

# The Vision of Research on the New Art History

## Words and Images

Jing Wang

College of Humanities and Sciences of Northeast Normal  
University  
Changchun, Jilin, China

Shuyan Yi

College of Humanities and Sciences of Northeast Normal  
University  
Changchun, Jilin, China

**Abstract**—Since the end of last century, the traditional art history research is turning to the multi discipline research angle, We call it the "new art history". One of the representatives of the "new art history" — Norman Bryson is a pioneer in the study of Western art semiotics. He look art as the symbol, look art history as internal symbol can refers to the history of conflict transformation, he found their position for the special art history which can not be explained by "History of continuous visual style".

**Keywords**—Bryson; semiotics; image; semantic

### I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional research of art history, has always been concerned about the style and the form and meaning of some self-discipline problems. From the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, some western scholars of art history conducted research no longer confined to the subject of the research methods, but also to absorb and use the research methods of other disciplines, such as semiotics, psychology, linguistics, feminist research perspective and theoretical system. This is the name of the new art history.

### II. THE "NEW ART HISTORY" IS THE NEGATION OF THE TRADITIONAL ART HISTORY

"Before the end of nineteenth Century, the West had its own logic of art history writing. However, after the twentieth Century modernism was produced, this logic began to become difficult to sustain and difficult. From the 60's, the history of the west is facing a great crisis. With this change, the new art history can be understood." [1]

The "new art history", be common in Europe and the United states in the 1980's. As scholar Cao Yiqiang said, the "new art history" means that the negation of "old art history". It argues that traditional art history without hesitation, passively will be a fact (or being constructed in as historically true). It will, for instance, style of artist biographies or anecdotes, works of art, the art of historical stages as 'given 'facts and be accepted. On the contrary, the history of the new art questions all facts and aims to explain rather than story. Thus, the 'new art history "also was dubbed' criticism of art history '[Critical art History] name and show that the theory and method than the traditional art

history out of a chip. "The new art history" thinks that "the old art history" has neglected the basic and important problems because of its focus on the superficial edge of the artist's life, style and age classification. In this connection, the "new art history" is also called the "radical art history" [2] Western art history "has four main research trend:" first, the use of Marxist political, social and historical theory interpretation of art history; second, feminist art history, to the patriarchal criticism; re affirmed the status of women in history and contemporary society; the third, of visual representation, and it in social construction and identity in the role of psychological explanation; the fourth. Analysis symbol and its meaning of the symbols and structuralism art history. " [3] "new art history" of the traditional art history of the theoretical paradigm and methodology to reflect on and reevaluation. New art history criticism Vasari since the historical materialism, the progress of art history, think that the kind of art as a trend into the perfect process of the "Vasari art history model" is the mechanical theory of history.

### III. BRYSON'S ART SEMIOTICS RESEARCH

Norman Bryson, one of the representatives of "new art history", contemporary British art historian, art theorist, who is a pioneer in the study of Western art symbols. The words and images: the French painting in the old Dynasty was the theoretical work of Bryson in 1980s. In this book, he tries to use symbols methodology, to briefly depicts the French 18th century reproduction art history also a historical outline. Different from the traditional style theory and perceptual representation theory, Bryson thought that the words and images are a component of the symbol, which can be used as a means of expression, and the two can be transformed into each other according to certain conditions. Bryson hopes to find a semantic explanation for the evolution of art history.

In Bryson view, Western painting has two kind of impulse. On the one hand, in an attempt to reproduce a painting image; on the other hand, it wants to convey certain semantic message. In the reappearance and painting through on the details of a large number of receptivity to show the visual world of the rich; in semantic painting has also been reduced as much as possible to schema, in order to avoid unnecessary ambiguity caused by information redundancy. A painting always has two kinds of expression of graph and

---

**Project:** the Jilin Provincial Education Department "12th Five Year" social science research project [2014], the research project of Social Science (B060), the stage of the stage results.

discourse, and its internal figure and discourse are in a tense relationship.

As the end of the 18th century French painting development, Bryson focused on taking place in France in about 1785 "neo classical" artistic revolution and reevaluation of the value of David. During this period, revolution government intervention to the art of painting to the crucial influence of painting were asked to have a didactic function and its discourse is emphasized, and limit the style is relaxed. The focus of the painting again from the graphics back to the discourse. However, the representative figure of "neo classical" David, his work is not on the creation of a diminution of the conceptual artist can from a painting graphics and discourse of conflicts between the transformation of history point of view be explained.

Bryson pointed out that David's representative for the brothers Horace oath "emphasis on lighting and direct sketching, broken composition to manipulate perspective and from nature are deviating from ancient tradition and neoclassical spirit of. Style classification to understand David's work did not attach too much significance, and the interpretation of their semantic model can show us what the real value lies—the paintings with the real value of the key, is the "ambiguity" of the text features. Bryson said, "sworn" in the Horace brothers for the national sacrifice of personal behavior, showing not only the choice of their own hero attributes, it also showed the gender alienation and the human nature is not complete. This powerful decisive action, "either the divine result, either wild results" [3]. So the educational significance of the work will in the dual interpretation of behavior weakened, replaced by is the significance of human behavior tragic pity and Thinking—the viewer must freely explore the moral choice. Bryson suggests that David the discourse of distance tendency, actually and Lebrun French painting tradition is come down in one continuous line.

"We used to think that, art history is as a continuation of the history of visual style, and we proposed for the classification of a pair of unique works is to conform to confirm our total visual appearance. Paintings from the Lebrun discourse full of painting to Watteau's discourse of exhaustion, coincided with a change of visual style. But pure style theory will cause serious different cases, artists that cannot easily be classified as successive visual style story works becomes the game can be classified, Chardin is one example; but if we turned to painting as a symbol of the evolution of words, then in Chardin and his different style Rococo contemporaries between similarity becomes abundantly clear. We can now see a common direction, it is style theories cannot see " [4]. Explores the semantics of the old Dynasty French painting of the whole historical development, Bryson eventually provide a from the perspective of discourse semantics to study painting symbols possible perspective. The art as the symbol, art history as internal symbol can refers to the history of conflict transformation, he continue the history of visual style "can not explain the special art history found their position.

In fact, when he was a teenager, Bryson was aware of the art is not boring, trivial things. Bryson's research on the history of art is a study of literature, art and linguistics. According to Bryson, when disciplines such as English literature to encourage the development of a competitive theory of criticism, art history but still as it. "In the vast majority of the English Department, people will find that graduate students will for text interpretation argue bitterly, the situation in the Department of art history, but can not be find; students does not debate for image." [5] as a result, Bryson on existing studies in the history of art reflection and questioning and unique perspective to construct his theory on the research of art history, to show us the art history of the development of another logic, namely to semiotic perspective to interpret the history of art, which is the main focus of his theory.

#### IV. BRYSON'S RESEARCH METHODS OF THE HISTORY OF SEMIOTICS

One limitation and the validity of a theory always go together like shadows. Gombrich's theory and Bryson's theory is the same, Gombrich's works in any is worthy of the reputation of British art history has a central location, but Bryson symbols learn art history and visual culture theory as a traditional art history especially Gombrich art theory of opposite theory has been accepted in the intellectual circles. Bryson believes that the history of Western art is not a development process from the non realism to the realistic, but the process of the interaction between the image composition and the composition of the words in the picture. This provides us with a new perspective and new ideas for the study of art history.

The study of art history in China has a long history, from the Tang Dynasty, Zhang Yanyuan of the paintings to now, we are using several versions of the "Chinese art history", we have a number of research methods, basic or the use of research methods in the social history, the art development time into the overall form of social, economic, political, ideological and cultural study, with particular emphasis on the influence of political and economic background to the development of art. Including those professional art theory of learners, from entering the University, We began to learn the true meaning of art history at the moment, the history of the fine arts classroom is such a scene: the students sit in the shade of the classroom, concentrating on looking at the long admired the paintings and other works of art slides, listening to the teacher say "whom when created this piece? What subjects does it show? How about its composition, line, color application? What does it mean?" It seems in the light bright classroom, no projector, the projector is difficult to fine art history course. Art history with social history writing and followed by the classroom teaching method, make trained theory of art talent cannot jump out of this mindset, about the progress of the formation of the history of art is the artist's life and art movement, artistic skills and with the existing social, political, cultural and other related, or the unity of art works in the category of a certain style of narrative. And the analysis of the works of Chinese art history, is not a simple picture description is falling in the same meaning analysis,

few people will put forward different views on the work itself. Some scholars also use some of the research methods of "new art history" in the west to study the material cases and subjects of Chinese art history. In this sense, Bryson's traditional concept of art history has also led to the role of the new thinking.

In addition, we should try to break the idea of Western art and Western art theory as the center in the art theory, when we look at the contemporary art world and the attitude of the art theory with Bryson's method. For example, in China since the 1980s, after the introduction of western modernism discourse theory, feminism gradually by extensive attention, beginning in every field of art history, using western structuralism theory, hermeneutics, deconstruction and new historicism theory of male culture of autocratic attack, temporarily feminism became a hot and sensitive topic. Although blindly reject or blindly absorb western research methods, will contribute to narrow nationalism, but we in reference to the western art theory, at the same time, should also tries to return to the Oriental Art Thought of mining and evaluation, on the basis of the western, and strive to create a has its own characteristics of Art theory. At this point, Bryson's theory of semiotics has a positive and practical significance to our contemporary art theory.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Lu Peng. Inspiration easy, referring to the difficulties from the basic concept of the new art history studies of Chinese art history > literary studies, July 2010 period.
- [2] Cao Yiqiang. New Horizons in European Art History (Introduction) [J]. new art, 2005, (1): 13.
- [3] Norman Bryson. Words and images: French painting during the old Dynasty [M]. Hangzhou: Zhejiang photography press, 2001:272.
- [4] Norman • Bryson. Words and images: French painting during the old Dynasty [M]. Hangzhou: Zhejiang photography press, 2001:278-279.
- [5] Ding Ning. Rewriting Art History -- Bryson and his new artistic conception of history [J]. world art, 1991, (3): 55.