CHAPTER 9

Photography
Learning Objectives

1. Recognize the aesthetic and technical decisions photographers make.
2. Describe early innovations that led to the development of photography.
3. Compare the use of photography as art to its documentary function in society.
4. Explain why artists did not commonly use color photography before the 1970s.

5. Discuss experimental photographic processes used by contemporary artists.

6. Demonstrate the influence of digital technology on photography in the twenty-first century.
Introduction

- **The Silence Is Twice as Fast Backwards**
  - Jane and Louise Wilson
  - 6 foot square picturing a lush, green forest
- **Photography**
  - Literally, "light writing"
  - Many uses in journalism, science, advertising, and personal record keeping
Photograph (C-print). 72" × 72".
Courtesy 303 Gallery, New York. [Fig. 9-1]
Introduction

• Photography
  ▪ Allows for selection of camera, lens, and film as well as composition
  ▪ Exposure controls light and darkness
  ▪ Wilson sisters' careful positioning of the trees in their photograph
The Evolution of Photography

• Concept preceded medium by more than three hundred years

• **Camera obscura**
  - Literally, "dark room"
  - Reflected sunlight passing through small hole in the wall of a darkened room
    • Inverted image of what was outside
  - Fixed room or portable chamber
    • Very cumbersome
Evolution of the Camera Obscura.
[Fig. 9-2]
The Evolution of Photography

• Camera obscura
  - Developed a lens and angled mirror for ease of tracing

• Chemical development
  - 1826 first vague photographic image by Niépce
    - Sensitized pewter plate exposed to light for eight hours
The Evolution of Photography

• Chemical development
  ▪ Daguerrotypes
    • Iodized silver plates exposed to mercury vapor, then fixed by mineral salt solution
    • Only stationary objects recorded due to long exposure times
      • First figure to appear is a man getting his shoes shined, taken in 1839
The Evolution of Photography

- Affect on art
  - New medium thought by some as unfair competition for artists
  - However, art more accessible
- Portrait photography
  - Prior to camera, only wealthy could afford to have portraits painted.
  - Julia Margaret Cameron
    - Pioneered close-ups and lighting
The Evolution of Photography

• Portrait photography
  ▪ Julia Margaret Cameron
    • Posed children off-center in *Paul and Virginia*
      • Suggestion of characters in a popular novel
  • Early photographers inspired by painters
• Development of less toxic technology
Albumen print. 10" × 7-7/8".
J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. 84.XZ.186.3. [Fig. 9-4]
Photography as an Artform

- Public initially reluctant to accept photography as art
  - Reliance on mechanical device
- Early crusader Alfred Stieglitz
  - Photography gallery, NYC in 1905
  - Magazine, *Camera Work*, published photography alongside art essays
  - Own photos produced with no technical manipulation of negative
Alfred Stieglitz. *Spring Showers, New York*. 1901. Photograph. 3-3/4" × 1-1/2". Courtesy of George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film © 2013 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. [Fig. 9-5]
Photography as an Artform

• Henri Cartier-Bresson
  ▪ *Place de l'Europe Behind the Gare St.-Lazare, Paris*
    • Drama and parallelism of man jumping like the dancer in the poster behind him
    ▪ Captured decisive moments in his work
  • *Bravo, Two Pairs of Legs*
    ▪ Combines billboard and building site
    ▪ Delightful revelations in shadows
Henri Cartier-Bresson. *Place de l'Europe Behind the Gare St.-Lazare, Paris.* 1932.
Photograph.
© H. Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos. [Fig. 9-6]
Gelatin silver print. 6-1/2" × 9-1/2".
© Colette Urbajtel/Archivo Manuel Álvarez Bravo SC. [Fig. 9-7]
Photography as an Artform

• Man Ray
  ▪ Innovative "rayographs" made by placing objects on light-sensitive paper and exposing them to sunlight
    • Not really photographs
    • No cameras or lenses
  ▪ Subjects sometimes unclear
Gelatin silver print. 11-7/16" × 9-1/8".
Private Collection/The Stapleton Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library. © 2013 Man Ray Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY/ADAGP, Paris. [Fig. 9-8]
Photography and Social Change

• Photographer as witness of each generation
• Visual statements of photography more believable than in any other medium
  ▪ Lends itself to documentation to bring awareness of events
• Jacob Riis
  ▪ Early leader of photography for social change
Jacob Riis. *Five Cents a Spot*. c. 1890.
Gelatin silver print. 6-3/16" × 4-3/4".
[Fig. 9-9]
Photography and Social Change

• Jacob Riis
  - *Five Cents a Spot*
    - Drew attention to squalid living conditions
    - Led to improved housing/work safety
• Photography as a vehicle of truth
  - "The camera never lies"
  - Margaret Bourke-White
    - Concept of photographic essay
Margaret Bourke-White. *Louisville Flood Victims*. 1937. Photograph. Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images. [Fig. 9-10]
Photography and Social Change

• Environmentalism
  ▪ Ansel Adams
    • Need for conservation of natural environment
    • *Clearing Winter Storm, Yosemite National Park*
      • Grandeur of nature
      • Symbols of spiritual life, transcending the conflicts of society
© 2012 The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust. [Fig. 9-11]
Photography and Social Change

• Gary Braasch
  ▪ Documents diminishing habitat of polar bears
  ▪ *Polar Bear Outside Barrow, Alaska*
    • Vivid evidence of warmer Arctic temperatures
Gary Braasch. *Polar Bear Outside Barrow, Alaska*. 2008. © the artist. [Fig. 9-12]
Color Photography

- Black-and-white for the first hundred years of photography
  - Technical problems persisted through twentieth century
- Development began in 1907
  - Improved in 1932 with Eastman Kodak Company color film
- Disdain for use in art throughout 1960s
  - Color associated with family photos
Color Photography

- William Eggleston
  - Exhibit in color at MoMA in 1976
  - *Los Alamos Portfolio*
    - Elegant compositions of everyday things
    - *Untitled (Nehi Bottle)*
      - Skillful arrangement of off-balance diagonals
      - Evokes a specific setting
William Eggleston.  
© 2013 Color photograph Eggleston Artistic Trust, courtesy Cheim & Read, New York. Used with permission. All rights reserved. [Fig. 9-13]
Pushing the Limits

• Susan Derges
  ▪ Lays sheets of photosensitive paper on the bottom of shallow ponds at night
  ▪ Shines light on the paper through surrounding bushes to emphasize shadows
  ▪ Creates landscapes looking up from below the water's surface
Unique ilfochrome print. 66-1/2" × 36".
Purdy Hicks Gallery, London. [Fig. 9-14]
Pushing the Limits

• Binh Danh
  ▪ Invented method of recording photographs onto plant material
  ▪ *Iridescence of Life* series
    • Pairs images of war victims with butterfly specimens and embeds them in resin

• Zoe Leonard
  ▪ Use of photographs as artifact
  ▪ Arrangement of Niagara Falls postcards
Binh Danh. *Iridescence of Life #7*. 2008. Chlorophyll print, butterfly specimen, and resin. 14" × 11" × 2". Courtesy of the artist and Haines Gallery. [Fig. 9-15]
• Binh Danh: Reconstructing Memories
  ▪ Born in Vietnam, half-Cambodian, half-Vietnamese, but migrated to the United States
  ▪ Cellular level of attention to landscape photographs
  ▪ Interest in daguerreotypes
    • Ghostly quality captures passing time
    • Recall European colonizers' photos
Binh Danh.
Courtesy of the artist. [Fig. 9-16]
Daguerreotype. Plate 9" × 12".
Courtesy of the artist and Haines Gallery. [Fig. 9-17]
The Digital Revolution

- Chemical photographic negative beginning to go out of style
- Translating information from the lens into digital files
  - Can be altered easily through photo-manipulation software
  - "Vehicle of truth" no longer holds
  - Specialness of photographs much reduced
Approximately 4,000 postcards. Variable dimensions.
Installation view, Beacon, New York, 2009. © the artist, courtesy Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne, Germany. Photo Bill Jacobson. [Fig. 9-18]
The Digital Revolution

• Jeff Wall
  ▪ Vividly "real," yet stagy photographs
  ▪ Pictures blown up to maximum size, about 8' by 10'
  ▪ Boy Falls from Tree
    • Seems documentary
    • Actually from a combination of images
Jeff Wall. *Boy Falls from Tree*. 2010.
Color photograph. 92" × 123".
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. [Fig. 9-19]