

The Transformation of Contemporary Photography Expression--Beyond Realism

Pang Wei

Department of Art and Design, Zhejiang Tongji Vocational College of Science and Technology, 311231, China
*Pang Wei. Email: 52445552@qq.com

ABSTRACT

The accurate reproduction ability of photography has brought a lot of confusion to people in the 19th to 20th century. If we use a saying to describe it, it can be said that ' success is depressed, failure is depressed.'Both Baudelaire's condemnation and Roskin 's complaint put photography in an awkward position. However, anxiety stems from the relationship between photography and art. The precise reproduction of photography brings shock and pressure to colleagues in painting, and is also affected by the reaction from the field of traditional art. Whether photography can be included in the forest of art is one of the most worrying issues after the birth of photography. Whether photography has expressive ability is not only related to the cognition of photographic attributes, but also becomes the key to whether photography can be regarded as art.

Keywords: *Contemporary Photography, Expressive Force, Realism, Transformation*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 19th century, the concept of expression has become an important and indispensable dimension for people to understand art. Taking performance as the basis of understanding art means that art works are regarded as the product of artists subjective creation. It means that from the perspective of the relationship between art works and artists, the significance of art works is analyzed from the creator ' s inner emotional experience, concept expression and even intuition, unconscious and other factors. In short, it is to analyze the works of art contains the artist subjective factors. Whether it is poetry, music, or painting, performance theory can provide an effective explanation. On the one hand, since romanticism, there has been a significant turn in artistic style. So is the idea of expression effective in explaining photography? For photography, is performance possible? On the other hand, if photography can be regarded as a photographer ' s expressive activity, how can such expressive activity be realized ?[1]

If photography is a traditional art like poetry, music and painting, it is no problem to abandon the reproduction theory and understand it from the perspective of performance theory. Poetry, music and painting are human creation. It is natural to express the feelings, ideals and concepts of the creator in the works.

In creation, the transformation from reproduction to expression is only a change in artistic style. However, photography is different, and photography seems to be defined as a natural objective reproduction medium from the beginning. People believe that the objective reproduction of photography is based on the mechanical nature of this medium. Image production based on optical, chemical and mechanical principles is even regarded as a natural product. Compared with painting, in the process of photographic image generation, it seems that human subjectivity and creativity have no space to play a role. It is for this reason that photographic images are highly consistent with the object images taken. The mechanical reproduction of photography is completely different from any traditional reproduction form, and the fidelity of photographic images has once become the highest standard of reproduction.

2. THE DOOR OPENED BY TALBOT

It should be admitted that the view that photography is completely automatic and mechanical is arbitrary. Studies on the history of photography show that how to manipulate photography to obtain more ideal photos is a conscious and unconscious behavior of many early photographers. In fact, Talbot had noticed at the outset how pictures should be created. Talbot, referring to the

book 'Natural brush', shows his cognition of the ability to record photography objectivity, and his views are often full of contradictions and tension. But in fact, he noticed another possibility of photography. The sixth photo in the book, 'Open door' (Figure 1), is a good example of a scene consisting of an open door, a broom at the door and a horselight hanging on the wall. The screen doors, brooms and lanterns are certainly video recordings of objects in front of the camera, but choosing these elements to combine photos is not just about recording their presence. The elements of the screen to stimulate people ' s imagination is worth playing. As Ian Jeffrey analyzed, ' the simple elements in the photos exist not for themselves, but for the ' unique imagination ' and ' they evoke. This kind of simple things arouse people ' s imagination and thinking, often seen in the Dutch small painting works. Talbot ' s own analysis of this photograph clearly shows that he was inspired by the Dutch painting.



Figure 1 Talbot *Open door* 1853

Open door is the essence of Dutch painting. The scenery itself is more ordinary, but ordinary things can cause people to ponder and aesthetic. Photos are worth playing, not in the picture image recorded things, but outside the picture, is not recorded in the picture, that is not present but may appear. Looking closely at the broom, the half-open door and the hanging horse lamp, they seem to be waiting for the people who use it to appear, which is probably the reason why this picture is expressive. It can be said that *Open door* opened up our expectations for photographic expressiveness.

3. THE CONCEPTS AND METHODS OF HIGH ART PHOTOGRAPHY

The exploration of photography controllability is mainly due to the efforts to win artistic identity for photography. A considerable part of the early photographers were part-time painters, and many painters engaged in photography in order to make a living. Their perception and intuition of art, as well as their understanding of art, have also been brought into photography. The theoretical basis for questioning the artistry of photography is that photography is a mechanical mapping process, and human creativity cannot interfere with image production. Photography without manual intervention often over represents the details of reality, showing the vulgar reality nakedly,

rather than showing people's ideal for beauty. The rise of high art photography has become a powerful counterattack against the idea of excluding photography from the art palace. After 1853, with the popularity of photo printing, some British photographers, with the purpose of pure aesthetics, began to intentionally create artistic photographs, and gradually developed into a high art photography school represented by Oscar Gustav Rejlander, Henry Page Robinson, William Luck Price and Julia Margaret Cameron.[2]



Figure 2 Relander *Two Ways of Life* 1853

Oscar Gustave Rejlander (1813-1875) ' *Two Ways of Life* ' (Figure 2) is considered one of the most successful high art photography. From its composition, the obvious imitation of Raphael ' s ' *Athens College* '. The center of the picture is a saint full of beards, surrounded by two young people, one with good conduct and one without discipline. The two groups of people also lead completely different lives. This is a kind of synthetic art, and the characters in the photos have dual identities. On the one hand, they are indeed the representation of characters in real life. They can be used as an organic part of the photos, and they are in line with the identity of the characters they play. *Two Ways of Life* "does not deny the presence of the front scene of the camera at that moment, but the significance of the photograph is not only the record of the front scene of the camera, but also the exhortation theme of the photographer conveyed by the role of the characters. No wonder some people evaluate that the production of this photograph is actually a combination of elements of drama performance art.[3]

Indeed, Rejlander ' s works were born in the dilemma of the popularity of the concept of transparent reproduction and the doubt of the artistry of photography. His creation, including the whole high-art photography and the later freehand photography, cannot break the dominant position of the objective reproduction concept. In any case, the success of ' *Two Ways of Life* ' opens up the possibility of photographic expression, which means photography can not only reproduce real life, but also be used to express serious classical themes. Henry Peach Robinson (1830-1901)

also took the famous synthetic photo '*Remained*' in the second year of '*Two Ways of Life*' (Figure 3).



Figure 3 Henry Page Robinson *Remained* 1858

4. SKETCH PHOTOGRAPHY AND STIGLITZ

Picture photography and early art photography, including high art photography, show great differences. Painting photography is no longer through the characters can play to imitate the theme of persuasion painting, not just in composition and theme of imitation painting, but the pursuit of the overall painting effect. From the technical point of view, freehand photography is less use of collage techniques, but a large number of use of soft focus techniques, intentionally creating hazy halo effect, which is very similar to the visual effect of impressionist painting.

No matter in the practice or theoretical contribution of freehand photography, Alfred Stieglitz (1864 – 1945) and his “photography separatist” status are pivotal. Stieglitz ' s efforts are not only for photography to enter the art field like painting, but also for photography to get rid of the servant status of painting and science and gain independent artistic status. Stieglitz was trained and studied in photography in the European continent. In his teens, he moved to Germany. He first studied engineering in Berlin, and then abandoned engineering. He returned to New York in 1890, joined the New York Photography Club in the second year, and became the first American to be selected into the famous British Painting Photography Organization ' s ' Linkages ', since then he has become the leader of American Painting Photography.[4]

At that time, the conservative forces in American photography were still very strong, and Stieglitz ' s advanced photography concept was not recognized by people. He must declare war to the conservative forces. In 1902, Stieglitz established the Photo-Secession, a photography group. As a member of the avant-garde art movement, the Photo-Secession was established to oppose conservative photography. Stieglitz should seriously think about and realize the meaning of the

concept of “separation” to American politics. This term itself indicates the incitement and provocation of this movement after careful consideration in the modern sense. Stieglitz divided photographers into three categories : ignorant photographers, pure technical photographers and art photographers. In his eyes, the separatists and the photographers who advocate freehand photography are undoubtedly in line with the third type of photographers. That is to say, in the eyes of the separatists, photography equipment includes lenses, cameras and films, etc. They make full use of these tools and adopt complex production methods to achieve their artistic purposes. Most freehand photography pursues the image effect of soft focus, because the high sharp image is clear and more suitable for reproducing the true details. The soft-focus image is blurred. There is a hazy beauty similar to impressionist painting, which is more suitable for achieving the effect of painting (Figure 4).



Figure 4 Stieglitz *The light of the sun* 1889

Later, Stieglitz abandoned the idea of freehand photography and advocated direct photography. In his view, freehand photography did not highlight the uniqueness of photography media, and that straightforward works represent the future of photography. Stieglitz ' s change, of course, is not a return to the simple reproduction of reality without control of tradition. It is simply that he no longer pursues the artificial impressionistic effect, but the poetic truth. Therefore, Stieglitz’s transformation does not mean that he gave up his pursuit of photographic expressiveness. But in the later Stieglitz ' s view, the expression of photography can and should not only be from the direct reproduction of things, and should not be obtained by imitation of painting, and should not be

obtained by artificial control of technology. That is to say, the concept of obtaining artistic identity by sacrificing the accuracy of the image itself has been abandoned by direct photography. This should be a major progress in the concept of photography, which not only means that photography has made new progress in exploring its own media characteristics, but also means that photographic images as symbols transcend the deep ideographic function of the image surface. When Stieglitz travelled to Europe on the "Emperor Deutsche William II" liner in 1907, he took an expressive picture of *Lower warehouse* (The Steerage, 1907) (Figure 5). This photograph is usually regarded as the iconic work of Stieglitz's transformation from freehand photography to direct photography. This change is from the symbolic theme of painting style.[5]



Figure 5 Stieglitz *Lower class* 1907

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- [5] The Linked Ring, founded in 1892, is a branch of the Royal Society of Photography.

5. CONCLUSION

Contemporary photographers and theorists are actively facing challenges and exploring other possibilities of photography. In order to enter the field of art, in addition to pray for artistic relaxation standards to accommodate themselves, a more practical way is to find photography in line with the possibility of art. In other words, the reason why photography was denied to be art - the mechanical reproduction of photography excludes human factors, and art is always the result of people's creation - was crushed by the stylized and subjective performance of photography. Photography and photographs are not purely mechanical or natural. Photography is actually controllable and expressive.