

PHMD 560 – Special Topics: View Camera, Fall 2012
Writing Prompt No. 3

We have all faced challenges over the course of this semester – many of which have required a project or portion of a project to be reworked or, in some cases, completely re-done. Think of a hurdle / problem / challenge you have had to faced in the class with regards to the following questions:

1. What was the problem / challenge (technical and otherwise) you faced?
2. How did you overcome it?
3. How did getting it right enable or change the way you moved forward?

" As I'm sure many did, I had the most issues with Scheimpflug and adjusting the plane of focus along a wall. At first, I didn't overcome it, I, of course, was confused and eventually grew frustrated and just snapped the picture hoping it would work out...somehow. And, of course, it didn't work. It was so easy to think you had it on the ground glass and with the slightest movement...it was gone. So, when I re-shot it I really had to take my time and not become overwhelmed, because for me I have a bit of a hard time viewing the image on the ground glass even with the t-shirt. So the second time around I just had to hold that t-shirt tight and really take my time and it took me a good 30-45 minutes checking and double checking with the loop to really make that one piece of film count. Which is the biggest lesson with using the view camera and it took Scheimpflug for me to learn it."

"Learning the movements of the view camera (rise/fall, swing, etc.) and learning what effects they have on the photograph was very hard to me to remember. Often times my picture would come out with the focus on a strange part of the picture, but while taking the picture I didn't notice this. 2. How did you overcome it? I started to pay more attention to the groundglass and what was in focus/what lines were straight, etc. when composing my photographs. Once I discovered how to manipulate the photograph using the techniques only a view camera can offer, I was able to apply that to my photographs and have them turn out the way I wanted."

" One major hurdle I have yet to fully conquer is perfecting color balance with film. It's funny that color balance has become an issue, since it's one of the most important factors in photography, but handling color with film and doing it 100% correct is tough.

I've overcome this challenge by spending a lot of time editing, and fine tuning highlight, mid-tone, and shadow color balance. Although this is something I've done in the past, dealing with color film is a little different. There are so many different factors such as developing, scanning, and film type that determine how the color is perceived, and through fine tune and careful adjustments to each one I've been able to get this correct (not including my past Chewbacca print).

I think once I have dialed down the C-41 development and understood how to scan in color correctly, my editing process has been a lot easier when dealing with color balance. This allows me to move forward in my work knowing that I have the ability and knowledge to shoot 4x5 in color. Even though it didn't show 100% in my last print, I believe that I now have an understanding of how color interacts with the film, and how to troubleshoot my color."

"My biggest challenge with the view camera is implementation. By that I mean to say that the view camera is a large beefy camera and in certain situations this can cause difficulty in getting the desired shot. I've overcome this by essentially saying 'screw it, I'll try anyways' and proceeding to shove the camera into the window frame or into the backseat of a car. It just makes the process that much more difficult (getting to see the ground glass, making adjustments, etc). As for changing the way I proceed, I

refuse to accept some of the stigmas surrounding view camera and I will continue to use it in any way I see fit even if it does make the process a little more cumbersome. "

"I've faced a couple of technical challenges so far using view camera. The camera that I have been using over the semester has a light leak when shooting in portrait orientation. Erin and I did not realize that our camera had this problem until many assignments in to the semester, so many of my negatives for the first few assignments were entirely over-exposed. This technical problem affected my macro/bellows extension assignment the most because all of my negatives had very pronounced light leaks across them. I overcame this problem by using many different masks in photoshop for my prints, but I do hope to rework or reshoot this assignment before the end of the semester. After we realized our problem during the macro assignment, I have been shooting only landscape photos. I plan on checking out a different camera sometimes to work on my final project for the remainder of the semester. "

"A problem I faced a lot at first was being comfortable with all the different movements available. I didn't understand the Scheimpflug at first, and it was kind of hard to wrap my mind around. Another issue was just being comfortable with all the details you have to remember while actually taking the photograph. I was always hesitant that I was forgetting a step, which would make me worry that the photograph didn't turn out. With time, both of these issues are much better. I still second guess myself sometimes when I'm taking a photo that I remembered to shut the aperture before pulling out the dark slide, or something of that nature. I still struggle a little bit with the Scheimpflug aspect of the camera, but I suspect by the end of the semester that will be second nature as well. After I had developed my first batch of negatives, I realized that I just need to follow the instructions and think about what I'm doing and the photo will (for the most part) turn out the way I envisioned it. The first time I processed my film I was so happy that the photo was actually there! And that gave me confidence for the next pictures I took."

"There were a few assignments towards the beginning of the semester that were difficult for me simply because I was still trying to figure out how to use the camera. As time went on, I quickly realized that I really needed to make sure and take more pictures. You have to learn to let your pictures go when they don't turn out well, and then move on to the next one. Another thing that I really learned was that you HAVE to spend time making sure that you get all of the dust and scratches off of your film because even though it might not seem like it will show up, it will, especially when you print large. Over all, while taking this class I learned a lot about editing. I would edit an area that after starting at the image, seemed to look fine. Then I would immediately print it, but then the next day when looking at the print I could totally tell the area that had been edited. I have learned to take a step back, really look at the image compared to the original, and edit appropriately. There is such a thing as editing too much."

"The biggest problem I have faced this semester was having to completely redo an assignment. This occurred with the Bellows Extension assignment. I had originally planned to do close up shots of a friend. Due to very long exposure times, all of the images were blurred. After realizing the negatives were unusable, I decided that the long shutter speeds and close crop of the images was not suitable for a human subject. To fix the problem, I set up a still-life instead. I also made sure there was more light for the image by placing the objects right next to a window. By initially failing to get the images I wanted, I had to develop a new idea for the project that was more suitable for the conditions. The resulting images are some of my favorites from this class, and I may not have created them if my original idea had not gone badly. "

"A problem I've faced technically is mastering the Scheimflug principle. In my original images, I tried to demonstrate the concept, but was unable to get the precision sharpness of the horizontal and parallel plane that utilizing the principle called for. I overcame this problem by allowing myself more time to become comfortable with the camera movements, returning to the project, and reshooting. This time, I wasn't overwhelmed by the view camera process and was able to produce tack-sharp images by allowing myself time to focus correctly.

Finally getting it right forced me to learn this fundamental view camera concept. I can now comfortably apply this principle whenever it is appropriate, especially when I produce landscape and architectural photographs. It's a great addition to my photographic toolkit."

"My first attempt at bellows extension did not go well at all. My images were severely under-exposed and unusable. I was really confused because I thought I understood the formula for compensation but apparently not. I ultimately had to re-shoot which created a lot of stress because of time constraints. I used a different light meter and outdoor light to try to correct my exposure. It was really frustrating to have to redo an entire assignment but it was good for me to experience. I learned to not expect my film to turn out right and to be prepared to regroup and think of different solutions. It was also good practice for me to redo/relearn bellows compensation."

"My biggest hurdle for this class has been the issue of thinking of something original and interesting to capture with the view camera. I think that is something we all seek in making photographs but I found that in this class it is that much more difficult because of the advantages and challenges specific to the view camera. There are many ideas I'd like to try with the view camera but I'm often limited to do the physical or technical aspects of the camera (size, cost, etc.)

Throughout the semester I've had to do a lot of problem solving to make the photos I wanted to make. One of my biggest issues was taking a self portrait without the aid of someone else to release the shutter and without a long release cable. I improvised by measuring the focus before taking the photo, then taping a fly swatter to a baseball bat to hit the shutter release. They weren't my best photos but I was still able to do a true self portrait.

Through problem solving I learned some of the more specific issues relating to the camera. For instance, triggering the shutter by poking it with a fly swatter with shake the camera. Now that I've experienced some of the basic challenges with the camera, I think ahead about what I might need to do to get around the limitations of the camera."

"The first problem that I had was with the Arista film. This started before the class even started when I was testing the film out. With testing and research and some help I figured out the characteristics of the film and how it needs to be treated. Knowing that the film has to be overexposed to what the film is actually rated and that the reciprocity failure is bad has helped in how I calculate what the actual exposure needs to be for this film."

"The most prominent problems I have faced in this class are exposure compensation issues and printing problems. The whole process takes so long that if you mess something up you don't have enough time to completely redo it before its due. I have been trying to get my work done early and taking multiple shots for backup. Making sure I do my assignments early helps me to not feel rushed and if something goes wrong I might have enough time to fix it."

"After completing a few view camera assignments, I noticed that I take more time composing images with my DSLR than I used to. With view camera, I'm always in the mindset of having only a few sheets of

film to get the image I want and I can tell I have been shooting less digital images to get to the final product I want.

I think one challenge I faced during the class was rechecking my movements and focusing more than I was. There were times where I thought I was 100% spot on with focusing and then negative would turn out soft. I overcame this problem simply by checking my focusing and movements more than necessary for each image. My images came out much more sharp and helped me to move forward and not waste as much film."

"I'm not quite sure if this answer is what you're looking for, but the main challenge with me is time. Since I live in Lenexa now and work 20-30 hours a week in Overland Park, it's hard to share the camera without one of us having it for the entire weekend and I have a hard time making it out to Lawrence during weekend lab hours. I've tried checking out a field camera a few times, but this usually requires me to have to drive back out to Lawrence at least one extra time to either pick it up or return it. I've been trying to work my shoots into the week to maybe keep me from needing to drive to Lawrence extra times. So far, it has worked a couple times, so I will continue to shoot during the week and I will try to work out a better schedule to use the monorail camera too."

"The bellows extension project was particularly difficult as I was completely frustrated, and was also completely unhappy with the result. When Bryon commented that the image wasn't bad, I thought he was out of his mind. There is some detail, but not much. Getting feedback from Bryon and his comments about the assignment were helpful though.

I definitely found TIME to be my biggest challenge. My partner Molly, (whom I adore!) and I had to share the camera and we live in two different towns! I would take it for the weekend, then she would. Overcoming the reciprocity failure was a high stress situation. I just started shooting outside. I prefer to shoot outside anyway, even with my digital camera. I feel that my best work was of my daughter the week before Halloween. I felt like I had mostly mastered the view camera. It's like it just clicked that week.

Overcoming my obsession with cropping was a huge frustration mark as well. I like to make the image centered, and only the image. I don't like the "breathing room" around the object. I have had a problem with that in the past.

Sticking with the same idea, but re-shooting, proved to be the best way to accomplish what I wanted to do."

"I think a common problem was really getting a handle on the scheidtflug thing. Not that it was a hard thing to understand, but sometimes difficult to achieve. Not only in movement but difficult to see sometimes on the ground glass because of the lack of light in certain situations. I think like anything, practice helps. Even if I'm not using it in a photography I still try and play with the tilt and shift just to see what it is doing to the image. This way when I need to use it I can hopefully get it right. Stopping down doesn't hurt either. After learning about scheidtflug I was able to think about it, if not use it in all my other photographs. I ask myself, "Does the focus this way work? Could it benefit from having it somewhere else?"

"My biggest issue was marking my film holders and being able to distinguish which ones had unexposed film and which ones had film that needed to be developed AND which ones didn't have film in them at all. I switched after my box of the Arista ran out to shooting only Ilford Delta. This switch also made me mix up my film holders even more. Another factor is that I am shooting 4x5 for both this class and Travis' class so distinguishing between the ones I had already shot for his class and the ones that needed to be developed for this class also added to my confusion. I would often times go out and shoot to find that

one of my film holders (or one side of my film holders) was empty which became very irritating when I was excited about the particular exposure I thought I had taken.

To correct for this easy mistake I simply bought a nice little booklet full of different colored note pads. After each exposure I would place a notepad on both sides of the film holder with the date and what I shot at which aperture. This way I knew for certain what was in each holder. I also purchased a number of rubber bands so I could group the holders together and keep them separated from this class, Travis' class, my own personal shooting, etc.

This in general helped how I approached shooting with view camera. Every step has to be precise and carefully thought out. You cannot take any shortcuts and must always know exactly what your doing at a given moment. Everything needs a system, you have to be able to get into a routine or else things will get sloppy and thats when mistakes occur. Technically you could be a master at shooting view camera but when it comes to the details with even things like organizing film holders, every step is still crucially important to making sure your exposures come out well and you don't get frustrated with light leaks, unexposed film, or just shooting a completely empty slide."

"Following project instructions to the T. I am still struggling with this one. Once I resubmit my Scheimpflug photos I will be assessed for that project."

"Scheimpflug was something I had difficulty in executing. I was either too heavy handed or not liberal enough. But after re-watching (and re-watching and re-watching) the youtube video Bryon sent us, I believe I'm starting to get the hang of it. When I had to shoot something I knew would involve scheimpflug, I would get frustrated or intimidated that my shots wouldn't come out because I hadn't mastered it yet. Now, I'm not so worried."