

Development of photography in the media



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- Kim Hwang

In the incunabula or ‘swaddling stage’ of a medium, certain kinds of conventions are set that later get refined or challenged. Look at photography and/ or the cinema and discuss how these media emerged and then found stable forms.

In the beginning, photography was a tough process. Getting a suitable picture required long exposures to the camera and processing time. The use of different materials shortened down the time frame substantially and made it more convenient for people to take pictures. It soon became a process many people wanted to use to capture moments of time. Soon, photographers found that they could manipulate the pictures and form illusions. A picture by an unknown photographer called “The Ghost of Milton” featured a solid human being with a transparent person standing beside him giving the illusion of the man being a ghost. Since usually pictures captured the real (making viewers felt as though they had been at the location of the picture and had seen what occurred with their own eyes) it made it seem as though ghosts are real. Cinema progressed in a similar way. It started out by simply capturing everyday events such as a baby eating a meal with its parents. It progressed to creating illusions by starting and stopping the recordings and adding effects. In the movie *Voyage to the Moon* the wizards took a trip to the moon and ran into unfriendly aliens. The wizards would hit the aliens with their wands and once hit, they would disappear into a puff of smoke. Even though that would never be able to happen in real life, the movie made viewers think it was actually possible because they were so fully invested in the movie. In these movies the

camera was stuck in one location having the actors move instead of the camera. Later on the camera started moving so the viewers can see more of the scenery and feel more incorporated in the atmosphere. It also started zooming in and focusing on certain objects or people as a subtle foreshadowing. In Andre Bazin's *What is Cinema?*, he talks about how the director would focus on the actor and his expression, then to food, and then on the actor moving towards the food and let the viewer figure out the storyline. There was also the example of the Kuleshov effect. There would be pictures of a blank faced actor and when paired with a coffin, the viewers would get the implication that the actor was sad. When paired with food, the viewers thought the actor was hungry, and when paired with a picture of a woman, the viewers thought the actor was portraying lust. With these techniques, the movie *Triumph des Willens* showed the death of a baby without using gore. There was a scene of the baby in the tram, a man with a knife, and a woman wailing with broken glasses and blood on her face. It explained to the viewer the horribly unfair death of an innocent baby without fully writing everything out for them.

What does photography take from painting, and what does cinema take from photography? How do older and newer media relate, and in what ways does each new medium relate to and differ from its predecessors?

Paintings, photography, and cinema are all connected to one another. Photography learned from its predecessor, paintings. Paintings always had a clear central focus. Since it was such a laborious process to paint a full painting, artists would pick an important object to focus their attention on. For example, Leonardo DeVinci's painting *The Last Supper* focuses on Jesus

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as the center of the painting. All angles of the building in the background and the positioning of the other 12 disciples point as Jesus being the most important person. Photography also taught cinema that the audience has an imagination. Not everything needs to be perfect and realistic for the viewers to 'see' what the director wants them to 'see'. In the book *Film: A Very Short Introduction* by Michael Wood he talks about a movie depicting a fake cardboard rock structure with a photographed sea. But, viewers still understand that the ship is out in the water and they are seeing it through a cave and still feel a part of the scenery. Photography also taught cinema the movement of still pictures. Multiple shots of a horse running showed that at one point all four hooves are off the ground, something cinema could never show. But alone, the photographs could never show a horse actually moving. But, flipping through the photos quickly easily shows the smooth gait. Cinema easily used the still shots of photos to emphasize points in the movie and to build up tension. For example, in *Gone with the Wind*, while Scarlett is running away, she hits an area with fire spreading through a train that was transporting explosives. The horse is frightened by the fire and does not want to move causing the viewers to be nervous, unsure if they will escape before everything blows up. The camera continuously cuts to the box of explosives and one could clearly see the fire moving dangerously closer. As the tension builds, Scarlett finally gets away and the watchers can finally "breathe" again. We get similar feelings from just three simple pictures of still pictures of a lion statue in the movie "Battleship Potemkin". Sergie Eisenstein used the three shots of the lion in between the footage of the opera house being leveled. The three pictures showed the lion in different positions making it look as if one lion was standing up, representing the

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people rising out of anger evoking “ emotional and intellectual response”.

The use of emotion to get a point across strongly is also taught by photography. Punctum in photos is something that, as Roland Bathes says in *Camera Lucida* , “ pricks...and bruises” the viewers by having something in the photo that does not seem right and therefore it sticks with the viewer. In cinema, they use something similar such as the baby and the violence in “ Battleship Potemkin” that would make the violence seem more intense, making the act of killing the baby stick with viewers.

What is the photography effect? Can we discuss a similar “ cinematic effect,” and if so, how would you describe it?

Early on, photography was only used to capture the regular. But soon, the photographer Felix Nadar wanted to make something artistic out of the simple photos. But he had an issue, how was he going to make art when “ photography was automatic and you press a button and capture the already existing perfection”? He easily solved this problem by using his signature style of switching up the positioning of the people he was photographing also changing the lighting. Shadows and angles quickly showed up and added a new dimension to each of the pictures. The photograph of Sarah Bernhardt shows clearly what can be done with the correct lighting and positioning. The light hits her from the left side adding in several shadows at the slightest curve. It adds sharper angles on her face emphasizing her already attractive features. As a result, the picture seems slightly more realistic. It feels as if she is sitting in the room, sitting right in front of you as the light comes in from the side. With humans as the object of the photo, we, as viewers, feel more connected to the picture. Cinema does similar things creating “ a gaze,

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a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion” as said in *Visual Pleasure* by Laura Mulvey. For example, the videos of factory workers leaving the building and made the viewer feel as though they were standing in the middle of the road with swarms of people going around them. It then moves to more interesting and complicated techniques such as the positioning of the camera and the light during black and white movies. In the movie, *Double Indemnity* the camera moves to different locations in the room, which makes viewers feel as if they are in the room with the couple. Also, since the movie is black and white, the producers needed to make sure the lighting was perfect enough for the film to capture facial expressions. The facial expressions in film were a large part the movie-audience connection. In *Gone with the Wind* viewers watch as Scarlett schemes how to get more attention from her male companion by her facial expressions while trying on the bonnet. Viewers knew exactly what was going on in her mind without words or sound. Photography and cinema used the same techniques to include the audience by making the unreal seem real.