director wanted to make a film, he/she had to subscribe and often compromise their ideas
to fit the philosophy of the studio, which, ultimately, was about making money. It wasn’t until the 1960s that independent filmmakers were able to freely express their ideas independently from the Hollywood-controlled industry. Discuss how art cinema is different from Hollywood cinema explaining how director like Antonioni is considered an auteur, a French term used to describe a director with a particularly recognizable style who controls all aspects of their films—from conception to post-production. Ask students if they can name other auteurs such as Alfred Hitchcock, Woody Allen, Spike Lee, and Quentin Tarantino, all of whom also star or cameo in their signature films.

7. Video
Most students are familiar with commercial television, but not many are familiar with the works of video artists. Ask students if they can name any video artist and you are likely to hear names associated with music videos. Inform students that the standard visual techniques used in music videos have their genesis with the Korean born artist Nam June Paik. Considered the George Washington of video art, Paik has employed aspects of video in his works since the 1960s. His first video, Global Groove, was created in 1957, the same year Sony introduced its first video camera, The Portapak. His TV Buddha (fig. 471) and TV Bra for Living Sculpture (fig.472) are excellent examples of Paik’s aim to humanize technology. Other works by Paik have consisted of huge video billboards such as, Route 66 BBS, which is choreographed to pulse and flow with an accompanying soundtrack. Have students visit the website http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/ to view more works by Paik.

CRITICAL THINKING: More Opportunities to Think About Art
Several artworks are detailed in the Critical Thinking and Works in Progress features found in this chapter. In addition, diverse opportunities for studying these works are located on the Companion Website and Companion CD-ROM.

1. Works in progress: Bill Viola’s The Greeting
Bill Viola’s video, The Greeting (fig 476), is based on a 16th century painting by Pontormo titled The Visitation (fig. 475). Viola’s challenge was to create a video work based on a painting. The Greeting both expresses the passage of time employing the fundamental characteristics of the medium of video itself—time. Show the Works in Progress: Bill Viola video about the making of The Greeting. Engage students in a discussion of the technical aspects of his video and the effectiveness of video as an art form. The Bill Viola website, www.billviola.com/, includes extensive video works, interviews, and bibliography.

2. Thinking about Jeff Wall’s A Sudden Gust of Wind
Many contemporary artists receive inspiration for their work from previous artists such. Jeff Wall, like Viola, relies on 19th century Japanese master printmaker Sakino Hokusai’s Shunshuu Ejiri from the series Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji (fig. 481) for his A Sudden Gust of Wind (fig. 482). Hokusai is known for his ukiyo-e images—pictures from the floating world. Shunshuu Ejiri represents a typical ukiyo-e subject, famous views. The scenario presented in the print is overshadowed by the famed and respected Mount Fuji.
Discuss Wall’s appropriation of the same type of scenario. Have students compare Hokusai’s work with Wall’s to identify the aims of each artist. Ask students how Wall has modernized Hokusai’s work?

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

*Direct students to their Student Study Guide when assigning Writing Assignments as the following assignments are written as instruction for the student and are contained in the guide as they are here.*

1. **Newspaper Editorial**
Students can define and defend a position on a controversial issue in the format of an editorial. Assign any Andy Warhol film for students to watch and have them write an editorial to *The New York Times* in defense of the film.

2. **Film Historian**
Assign an essay to students that surveys early history of film to include all the major players and techniques invented.

3. **Art Critic**
Have students visit the Bill Viola or Nam June Paik website to view exhibitions of their work. Have students write an art review of that exhibition.

**HANDS-ON PROJECTS**

*Direct students to their Student Study Guide when assigning Hands-On Projects as the following assignments are written as instruction for the student and are contained in the guide as they are here. For additional project ideas, remember to investigate the Hands-On Projects found on the Companion Website.*

1. **A World of Art Companion Website Featured Project: Building a Zoetrope**
In order to understand the basic premise of film, have students create their own Zoetrope, a 19th century invention that replicated real life motion though the use of still photographs or drawings. See *A World of Art* Companion Website for detailed instructions and illustrations.

2. **To Tell The Truth**
Have students cut apart 5 (or more) photographs and reassemble them in order to fabricate their own reality.

3. **A Day in the Life**
Have students create a video presentation about the life of a photographer or filmmaker.

4. **Create Your Own Video Art**
Have students create their own video in the style of Bill Viola
5. Documentary Film
Instruct students to use a video camera to document an event on campus. Let each person in the class take turns shooting, and then edit the work. Create a film series to view the documentary.

RESOURCES

A World of Art Companion Website:
Remember to direct students to A World of Art companion website (www.prenhall.com/sayre) to help further their understanding of the materials discussed in this chapter with ideas for completing hands-on projects and exercises. Self-testing materials are also available and offer students the opportunity to evaluate their understanding of the chapter materials in a variety of formats. In addition, links to websites featuring contemporary artists, and museum and gallery exhibitions related to this chapter will enhance discussion and comprehension. Links for this chapter include

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS: Bill Viola has been a pioneer in video installation for many years, and was the 1995 American representative at the Venice Biennale. His exhibition, Buried Secrets featured six large installation pieces, which filled the American Pavilion. Viola produces works that fit a variety of environments, including the World Wide Web. This work was sponsored by the Whitney Museum of Art in New York.

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS: D. W. Griffith. The University of New Orleans Drama and Communications Department manages a fabulous website on Silent films featuring (among others) D. W. Griffith. When you arrive at the site, select DG, and you'll be able to view stills and QuickTime movies of many of Griffith's famous works. A short biography by Diane MacIntyre is provided. MacIntyre's site, The Silent Majority, is also worth a visit.

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS: Light Work is a non-profit, artist-run, photography and imaging center. Since 1973, it has been their goal to support artists working in photography and the related arts through residencies, exhibitions, and publications. Light Work's publications have featured the most creative, innovative, and talked-about artists of our time.

GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS: The California Museum of Photography is at the University of California, Riverside. This site is constantly changing, and features images and text from current and past exhibitions. This is an extremely well designed site with fascinating links.
Other Suggested Websites:

- **A History of Photography** contains an extensive history, from earliest times to the 1920s. Includes information on all significant photographers. [http://www.rleggat.com/photohistory/](http://www.rleggat.com/photohistory/)

- **Masterworks from the History of Photography** is an exhibit from The American Museum of Photography and includes critical ideas such as, what makes a photographic masterpiece? [http://www.photographymuseum.com/mast.](http://www.photographymuseum.com/mast)

- **Masters of Photography: Alfred Stieglitz** at Masters of Photography includes photos, articles and resources. [http://www.masters-of-photography.com](http://www.masters-of-photography.com)

- **Joel Meyerowitz Photography** is a site that has been designed to offer basic support for research and other inquiries into the work of Joel Meyerowitz. The site includes interviews and the artist’s most recent series of photographs titled, *After September 11: Images from Ground Zero*. [http://www.joelmeyerowitz.com/](http://www.joelmeyerowitz.com/)

- **The Andy Warhol Homepage** contains a complete Andy Warhol filmography as well as an all-inclusive catalogue of anything Andy Warhol. [www.warhol.dk/](http://www.warhol.dk/)

- **Nam June Paik** on the Internet features the artwork of Nam June Paik. [http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/](http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/)

- **The Bill Viola** website includes extensive video works, interviews, and bibliography. [www.billviola.com/](http://www.billviola.com/)

Suggested Videos:

*Videos and other resources are available for purchase through any of the distributors listed in the Resources section of this manual.*

- Works in Progress: Bill Viola
- Captured Light: The Invention of Still Photography
- Images Images: On Assignment 2000
- National Geographic: The Photographers
- Life Magazine: Images of Life
- Alfred Steiglitz Photographer
- Henri Cartier Bresson
- Man Ray: Prophet of the Avant Garde
- Ansel Adams: Photographer
- Annie Liebovitz: Celebrity Photographer
- Carrie Mae Weems
- Wegman’s World
- Dara Birnbaum: Technology/Transformation, Video Data Bank
- Krzysztof Wodiczko: Projections, Roland.
D. W. Griffith: Father of Film
Sergei Eisenstein: Autobiography
Walt Disney: Walt, the Man Behind the Myth
The Best of Liquid Television
The Mind’s Eye
Computer Animation Festival
Masters of Animation: Home Vision Animation Japan

**Suggested Films**
Birth of a Nation, 1915
Ballet Mecanique 1924
Battleship Potemkin, 1925
The Jazz Singer, 1927
The Gold Rush, 1925
Citizen Kane, 1941
Fantasia, 1942
Blow-Up, 1966