
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Hand and Eye: Study on the Relationship between Painting and Photography from Benjamin's Perspective

Yuan Lei

Fine Art, Northeast Normal University, China

Corresponding Author: Yuan Lei, **E-mail:** 656732059@qq.com

| ABSTRACT

The birth of printing brought great changes to literature, and the continuous fragmentation of printmaking media allowed pictorial art products to flow into the market. However, no one could have imagined that just a few decades later, the birth of photography would remove the human hand from the main artistic task of image reproduction, which would henceforth be reserved for the eyes staring at the lens. Walter Benjamin, as an early scholar among Western intellectuals in the 20th century, paid attention to the study of the relationship between photography and painting. The *Small History of Photography and Works of Art in the Era of Mechanical Reproduction* written by him can be regarded as classic works of photographic theory, modern cultural theory and modern art theory. His focus is on the juxtaposition study of photography and painting, two art categories that are both visual image presentation, which is pioneering, original and foundational. Although the paper is not long, the game between symbol and image, politics and economy, and subjective and objective is particularly wonderful. Therefore, it is particularly necessary to dig deeper into Benjamin's theoretical connotation and fully reveal his value in all aspects. The combination of the relationship between painting and photography has also injected impetus into the construction of contemporary visual culture.

| KEYWORDS

Benjamin; Photography; Paintings; Graphics

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 January 2024

PUBLISHED: 20 January 2024

DOI: 10.32996/ljahs.2024.4.1.2

1. Introduction

The difference between painting and photography represents the "traditional" art form and the "mechanical reproduction era" art form. Comparing the two, we can better see the impact of science and technology on art form, and it is also more conducive to people's understanding of Benjamin's art theory. However, the ambiguity between painting and photography seems to have developed since the Renaissance, when some artists used an opaque box or entered a dark room where no light could penetrate. And cleverly made use of the small hole imaging principle discovered and organized by the famous philosopher Mozi in the Spring and Autumn period. Through the holes carved in the wall of the box, the light reflected by objects outside the box passed through the holes and reflected to the inner wall of the camera obscura in the form of reflection. At this point, the artist only needs to lay the paper flat on the reflection and can easily trace the image. For example, the classic oil painting "Embroidermaid", created by Vermeer, is a typical example. We find that the woman in the picture is poised, the structure of her hands presents a mechanical accuracy, and the tools and cloth around her are depicted in a delicate but cold way. In order to verify Vermeer's use of the camera obscura technique, Professor Stedman of the Open University in the UK chose to scan individual Vermeer paintings with medical X-rays. It was surprising to find that the painting was not a first draft or sketch but only an outline of the image in black and white, which undoubtedly provides strong support for the hypothesis that Vermeer painted with a camera obscura. Because classical oil painting has strict painting steps, and such a cumbersome painting method is easily broken by the camera obscura. If the way of using optical instruments to create art has long existed or artists have long been practicing art, then why do many painters keep

silent about this secret? The fundamental reason is that painting has always been a secret activity, and the unique religious meaning and political purpose behind it have prevented artists from easily explaining their painting process to the public. In another of Vermeer's classic paintings, *The Girl with the Red Hat*, scholars and critics have found that the clothes and objects placed next to the figure in the picture are very detailed. However, the upper part of the girl's face has no clear boundary and no details of the features are outlined or even blurred. It can be said that this painting technique is completely different from the painting steps carried out by artists in the past, but it is very similar to the virtual focus produced in today's photographic works; perhaps the painter copied the information of the picture into the picture in the process of rubbing. Although photography technology did not appear at that time, this creative technique and traditional painting seemed to show a deviant meaning - behind it was the struggle between "hand" and "eye", "subjective and objective game, until photography technology was truly mature and popular," politics "and" economy "would constantly compete for dominance between image art.

2. Literature Review

The birth of photography was in the 19th century, and the "industrialization" of photography occurred in 1931. In the first ten years, the social function of photography was not perfect, and photography activities did not get any remuneration. It was a spontaneous art activity, although photography was not called an art at that time. With the development and the discussion of the relationship between photography and traditional painting, artists were hostile to photography at the very beginning of its birth. Faced with the challenge of new technology, they call photography the "demonic art". Faced with this anti-technology artistic view, photography theorists have fought with it for nearly a hundred years. Finally, because photography has the potential to be involved in human society, he finally defended himself.

3. Methodology

Literature method, Comparative research method, Case study method

3.1 The direction of thinking -- the antagonism between subjective and objective

"Photography, a technique of extreme precision, can give its product a magical value far beyond what painting seems to enjoy." No matter how skillful the photographer's technique, no matter how upright the subject is, the viewer feels an irresistible desire to look for the tiny light in the image, unexpected, here and now. Because of this fire, the "real" seems to burn through the subject - the viewer longs to find the invisible place, that place, under the surface of the "past" for a long time, still lives in the shadow of the "future" a future so moving that we can find it in retrospect." The eyes will be screened, and the human eye will subconsciously project more attention to what you are interested in, so it will ignore some of the existence of the objective, not to mention that artists will adjust the picture according to their subjective thoughts when creating. The space in the camera is the product of unconsciousness, and the viewing mode of the camera is like a black hole, which absorbs all information and objectively presents it on the developing media. Images can achieve local amplification and instantaneous trends through photography, and it is also through photography that we can respond to the unconsciousness in the camera space.

However, when people calm down and look at the contents of the photo, it can be creepy, especially when you see your own portrait compressed into a small piece of paper, but you can write all your biological information. People are always afraid of things that are similar to themselves; similarity means replaceable, and when the subject's thought is replaced by the existence of the object, the problem of existence comes into view. Due to the low sensitivity of the development medium, the early photos needed extremely long exposure time to complete the shooting. The long, quiet exposure gave the photos a kind of temperament that is close to sketching or painted portraits, mainly because of the comprehensive expression formed by the characters who were still for a long time. Under low-speed exposure, the optimistic bourgeoisie immersed in the space in which they live - the permanent and hopeful world - appears with them in the photograph. This is a kind of false romanticism, in which the exposure process makes the subject not live "outside" the moment of the photograph but live "in" it: in the long exposure process, they seem to settle into the image. Portrait photography is like a cage, confining the subjects of a given period, their bodies and minds, to small pieces of paper. However, this is not all a bad thing. For example, the relationship between "halo" or "light" and such esoteric concepts and photography, photography and memory can be developed from this.

What is the definition of "light"? It clearly points to the strange entanglement of time and space, allowing distant objects to appear as if they were close at hand. "Light" is what artists try their best to present. Authenticity and permanence are the characteristics of "light", while mechanical reproduction greatly invades the absorption of "light" with its ephemerality and reproducibility. Indeed, to appreciate a piece of reproduced art, especially in the grand art categories of sculpture and architecture, it is much easier to look at a photographic copy than to face the objective object. But the fact that people prefer to stare at the clouds in pictures rather than look up at the blue sky is a sign that, with the proliferation of replicable images, people have dulled their perception of reality. The limitation of mechanical reproduction brought by photography also lies in the loss of the "here and now" of art, the unique dedication to his place, which is the unique existence, and only this unique existence determines his entire history, from the material properties of the work itself to the time process of becoming history has been greatly compressed by mechanical

reproduction. The "here and now" of the original work forms the so-called authenticity of the work -- the inscriptions engraved on the Hou Mu Wu square tripod write the story of Yin Shang, The Last Supper in the Church of the Thanksgiving of Santa Maria in Milan witnessed countless faithful. Mechanical reproduction does not rely on the original; it can be processed at will to present the content it wants to present, and mechanical reproduction breaks through the limitations of space and time, making all visual culture readily available. Works of art were finally released from the appendages of the ceremonial function of the foundation stone, and more and more works of art were created simply to be copied. However, once the previously mentioned criteria of authenticity are no longer applicable to the production process of art, the whole functional orientation of art is also upended. The rapid development of reproduction technology has also changed the way people view large-scale works. People are no longer careful to regard art as the private property of individual creation, and they are choosing to openly merge art and culture into a powerful collective product. In the process again, the necessary step is to first reduce it so that it can be absorbed. For this reason, we view mechanical reproduction as a reduced-scale technology whose purpose is to help people grasp the work to some degree quickly.

The counterattack of painting to photography is ultimately based on the aesthetic nature of the subject. When the Outer Light School was exhibited among the leading artists in Europe, a new vision was revealed. Gale's photographic invention has been able to fix the effect of atmospheric opacity sought by the painter through the camera obscurum. At this point, painters and craftsmen will be thoroughly ventilated. However, the greatest influence of photography on the form of painting was not the impressionist painters, whose landscapes still exude charming charm; on the contrary, the pocket portrait was greatly impacted, and most portrait painters turned around and chose to hone their photographic skills, at a time when the character of photography had nothing to do with aesthetic cultivation. The high cost of photography makes customers more interested in the photographer's mastery of the camera. However, after the spread of film retouching, the cost and difficulty of photography decreased, and the bad painters took revenge on photography, and the taste was quickly dragged down. With the rise of popular culture came the "photo album era," in which people no longer put images in gorgeous frames and kept them in a prominent position to wipe them away but chose to put them in family albums and never look at them again until the album dust. There is no doubt that the aesthetic of the subject occupies an important position. Impressionist painters deeply studied optics and color and began to pursue the expression of light sense, environmental color and light source color, hoping to create a grand color party. Their ideas have changed the stubborn ideas of physical realism in the West for thousands of years. In order to create a flashy and slim picture effect, the stone pillars were stood on the blanket for shooting activities. Modern photography will not give up the creation of portraits, but the photographed works should not pursue biological uniqueness but should pay attention to the pursuit of essential existence. The famous German writer Camille Reicht vividly likened the relationship between the painter and the photographer to that between the violinist and the pianist: "The violinist must create his own tone, the difficulty is to find the tone as quickly as lightning, and the pianist only needs to strike the keys and the pleasant sound will be sounded." Both the painter and the photographer have their tools in hand: the painter's sketch mixes color, which corresponds to the sculpting behavior of the violin. A photographer's camera is like a pianist's piano. The same is the use of a machine limited by rules, while the violinist can obviously break through the fetters. "Then Ritter pointed out that no pianist can enjoy the same reputation as the violinist Paganini, but what he really wanted to highlight is that the "color "and" photography "of the battle are undoubtedly better with the" color "of the" heart ", in other words, Photography dominated by the "hand" will be dull if it completely gives up the connotation of the "heart."

3.2 The attribution of images: the struggle between politics and economy

The invention of photography is to cater to the development of capital, and the popularization of photography technology also has trans-era significance because compared with the construction of the lower structure, the speed of change of the upper structure is obviously slower. The rise of such an emerging technology can record the whole process of change and release more social effects. Around 1839, Daguerre used copper plates coated with silver iodide and placed them in a camera obscurum. By constantly shaking and adjusting, the delicate and slightly gray images were printed on the plates. Each plate had a market value of about 25 francs in gold coins, and they were carefully placed by customers in elaborately carved boxes. Each customer is seen as part of an emerging social class, and they present a point of power. In fact, photography first points to politics. However, when a large number of pictures invade the report, based on the authenticity of images, words are needed to explain the pictures. The combination of pictures and pictures reduces the power of the picture itself, and long words cover up the authenticity of photography. The relationship between words and pictures has become a hot topic which is closely related to the importance of images in the new era. Photographers from the popular Pulling Out of the Economic Vortex are particularly important for the explanatory ability of the connotation of the work; only this can give the work a transformative use value.

Photography technology can attract attention in the contemporary era thanks to the continuous breakthrough of replication technology. If we want to classify photography, we can roughly point to two situations. The first complicated situation is that photographers themselves have unique aesthetics. They have artistic thoughts, observations of reality, and certain artistic appeals. By adjusting the aperture, focal length, etc., using the finder to capture the picture you want to shoot, which mixes the

photographer's personal emotions and social reality, in essence, it is the product of the combination of technology and personal or the artist with the help of technical tools to complete the artwork. The second situation is relatively simple: this kind of photography only exists as a copy of technology, such as the reproduction of original work, such as painting works, only plays the role of reproduction and promotion; this can not be called art. The production of photographic replicas made by art has a very important impact on artistic function; the key is that its meaning is very different from the creation of photography; in other words, it is not the same as the completion of an image with more or less artistic significance. The captured event appears in the photograph as if the camera had hunted the "catch". In this way, photography embodies the public's thinking about art and value. The key lies in the fact that photography changes the meaning and function of people's memory through the rapid reproduction of media such as magazines, newspapers, postcards or snapshots. The fate of photography is destined to be about the present moment, destined to be the record of history. Of course, history is much more than the present, and memory receives a technical supplement. The value of memory is inestimable. When the person you care about disappears from the biological sense, the memory about him will gradually fade in your mind, and photography technology makes the memory spurt out in the moment of crisis. Therefore, the objective shooting of the camera freezes time, space and memory on a small piece of paper to be examined later.

The debate about painting and photography should start from the value of their medium works; such a debate is endless and can be said to be meaningless, but through the debate of these specific art forms, we should ask for insight into the economic and political struggle for culture. Courbert is known as the last painter to try to transcend photography, and his close attention is on the profound, realistic characteristics of society; the great danger photographers face in the process of moving from traditional art to photography is the decorative tendency, in which the meaning of photography appears simple and fragile. The origins of photography have changed since its transition to an art form of authentic documentation. The more the crisis of the social order grows, the more we see that every moment is filled with hard-line conflict and the most complete contradiction, and the more creation - whose basic characteristic is change, with contradiction as the father and forgery as the mother - becomes the object of worship.

During the Middle Ages or Renaissance in Europe, traditional artistic creation had a strong religious character, and under the background of theocracy, art had a close relationship with politics. The restrictive and treacherous ways of art can be seen in the strange ways of wizards or Kings' empowerment at this moment - wizards healing patients by placing their hands on them, Kings tapping knights three times on the shoulder to give them supreme glory, and the authority of political identity explaining these cultural behaviors. The function of art is no longer attached to those mysterious rituals and rites; from now on, the perspective of art is devoted to another practice - politics, on the basis of which the form of culture dominated by politics is established.

However, the new technology of photography represents science; it is like a doctor holding a sharp knife to cut into the inside of things with precision. More and more modern people are becoming proletarianized, and on the basis of this, the status of the people is also increasing, which are two aspects of the historical process of unification. In the past, paintings could only be expected to be appreciated by a very small number of audiences, and then from the 19th century, a larger number of audiences could appreciate paintings together, which meant that, long before the proliferation of photography technology, artworks wanted to be close to the market and close to the capital. As the social significance of art continues to decline and art falls from the altar, when the painting is exposed to the public, we see in the public the gap between critical spirit and hedonistic behavior is constantly widening. The fact that people hold a good attitude towards traditional things while criticizing new things is a sign of their growing self-awareness. The public wants to relax and engage in aesthetic entertainment activities in a peaceful way, while art requires concentration, and artists must concentrate on connecting their artistic thoughts with social existence. This paradox makes photography take advantage of the opportunity to enter the capital market while photography is regarded as a new art form. The public is like a mold; at this moment, it is rapidly budding from the attitude towards art, and quantitative change has formed a qualitative change. For the relationship between people, even if you desperately squeeze into it, you may also get nothing. Because the purpose of some photography is not for cognition but for the commercialization of the logo subject matter, photography is as much a commodity as milk on the shelf; based on this, some artists even have the most whimsical curiosity subject matter. As long as the attention of the public is captured, a steady stream of capital may be invaded into the picture; politics is the dominant culture, while the economy occupies the main body.

The subject content of paintings can make it easy to lean towards power. Whether it is Pope Innocent X in Vilasquiche's painting or the goddess of Victory holding up the tricolor flag in Delacroix's painting, both reflect the influence of politics on painting, and the long painting creation process has poured the enthusiasm of artists. How does photography work? Photography is the art of "seeing", after all, and the spatial perspective photography method puts on a political cloak for photography. Taking a building as an example, shooting with a bird's eye view will produce a much better effect than standing in front of the building because the

bird's eye view itself has political implications. People from above coldly observed the rental sheds, filled with a military-style atmosphere.

4. Conclusion

Since its birth, photography has begun to absorb the strengths of hundreds of schools and draw on different forms of artistic expression from various kinds of art, among which the method of exploiting the unique aesthetic style of photography through the changeable and systematic expression methods of painting is particularly key. Today, with the rapid development of digital technology, photography or images have shown a more robust vitality, and their use of media and expression methods is gradually diversified. We don't have to worry about whether photography is art or not as we used to because the definition of art is constantly changing. Photography at the technical level of gradual innovation, higher picture quality, and faster focus. At the same time, the development of painting will also present modernity and diversification, and the "tussle" between photography and painting will continue along with the dialogue between politics and economy. Clarifying their internal relations has far-reaching significance for promoting the construction of visual culture.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

- [1] A Short History of Photography [M.] by Walter Benjamin. (2003). Translated by Ni Yang, edited by Luo Gang and Gu Zheng. Guangxi Normal University Press, 2003
- [2] Benjamin's interpretation of the concept of "halo" [J]. (2008) Fang Weigui. Social Science Forum (Academic Review Volume),2008(09)
- [3] GU X. (2020) Report on Translation Practice of Benjamin on Photography [D]. Beijing Forestry University,2020.
- [4] GU L. (2016) Study on Benjamin's art Theory in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction [D]. Dalian University of Technology,2016.
- [5] Li. (2018). The new art history research horizon, "language-figure" relationship analysis [J]. *Journal of Inner Mongolia Academy of social sciences (Chinese version)*, 2018, 33 (6) 6:124-131. The DOI: 10.14137 / j.carol carroll nki issn1003-5281.2018.06.021.
- [6] Photography and Photographic Critics [M]. (2005) By Mary Werner Marien; Hao Hongwei, Translated by Ni Yang. Shandong Pictorial Publishing House.2005
- [7] Sun S. (2005). Outside the history of Photography: An interpretation of Benjamin's A Little History of Photography [J]. *Journal of Tongji University (Social Science Edition)*, 2005(03):114-119.
- [8] Wang F. (2011). Photography: Technology, Art and Culture [D]. Zhejiang A&F University,2011.