

ADAD 7017

Professional Discourses

Innovation Review Article:

Student's name:

Xiang Meng (Steven)
2234103

20/5/2024

Title: The Importance of Observational Training in Photography: Insights from "Observational Studies on the Road"

Abstract: This paper explores the significance of observational skills in photography training, drawing inspiration from the photography work "Observational Studies on the Road". It unfolds discussions on feasible pathways for enhancing observational abilities and analyzes the implications of such training in photography through the lens of collaborative partnerships. The paper first delves into the importance of observational skills in photography and highlights the interdependence and complementarity between the two. Observation serves as a prerequisite for the creation of photographic works, with keen observation reflecting the photographer's own acuity and facilitating the creation of captivating photographic works. The second part of the paper further elucidates the role of street observation training in enhancing observational skills and sensitivity. It attempts to outline three key points in training through case analysis, namely, attention to detail, continuity, and immersive perspectives, and their impact on the creation of photographic works. Detail determines the depth and emotive power of photographic works, while continuity dictates the coherence of series and projects, crucial for effectively conveying narrative and intent to the audience. Immersive perspectives entail the application of entirely different viewing methods, seeking fresh perspectives and interpretive directions within everyday environments. These three approaches collectively address individuals' sense of uncertainty when faced with complex environments, offering viable methods and pathways for image expression. Starting from the minutiae and altering one's observational perspective assists photographers in discovering new viewpoints and overcoming perceptual barriers formed by cognitive interface theories. Lastly, the paper discusses collaborative partnerships and focuses on observational training within the photography education system. It emphasizes the importance of enhancing students' observational and collaborative abilities through curriculum design, aiming to address the shortcomings and deficiencies in current Chinese university photography education.

In conclusion, this paper is grounded in observational research, elucidating the importance of observational skills through analyzing their role and impact on photography. It ultimately returns to the significance and contributions of observational training to photography education, sparking academic attention and discussions on observational skills.

Keywords: observational skills, photography training, collaborative partnerships, observational studies on the road.

Introduction

Observation, a topic closely linked to photography, has been increasingly mentioned in the past twenty years. In the contemporary era of convenient digital technology, people are bombarded with a vast amount of information daily. As long as people are willing, opening any smartphone application can almost solve all queries. However, this also poses a problem: firstly, a large amount of information is filtered and pushed to users based on algorithms, often prioritizing quantity over quality, attracting attention to "eyeballs" and "followers" rather than "facts themselves" and "capacity improvement" (Lin, 2014). The prevalence of fake news

constantly challenges the public's trust in the media. The proliferation of complex information disperses people's attention and limits their focus on genuinely interesting content (Gustave, 2015). People no longer cultivate curiosity from within and develop interests and likes. The phenomenon of observing every detail of the world, from a flower to an insect, for a long time, is becoming rare. The loss of concentration contributes to a restless society that only values superficial effects, which inevitably affects all art forms, including photography.

In fact, photography, as an art form, has two important developmental factors. One is technological conditions (the level of imaging technology at different times determines the final imaging effect, thus also influencing the subject matter and expression methods at that time), and the other is human observation methods. As Chitosegawa said: What we want is not art, but observation (the perspective of the observer, p. 82). Different photographers scrutinize the world from different perspectives, focusing on different things, forming different themes and techniques, greatly expanding the expressive forms and application scope of photography. Photography, as an artistic medium, belongs to the art system, similar to branches such as painting, dance, and writing, all of which are pathways for humans to express their cognition of the objective world. Since it is expression, they all follow the logical chain of input-processing-output. Input is observation, as the initial condition, which determines how subsequent steps develop. From this, it can be seen that observation (input) is crucial for photography expression (output). Therefore, this article will discuss what forms of photography observation can determine, how to train one's observational skills, and the results brought about by emphasizing observational skills in photography education.

The Meaning and Essence of Observation

Is observation something that needs training and learning? Some people believe that observation is an innate instinct. As long as a person's visual system is intact and their physiological condition is good, they possess the potential for observation. From a physiological perspective, this is indeed the case, but it is not entirely accurate (Laroche, 2020). The aforementioned observation refers to completely instinctive, biological observation, meaning that this type of observation is not much different from that of early humans millions of years ago. The purpose of biological observation is simply to obtain information, which is then analyzed by the brain to produce corresponding bodily commands, ultimately serving the needs of survival and avoiding harm.

In contrast, observational skills in photography are entirely different; they represent a more research-based form of observation and information gathering. Let us consider a question: if two people walk down the exact same road, will they see the same scenery, receive the same information, and focus on the same points? The answer is no. This precisely explains why no photographer can perfectly mimic another's photographic style, because they are inherently two distinct individuals (Wigoder, 2001). Personal observational habits vary greatly depending on an individual's growth experiences, personality traits, and other factors, leading to a wide range of observation habits and points of interest. It can be said that observational skills in photography are inherently personal, exploratory, and based on individual experiential conditions. In summary, observation is something everyone can do, a physiological response, while observational habits are highly personalized and closely related to an individual's worldview, interests, hobbies, and lifestyle (Basil, 2011). Through self-training, purposeful

systematic observation, and the synthesis and organization of observational and reflective results, we witness today a plethora of unique perspectives and photographic subjects.

The Significance of Street Observation Studies and Modernology

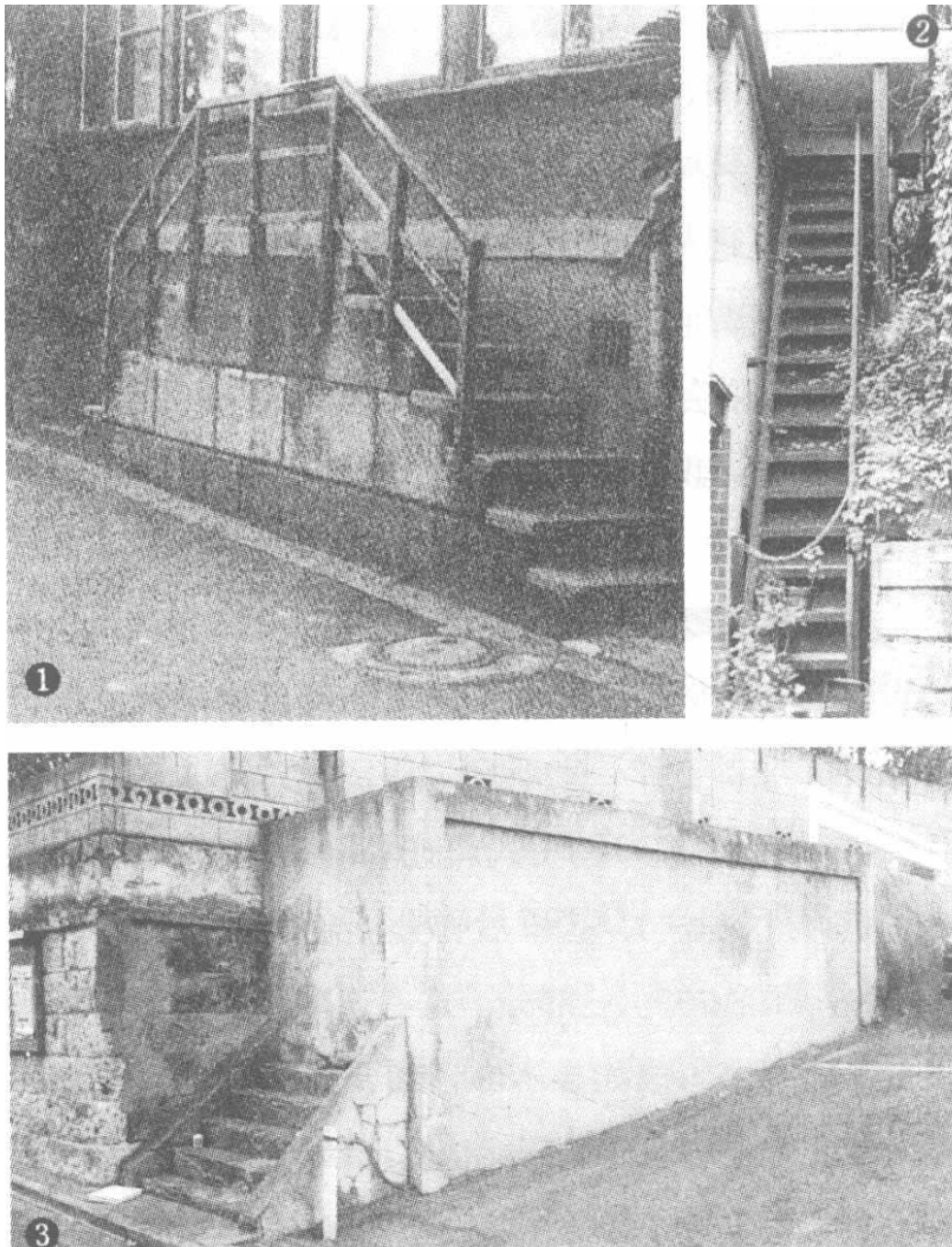
Observation is not only a way to understand the world but also a means of self-expression. Street observation studies focus on the everyday life research that everyone can participate in. Unlike traditional forms of artistic expression, street observation studies involve observing everyday objects such as manhole covers, fire hydrants, architectural fragments, and TVs transformed into chicken coops. These objects are pre-existing and unaltered; they do not undergo any form of processing or transformation, and therefore, there is no room for judgment (based on previous examples) or appreciation. Objects like manhole covers or sawn-off electrical pole bases have no thoughts or emotions; they lack intentionality and can, at most, be considered objects. With such objects, there is no "appreciation," only "observation" (Fujimoto Terunobu, p. 30).

Street observation studies originated from modernology (MODERNOLOGIO) and began in the 1930s. "After the Kanto Earthquake of 1923, everything fell apart, turning into worthless fragments, and the scene became a wilderness. People started rebuilding the city bit by bit, starting with erecting temporary shelters. Jintaro Imaha's modernology emerged in such an era" (Akasegawa Genpei, p. 21). The earthquake physically disrupted people's research and exploration of the past, giving rise to modernology, a discipline that focuses more on the modern and contemporary. Jintaro Imaha, a professor at Waseda University, initially studied Japanese folk houses with Kunio Yanagita. Later, he developed modernology. Initially, modernology focused on ordinary street objects such as wooden signs, school uniforms, and posters. However, over time, its underlying philosophy evolved beyond mere reception and recording. In 1972, the discovery of the "Pure Staircase" by Akasegawa Genpei, Tetsuo Matsuda, and Nobuo Minami outside the Shouhei Hall hotel in Yotsuya introduced the concept of "Thomassom" (Thomassom), which unearthed the "ultra-artistic" components. Later, it was given a specific term, "Thomassom."

"The term 'Thomassom' refers to various useless objects left behind by urban architecture. A very careful observation of the living environment is required to analyze whether an object is truly 'Thomassom' or suspiciously so. It can be said that 'Thomassom' is the sum of human behavior, consciousness, emotions, and economic activities, and what remains after these are removed and revealed" (Akasegawa Genpei, p. 15). The emergence of Thomassom signifies that street observation studies, as a mode of viewing, have produced a landmark interdisciplinary achievement. This "observation of meaningless objects on the street" goes beyond conventional observational requirements and leads to philosophical reflections on societal forms and individual cognitive modes, among other impacts. Looking around, most of the things around us are deliberately manufactured, which can become tiresome to observe. Searching for "Thomassom" and observing and recording them in certain ways aligns with the characteristics of photographic observation. The purpose of photography is to find the extraordinary in the ordinary, the misalignment of meaning, or the collision of forms, to create visual structures and conflicts in meaning. As Fujimoto Terunobu stated in the well-known Thomassom case of the "Pure Staircase," "All objects in the world are made for a certain purpose, but we want to find the part that deviates from the original intention" (Fujimoto

Terunobu, p. 31). Whether in form or meaning, misalignment is precious in photographic expression. In daily life, most things adhere to logical consistency and causal connections, inevitably leading to a loss of interest in mundane everyday life, without prolonged observation. Unexpected conflicts and misalignments become indispensable condiments in daily life.

It can be said that the emergence of Thomassom is an inevitable result of the development of modern civilization, and attention to Thomassom is a manifestation of contemporary art development. Paying attention to the redundancy of civilization and elevating it to the realm of art leads to reflections and critiques of civilization itself, which is also an important responsibility of modern art. After all, under the pervasive erosion of consumerism, "God hides in the streets" (Fujimoto Terunobu, p. 17).



In addition to the observation of "Thomassom," modern Japanese nodernology has also developed various observational categories that combine observation and collection, such as architectural fragments, manhole covers, and "tobidashi" (small pits formed on streets or surfaces). However, overall, these various branches of observation cannot escape the unchanging theme of "observing things with the eyes" (Akasegawa Genpei, p. 26), which is the essence of street observation. In terms of photography, street observation shares similarities with typological studies, and nodernology has parallels with natural history painting—a branch that emerged during the European Industrial Revolution, extending from the observation of all things. These disciplines follow certain logical frameworks to explore the inherent logic contained within what the eyes see (or the objects themselves), organizing and summarizing them, and ultimately addressing the ultimate questions of observation: what to observe, how to observe, and from what perspective.

Perspectives and Training Methods for Observation

1. Balancing Novelty and Familiarity

In 1989, Donald D. Hoffman, a cognitive science professor at the University of California, Irvine, proposed the well-known "interface theory of perception." According to this theory, from an evolutionary perspective, our brains may not necessarily correspond one-to-one with the things that exist in reality during the process of perceiving the world. In order to conserve energy, the brain often simplifies the recognition process by ignoring redundant information, thereby minimizing energy expenditure. This explains why individuals tend to overlook minor changes in familiar environments while maintaining high levels of attention, observation, and excitement in unfamiliar cognitive environments.

Applied in the field of photography, the above theory explains why photographers need to constantly seek out new subjects for their creations. It also serves as a warning for photographic creation: our brains naturally tend to filter out familiar things, thereby reducing the sharpness and sensitivity of observation. Imagine how difficult it is for someone to maintain the same level of curiosity and desire for exploration when observing the path in front of their house that they pass by every day. This goes against instinct. Therefore, Fujimoto Terunobu once expressed: "In the present era, curiosity about things is becoming increasingly important" (Under the Banner of "Street Observation," p. 32).

The most challenging aspect of nodernology or street observation studies is never losing the sense of freshness when observing things; otherwise, it would merely be monotonous recording (Fujimoto Terunobu, p. 88). From the perspective of photographic observation, photographers need to confront this instinct and discover subjects worth attention in the ordinary world. In this regard, street observation studies provide methods worth emulating: by exploring the beauty of ordinary things in life and permeating observation into every corner of the surrounding environment, more avenues and possibilities for expression can be found.

The quality of photographic works fundamentally stems from a counter-instinctual, calibrated observation habit developed on the basis of keen observation of the world. Whether one can persist consistently and persistently is the key to the success and appeal of the work.

Furthermore, enjoyment has always been an inexhaustible driving force for sustainability.

"There is no joy without discovery. If you haven't experienced the joy of your own discoveries, it is difficult to continue this kind of research" (Suzuki Tsuyoshi, p. 260). Finding details that

have not been noticed by others and discovering one's own unique world and contribution is a way to realize the value of life. From this perspective, photography and street observation perfectly overlap in their objectives. As independent individuals in the world, people always hope to leave their own mark and contribution to the world. From a biological perspective, this stimulates the secretion of dopamine. Whether one can find joy in the exploration process, establish a reward circuit in the brain, is also an important factor in whether one can persevere.

2.The Importance of Perseverance

Perseverance seems to play a crucial role in the journey of every successful photographer. Stuart Matt expressed a similar sentiment in "Think like a street photographer": "Never does that old maxim 'The harder I practice, the luckier I get' ring truer than with street photography. You have to put in the hours, pound the pavements, adopt a kind of 'in it to win it' mentality if you want to get anywhere."

For photographers, perseverance not only means persistence in the choice of creative subjects and image capture but also entails maintaining sharp observation skills and breakthroughs. Training in observation, much like language and writing, fundamentally relies on daily accumulation and ultimately internalization into personal habits. Only by capturing scenes that are overlooked by ordinary people and revealing the brilliance hidden beneath the surface of daily life from a unique perspective can the value of photographic series be achieved, which is the essence of personal observation.

Perseverance is no easy feat and is often accompanied by pain and struggle. Whether one can achieve personal goals and expectations through this almost self-flagellating perseverance, reaching the innermost desires and aspirations, or succumb to short-term pleasures, is a difficult choice that everyone must make.

3.Ability to Discover Details

Another key aspect of street observation is attention to detail, a characteristic prominently displayed in Lin Zhang'er's street observations. In his observation records, in addition to conventional items such as manhole covers, "he also observed various details such as dog feces, gravel embedded in shoe soles, and small holes in brick walls, as if everything he encountered emitted a special radiance" (Fujimoto Terunobu, p. 119). The Japanese integrate the emphasis on detail into their national character, so when viewing works by some Japanese photographers, one can feel a faint radiance flowing on the surface of the works. The emotional impact of a work comes not only from its subject matter and presentation technique but also from the time invested by the creator in the work. The weightiness of a work, or its completeness, mainly comes from the attitude upheld by the creator throughout the process from beginning to end. The creators walking the streets and observing have already provided answers to how far observation can be pushed and how meticulous details can be captured.

4.The Habit of Continuous Reflection

Reflection is the inherent driving force of progress, and any observation without reflection can only remain superficial. While photography may seem like a decisive art captured in an instant, it actually requires long periods of preparation and groundwork before that decisive moment arrives. Some say that luck comes to those who see, and observation is no different. I often feel that while photography may appear to be a creation completed in a moment, it is

actually the culmination of all past preparations released in that single moment. All past thoughts, readings, reflections, changes, etc., are reflected and sublimated in that moment. Mastery is always implicit, and the role of sedimentation is always weak, with the ultimate effect being just a small part of the iceberg. But without daily simple accumulation and repetition, where would the achievement and greatness come from? As the ancients said, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," and "A river is formed by the accumulation of small streams." Only by maintaining reflection, diligence in study, and curiosity can breakthroughs be achieved.

窗体顶端

Observation and Collaboration Modules in Photography Education

For a long time, as a branch of art education, photography education in contemporary Chinese universities has not occupied a prominent position compared to other traditional art disciplines. Consequently, photography teaching has not yet formed a complete teaching system and evaluation system. Looking at photography education in Chinese universities, it mainly follows the dissemination of Western theoretical achievements, with insufficient emphasis on training and cultivating individual observation. Besides accumulating professional theoretical literacy, photography art education should stimulate students' interest in a scientific and reasonable way, thereby nurturing their own characteristics. In today's era of widespread digital terminal devices, anyone can become an artist, and professional talent cultivation education should move towards cultivating what kind of talents and maintaining a balance between thinking and technology are continuous problems facing every art education worker.

Teaching innovation is not easy; it first poses new demands on educators. In today's ever-changing era, sticking to old rules cannot keep pace with the times. Whether from the utilitarian purpose of social output or as the metaphysical cultivation of art, photography education systems need to provide new answers to the requirements of cultivating compound professional talents. Perhaps, cultivating observational skills based on cooperation can provide new solutions to this purpose.

First, in the process of classroom exercises and assignment arrangements, to eliminate the requirement of individual-based creation in the photography creation process and transform it into group-based collaborative creation and critique. At the beginning of the class, students are divided into several groups to carry out activities such as peer review of assignments, photography analysis, and discussions. At the same time, photography groups are particularly suitable for courses requiring teamwork, such as portrait photography and still life photography. This measure can enhance the cohesion within the group and strengthen the competitive awareness, establishing a positive atmosphere of striving for progress among students.

Second, relying on online resources and platforms, encourage students to share in the community, develop their own creative styles, build personal IPs, and share experiences based on operational results, which also form a part of their regular grades.

Photography education is a complex and ever-changing process. In the process of tailoring education to the characteristics of each student, discovering their strengths, correcting their

weaknesses, and not forgetting the mission of moral education and nurturing talents in the process of skills training, is the fundamental pursuit and result of education.

References

1. Akasegawara, H., Fujimori, T., & Minami, S. (2020). Introduction to Street Observation Studies. Translated by Yan Ketin, Huang Bijun, and Lin Jiaobi. Beijing: Life·Reading·New Knowledge Sanlian Bookstore.
2. Lin, S. (2014). Why is the lying posture of camels so charming? Observer. Retrieved December 3, 2023, from https://www.guancha.cn/LinShuYou/2014_10_21_278259.shtml.
3. Le Bon, G. (2015). The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind. Central Compilation Bureau.
4. Laroche, H. (2020). Observation as photography: A metaphor. *M@ n@ gement*, 33(2), 79-99.
5. Wigoder, M. (2001). Some thoughts about street photography and the everyday. *History of Photography*, 25(4), 368-378.
6. Basil, M. (2011). Use of photography and video in observational research. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 14(3), 246-257.
7. Hoffman, D. D., Singh, M., & Prakash, C. (2015). The interface theory of perception. *Psychonomic bulletin & review*, 22, 1480-1506.
8. Brown, D., & Stuart, M. (2023). Think Like a Street Photographer. Hachette UK.

ADAD 7017

Professional Discourses

Innovation Proposal Article

Student's name:

Xiang Meng (Steven)
2234103

20/5/2024

Research Background

Vision is an integral part of everyday life, appearing in our world in the form of images and artifacts, conveying and depicting various aspects of our social life and culture (Rose, 2012; Silver, 2013). Since the Second World War, image-based media, relying on technological conditions and market demand, has been widely applied, gradually challenging the dominant position of text and printing and giving rise to what Daniel Boorstin termed the "image revolution" (Lin, 2007, p.17). William Mitchell, in his book "Picture Theory," introduced the term "the pictorial turn," to more precisely summarize this cultural shift. In his view, to some extent, we already "live in a culture dominated by images, visual likeness, facades, illusions, copies, reproductions, imitations, and fantasies" (Mitchell, 1994).

My research direction is greatly influenced by two individuals, namely the German photographer Andreas Gursky and the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, who express concerns about the imagistic society in their respective fields. In the artwork "Rhein II," Gursky meticulously reconstructed a non-existent scene of the Rhine River using post-production techniques, challenging the inherent cognitive processes preserved from the era of reading images: namely, the process of establishing equivalence to reality through obtaining detailed information (Boden and Edmonds, 2009, p.21-46). Baudrillard, on the other hand, believes that under current technological conditions, it is no longer possible for people to distinguish between the real and the fake; images have detached from any association with the real world, and as a result, we now live in a visual-political regime dominated by simulation or hyperreality (Baudrillard, 2001).

In 2023, as the inaugural year of AI technology development, its impact on the field of image generation further expanded. The experience and perception of "reality" no longer rely on "real" means of acquisition (Bsteh and Vermeylen, 2021), and people's perception of reality has become increasingly fragile, with images completely detached from "actual sources" and relying on "algorithmic iteration" to generate and disseminate information (Mannay, 2016). The discussion about the authenticity of images and their relationship with reality has been further severed and has sparked widespread debate.

Research Objectives

Building upon the aforementioned research considerations, this study takes the perspective of the audience, i.e., the receivers, in the process of image information transmission. Following the research example provided by Clark in 2017 ("The use of visual methodologies in social work research over the last decade: a narrative review and some questions for the future"), the study employs a team-based approach to investigate the transformation of information in image representation and the construction of "hyperreality" in audience consciousness, starting from the meaning reference of image symbols. The main driving points of this team-based research are derived from the following aspects:

Objective 1: How do different age groups within the same region prioritize their understanding of images?

Objective 2: How do viewers distinguish between "reality" and imaginative space in images? What are the bases for their distinctions?

Objective 3: What factors influence viewers' judgments of information in graphic information transmission? What are the transformation pathways? (This includes research on environmental factors, information density, personal cognitive experiences/habits, etc., within the context of visual perception.)

These objectives aim to shed light on the complex process of image interpretation and audience perception, with a focus on understanding how individuals perceive and interpret visual information in today's highly visual culture.

Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology

This study is grounded in Max Weber's perspective on social research, emphasizing "understanding" as the primary goal, which involves immersing oneself in the world of the subjects under study. The interpretivist epistemology highlights the subjective interpretation and understanding of individuals regarding the external world. It views the process of cognition as a subjective interpretive process, where individuals generate their understanding and interpretation of the external world based on their experiences, culture, and background. This paradigm emphasizes uncovering the deeper meanings behind human behavior and social phenomena, making it particularly suitable for exploring the construction of meaning between artworks and audiences, as it allows researchers to delve into how individuals perceive and experience the meaning of artworks.

In this study, the meaning of images operates within the consciousness of the viewers, influenced by factors such as personal experiences, age, region, ideology, and more. The study aims to construct a generalized pathway of how people understand image meanings, thereby contributing to artistic creation.

To investigate the construction pathway of visual symbols and meanings, the research team adopts a qualitative approach based on phenomenological theory, building upon the interpretivist paradigm. According to Edmund Husserl, the driving force behind phenomenological research is "not derived from various philosophies but from facts and questions." The purpose of phenomenology is "not to build upwards but to dig downwards repeatedly, laying a more solid foundation for existing insights than ever before." This aligns with the objectives of this study. Phenomenology focuses on studying human experiences and can reveal the underlying meanings behind phenomena. For the objective of comparing the pathways of image meaning construction among different age groups, the phenomenological approach within the interpretivist perspective, particularly Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), is suitable for exploring the hidden logic behind image cognition.

Relative relativism ontology posits that there is no universal, objective reality. Reality is considered to be constructed by individuals within their cultural and social environments, allowing for diverse interpretations based on personal backgrounds and experiences. I adhere to this ontological stance and agree that the nature and existence of reality are not fixed or absolute but constantly evolving based on specific cultural, social environments, or personal

experiences. This ontological perspective is applied to the research design, recognizing the interpretive space inherent in artworks, which provides viewers with an open range of understanding. In this space, the diversity of interpretations of external information can be fully displayed, enhancing the attractiveness of artworks. This ontological structure is acknowledged and applied in the research design.

Research Design

This study believes that the significance of researching viewing behavior extends far beyond viewing itself. The cultural connotations and group experiences reflected behind viewing behavior represent the collective tendencies and cognitive modes of the group. Through visual research and analysis, it is possible to study the common cultural orientations behind the group. Considering the emphasis of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis on the discussion of psychological phenomena and external transformation directions, the research process relies on questionnaire surveys and interviews to analyze and organize data. It focuses on using interviews and observation methods to collect data and establish feedback pathways of visual psychology, forming interpretive summaries of the cognitive patterns of visual perception based on mixed research methods.

Data Collection and Analysis

Firstly, to address Objective 1, a questionnaire survey method is employed to preliminarily summarize data from potential respondents. The distribution of answers regarding age and aesthetic differences in images is summarized to classify coordinates. Additionally, another objective of this step is to select representative individuals for further in-depth interviews. The questionnaire, targeting residents of Ningbo City, is designed based on the classification of image experience, image cognition, and image impact, following the framework proposed by Yang (2011) for questionnaire-based data collection and analysis.

Image Experience (Basic Information): This section aims to gather information about respondents' past experiences with images and their cognitive environment to establish their basic profiles. Drawing upon Infotrends surveys indicating that the average person views 220 photos per day (Kearney, 2004), a comparison axis is established to differentiate between low, normal, and high frequencies of image exposure.

Image Cognition (Further Categorization): This section investigates respondents' aesthetic preferences and tendencies regarding images to clarify their habits and purposes in image cognition. Questions inquire about respondents' favorite types of images, preferences, and the type of information they hope to obtain from images.

Image Impact (Result Analysis): This section focuses on studying whether audiences believe the information conveyed in images, whether they are influenced by visual perceptions in independent thinking and factual judgment, and the relative importance of text and images. The questionnaire is distributed using personal links and QR codes shared through snowball sampling methods for recruitment. Questionnaires are collected either online or offline in a random manner. The final sample size is no less than 1000, and respondents under the age of 20 are not included to ensure the concentration and effectiveness of the study. The questionnaire process does not involve the collection of personal confidential information. Both online and offline questionnaire collectors are students majoring in photography and

cinematography who have undergone training to ensure the standardization of the collection process.

Secondly, to address Objective 2, described by Smith et al. (2009: 83) as the "most detailed and time-consuming" step, a preliminary interview outline is created to explore visual information feedback and construct transformation pathways. This study uses a qualitative method to explore the cognitive pathways and basic attitudes towards image information, observing and recording respondents' behaviors and reactions when faced with images with clear directions (such as shape, color, image content, etc.), analyzing the roles of age, experience, and image understanding (Sutton, 1987: 542-569), and studying the sources and pathways of "real" feelings.

The interviews are conducted in Ningbo City, and interviewees are selected based on previous online and offline questionnaire data. The selection criteria are determined based on the extreme square difference method (Lachal, 2012), aiming to select differentiated data to cover as many image understanding pathways as possible and compare their similarities and differences. The selection of interviewees follows the principles of theoretical sampling (Fendt and Sachs, 2008: 430-455):

Interviewees have relevant experience in image creation or learning (professional group)/enthusiastic about image reading (enthusiast group) and have little or no experience in image reading (control group) for comparison.

Interviewees have significant differences in basic characteristics (gender, age, occupation, image reading habits, etc.) and professional directions to enhance the explanatory power of the interviews.

Interviewees are required to have a certain understanding and recognition of society, be able to independently and systematically understand and think about cultural phenomena, and not be excessively influenced by subjective emotions.

In this study, visual materials serve as a means for participants to demonstrate and narrate their feelings about images or guide their image reading experiences. Visual images provided by participants are used as the basis for interviews, allowing their oral narratives to be guided and expanded (Lachal et al., 2012). Following the research principles mentioned by Rudolf Arnheim in "Art and Visual Perception" (p235-247), a database of ten sets of images with approximately different content is established for use during interviews to collect feedback data.

The optimal sample size for in-depth interviews is between 28 and 40 (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001: 20), following the principle of theoretical saturation, and a total of 32 interviewees are selected for the study. Sufficient time and sample size allow the team to explore the experiences and visual perceptions of participants in detail. Additionally, other similar studies typically interview 10 to 20 people (Park and Sarkar, 2007).

Before the interviews commence, participants are first introduced to the purpose of the interview and background information about the study, with visual image understanding serving as a catalyst for data elicitation and discussion. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews are conducted based on a pre-determined outline. Semi-structured interviews are suitable for research focused on individual experiences and comparisons of their differences, allowing participants to concentrate on discussing their own experiences (Barriball and While, 1994). Therefore, this format allows researchers to pose flexible questions, and participants

respond freely to investigate their perspectives and opinions. The open-ended interview plan is designed to guide rather than lead the interview (Bartoli, 2020), which allows for more information to be provided and clarifies the reasons behind the answers.

During the interviews, participants are asked to elaborate on the visual graphic stimuli and feedback results. Interviewers typically ask targeted follow-up questions based on the respondents' answers and encourage respondents to provide specific examples or stories. Each semi-structured interview lasts approximately 40 minutes to an hour. The factors in image understanding that rank relatively high are extracted from the interview information for model construction, followed by the distribution of a large sample questionnaire for validation.

Data Analysis

To address Objective 3, data collected from in-depth interviews are transcribed, and three steps of coding—open coding, axial coding, and selective coding—are applied to the textual data to interpret the similarities and differences in the encoding of image information. A continuous comparative approach is employed in the coding process, refining and revising concepts through the supplementation of data until theoretical saturation is achieved, revealing the convergence of audience understanding of image information and constructing a model of image cognition for different age groups in Ningbo City (Pandit, 1996: 1-15) (Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014: 1202-1229), and generating a research report.

After establishing the model, this study will use statistical analysis software such as SPSS to test the reliability and validity of each research variable. Descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, factor analysis, analysis of variance, regression analysis, and other statistical analyses will be conducted. Finally, a results discussion meeting will be held to invite experts to validate the pathways of image meaning construction. Combining an empirical perspective, the relationships between variables will be analyzed to verify the research hypotheses.

Timetable

PG1 completion	05.2024-08.2024
Introduction chapter	08.2024-10.2024
Literature review chapter	10.2024-02.2025
Research Design Chapter	02.2025-04.2025
Conduct preliminary interviews and gather information to determine interview questions.	04.2025-07.2025
Preliminary Survey and Data Collection: Initial surveys will be conducted to understand respondents' feedback on image information and viewing experiences from a macro perspective.	07.2025-09.2025
Based on the questionnaire results, representative candidates will be selected for interviews to ascertain their cognitive habits regarding flat images and to establish research hypotheses.	09.2025-02.2026

The questionnaire survey results will be examined and validated.	02.2026-03.2026
Findings Chapter	03.2026-04.2026
Discussion Chapter	04.2026-05.2026
Conclusion Chapter	05.2026-07.2026

Expectations and Results:

Through the theoretical framework and research methods outlined above, a study on the cognitive pathways of image meaning and authenticity based on the interpretive phenomenological perspective will be constructed. This will yield comparative results on the differentiation and specificity of image cognition among residents of Ningbo. Based on the feedback and findings of the study, the high sensitivity of viewers to symbolic application will help clarify the direction of artistic image creation, thereby refining the intent and pathway of artistic expression.

Artistic creation and interpretation are inherently stochastic, with ambiguous imagery providing viewers with an open space for interpretation, allowing for the diversity of reality to be showcased. Theoretical research endeavors to elucidate and clarify amidst this ambiguity, attempting to construct a clear map between transmission and reception. This not only clarifies the thought process of the creator but also provides a basis and literature for other artistic creations, thereby embodying the significance of the research. Conducting this study in the contemporary context of widespread AI technology application, where the boundary of reality is increasingly blurred, holds strong local and temporal significance.

Challenges and Execution:

During the research process, there will be challenges related to team collaboration, division of labor, and extensive data collection and analysis. Methodologically, clear individual responsibilities and goals should be established through timely team meetings and software assistance (such as Slack) to ensure progress and work quality. Communication is an effective means of problem-solving, and data collection for this study is also based on effective communication. Therefore, careful selection of team members with high compatibility and common interests to assist in the research is crucial in the preparatory phase.

In summary, the design of visual research based on semi-structured interviews involves various variables and uncertainties in the execution process. Various adjustments during the research process will affect the final results. Therefore, researchers need to make various preparations and extensive literature references to achieve targeted results. Attention to detail is essential, and confidence is equally important to successfully complete the research work.

Reference

- 1.Rose G (2012) Visual Methodologies – An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials. 3rd ed. London: SAGE.
- 2.Silver J (2013) Visual methods. In: Willig C (ed) Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology. Berkshire: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education, pp.156–165.
- 3.Lin Wengang (1997). "Media Ecology," translated by He Daokuan, Peking University Press, p.17.

- 4.Zhan Mingxin. (1997). "Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" [M]. Sanlian Bookstore.
- 5.W.J.T.Mitchell, (1994) *Picture Theory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 6.Boden Margaret A. and Edmonds Ernest A.. 2009. What is generative art? *Digital Creativity* 20, p21–46.
- 7.Baudrillard, J. (2001). *Jean Baudrillard: selected writings*. Stanford University Press.
- 8.Bsteh Sheila and Vermeylen Filip. 2021. From Painting to Pixel: Understanding NFT Artworks. Retrieved June 15, 2021 from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351346278_From_Painting_to_Pixel_Understanding_NFT_artworks.
- 9.Mannay D (2016) *Visual, Narrative and Creative Research Methods – Application, Reflection and Ethics*. Oxon: Routledge.
- 10.Clark A, Morriss L (2017) The use of visual methodologies in social work research over the last decade: a narrative review and some questions for the future. *Qualitative Social Work* 16(1): 29–43.
- 11.Husserl, Edmund. Edmund Husserl. Ousia, 1991.
- 12.Clarke V, Braun V (2013) *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*[J].
13. Sokolowski, R. (2000). *Introduction to phenomenology*. Cambridge university press
- 14.Smith, Jonathan & Flowers, Paul & Larkin, Michael. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*.
- 16.Yang Mei. (2011). *Research on data collection and analysis based on questionnaires* [Dissertation, Shandong Normal University].
- 17.Kearney KS, Hyle AE (2004) Drawing out emotions: the use of participant-produced drawings in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Research* 4(3): 361–382.
- 18.Smith JA, Flowers P, Larkin M (2009) *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis – Theory, Method and Research*. London: SAGE.
- 19.Sutton, R.I.(1987)‘ The process of organizational death: Disbanding and reconnecting’, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, pp.542-569.
- 20.Lachal J, Speranza M, Taïeb O, et al. (2012) Qualitative research using photo-elicitation to explore the role of food in family relationships among obese adolescents. *Appetite* 58(3): 1099–11-11.
- 21.Fendt, J. and Sachs, W.(2008)‘Grounded theory method in management research: Users' perspectives’, *Organizational research methods*, 11(3), pp.430-455.
- 22.Lachal J, Speranza M, Taïeb O, et al. (2012) Qualitative research using photo-elicitation to explore the role of food in family relationships among obese adolescents. *Appetite* 58(3): 1099–11-11.
23. Arnheim, R. (1954). *Art and visual perception: A psychology of the creative eye*. Univ of California Press.
- 24.Gubrium, J.F. and Holstein, J.A.(2001)*Handbook of interview research: Context and method*. London:Sage Publications.
- 25.Park, S. M., & Sarkar, M. (2007). Parents' attitudes toward heritage language maintenance for their children and their efforts to help their children maintain the heritage language: A case study of Korean-Canadian immigrants. *Language, culture and curriculum*, 20(3), 223-235.

26. Barriball, K. L., & While, A. (1994). Collecting data using a semi-structured interview: a discussion paper. *Journal of Advanced Nursing-Institutional Subscription*, 19(2), 328-335.
27. Bartoli, A. (2020). Every picture tells a story: Combining interpretative phenomenological analysis with visual research. *Qualitative social work*, 19(5-6), 1007-1021.
28. Pandit, N.R., 1996. 'The creation of theory: A recent application of the grounded theory method', *the qualitative report*, 2(4), pp.1-15.
29. Mirabeau, L. and Maguire, S. (2014) 'From autonomous strategic behavior to emergent strategy', *Strategic management journal*, 35(8), pp.1202-1229.
30. Reavey P (2011) *Visual Methods in Psychology – Using and Interpreting Images in Qualitative Research*. East Sussex: Routledge.
31. Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.

ADAD7017

Professional Discourses

Public Engagement Article:

Student's name:

Xiang Meng (Steven)
2234103

20/5/2024

Conceptual Analysis

In the realm of social science research, a crucial component is the elucidation and analysis of phenomena, which involves using new methods and theories to re-examine existing phenomena. The essence of this activity lies in attempting to transform complex and disorderly phenomena into orderly, perceptible, and easily acceptable theories for interpretation through certain methods and analyses. This process roughly involves three variables: information emission, transmission, and reception, which mutually influence each other and collectively determine the ultimate transmission outcome. In other words, whether it is theoretical or practical research, the process of analyzing and elucidating issues involves how to articulate, how to express, and to whom these issues are addressed. Only by understanding the influencing factors of the above three aspects and employing appropriate techniques and methods can one effectively control the transmission effect of concepts and thereby achieve the expected academic and societal impact.

During the literature review process, I noticed that audience analysis in painting and the transmission of visual concepts involved in this research have a high degree of similarity in ontology and objective orientation. One well-known experiment in this regard is the "In-Depth Study of a Painting." This experiment was conducted by curator and audience researcher Douglas Watt, along with his colleagues at the Ontario Art Gallery in Canada between 1993 and 2003 (Clarkson and Watt, 2005). The purpose of the experiment was to increase visitors' attention to artworks in the gallery. The experiment provided various methods and points of connection to approach the artwork, all of which were optional. As described by the researchers:

"In this experiment, two visitors were seated in a small space facing a landscape painting 'Beaver Dam' by Canadian artist J.E.H. MacDonald from 1919. At the same time, there were headphones and a touchpad for selecting three audio programs. The first program was a three-minute introduction to the painting by the curator. The second program was a three-minute introduction to the artist's life by family and friends. The third program, 'Exploration Practice,' was the core of this experiment, lasting twelve minutes and guiding the audience to engage imaginatively in the creative process of the artwork." (Clarkson and Watt, 2005: 257-258)



Experiment analysis indicates that the most captivating part is the "exploration practice," where viewers express that this segment enables them to achieve a purely personal narrative and interpretation of the artwork. The researchers designed this segment as follows: Viewers were asked to slowly examine the entire artwork and then close their eyes, using their imaginative eyes to "see" the artwork. They needed to select a point from the picture and then imagine themselves standing at that point, observing and exploring the scenery depicted in the artwork. At this point, the narration would ask the viewers if they could feel the temperature, hear sounds, and touch the texture of the artwork. They were to choose a specific color, focus on it, and pay attention to the feelings it evoked. Then, they were instructed to focus on a particular shape and imagine themselves transforming into that shape and moving around. In the ensuing silent minutes, this free imagination continued to resonate in the viewers' minds. The imagery flowed freely, reaching the peak of the viewers' inner creative process (Clarkson and Watt, 2005: 263-4).

Afterward, the researchers invited viewers to write down their experiences, thoughts, and critiques in words and drawings on a special card. The researchers summarized the experimental effects as follows: "Many cards indicated that paintings that initially seemed uninteresting now became vivid and interesting. After interacting intimately with the exhibits, viewers found their own personal positions in meeting and getting to know the artworks. This exercise provided people with ample time to unleash their imagination, obtain personal images and emotional experiences, and active creative imagination is likely to produce deeper spiritual experiences" (Clarkson and Watt, 2005: 268-271).

Clarkson and Watt's study shows that this experiment can promote audience engagement and interaction in art galleries. Through interaction and guidance, viewers deeply discover the information conveyed in the image space and obtain more feedback, thereby further strengthening their impression of the artworks. However, the selected artwork for the experiment was a representative landscape painting from the early 20th century, although the researchers themselves noted that "this strategic experiment is more suitable for representational paintings" (Clarkson and Watt, 2005:263). Whether this method can be successfully applied to contemporary art has not been considered yet.

The entire experiment, by providing various selectable media and points of connection for information and experience acquisition, adheres to a diversified learning model under the constructivist principle. This feedback and guidance approach to the audience is helpful for the semi-structured interviews in this research.

"Visual Thinking Strategies" (VTS) is a teaching program designed by psychologist Abigail Housen and museum educator Philip Yenawine. It aims to engage viewers directly with artworks, confirm their own viewpoints in the process involving the specificity of artworks, and focus on building associations with art directly. "Visual Thinking Strategies" is based on Housen's theory of aesthetic development, which includes five levels, as follows:

Stage One: The storyteller who incorporates what he sees into stories.

Stage Two: Creative audience who creates value orientations based on their own understanding of reality.

Stage Three: Interpretive audience guided by art historians' analytical criticism (such as themes, images, genres, styles, times, and origins).

Stage Four: Audience that engages in intimate dialogue with the artwork by appreciating the subtleties of lines, shapes, and colors.

Stage Five: Audience knowledgeable about the complex ecological background of artworks, such as time, history, doubts, and transmission.

These viewpoints are credited to Piaget and Vygotsky, who believed that thought actually depends on discourse. Essentially, "Visual Thinking Strategies" stimulates interaction through non-directive or even somewhat lengthy communication, based on a series of open-ended questions: What exactly happened? What did you see that made you think so? What else can you see? What is the basis? Besides, what else can you find? Students' responses to these questions are responses to specific artworks and seek evidence from the artworks to support their viewpoints.

"Visual Thinking Strategies" and Watt's experiment share the constructivist belief in the importance of affirming the experience and audience identity. In the "In-Depth Exploration of Painting" experiment, the audience experienced an individual artistic journey, while encouraging children or adult beginners through "Visual Thinking Strategies" to find and validate personal narratives for specific artworks. Furthermore, on the ontological level of constructivism, it encourages audiences to find their own interpretations in artworks.

Based on the above research analysis, this study combines various display media, such as symbols, videos, and sounds, to detail the research results in the process of presenting visual cognitive achievements, creating an immersive space to convey information to the audience with actual cases.

New Zealand curator and art historian Justin Paton has a publication called "How to Look at a Painting" (2005). This book expresses the author's desire to introduce his way of looking at paintings to audiences who are not good at conversing with artworks. The title of this book already indicates that appreciating a painting is not a simple act of seeking hidden meanings. Paton emphasizes that looking at a painting is not an instant response, but, on the contrary, it requires time and effort. At the same time, he believes that the main misconception people have is that "art is beyond reach unless you understand all the hidden meanings." In fact, it is quite the opposite; he believes that "everything that art wants to present is already in its body language" (Paton, 2005:27). The body language he refers to includes the painting technique,

control over the overall painting, and "the attitude of the work towards its own structure" (2005:28). The audience's task is to make the necessary effort to feel all of this. Paton divides the viewing of paintings into ten guiding steps (Paton, 2005:110-11), roughly as follows:

1. Respect the artwork.
 2. Spend some time.
 3. Look at the artwork as much as possible.
- Often ask what I notice rather than what I think.
Try to question one issue.
Find the context.
If the audience for this work is not you, then who could it be?
Trek through the art.
Trust your intuition.
Trust the artwork itself.

If Paton's steps were provided to every visitor to a gallery, perhaps their interaction with contemporary art would be resolved. However, I also noticed that these are not the only paths to solving the problem. "When we are confused or beyond belief, the only thing we can do is look" (Paton, 2005:21). Especially when the assumption that every person desires to grasp something unfamiliar or beyond their comfort zone is not a recognized fact, some viewers choose to overcome difficulties, but many others do the opposite—they flee or refuse anything beyond their expectations. It is unrealistic to expect everyone to eagerly embrace unfamiliar or uncomfortable things. Therefore, necessary guidance and encouragement are essential during the observation process. For example, preparing some cards and paper that can provide ideas to facilitate non-professional viewers in finding new points of interest.

Paton, based on his experience of viewing Hiram Woom's representative work "One Million Years (Past) and One Million Years (Future)," emphasizes the inherent difficulties in dialogue with the sense of doubt. Woom's work consists of a series of small, dark paintings, each expressing a specific date or time period. Paton said that when he rushed to the exhibition, "I was a little annoyed by the long dates and the incomprehensible actions" (Paton, 2005:54). He took the catalog and left. By looking at the brochure, Paton realized the enormity of this work. The conclusion he drew from this example is that appreciating art requires leisurely time. As evidence, he cites the so-called "third impression principle." It is outlined as follows: When encountering a work for the first time, establish a connection and consider: What kind of artwork is this? What rules does it rely on? Subsequently, think more stably: How are these rules deployed and accepted? How do they subtly and specifically work? By the third impression, it is generally clear whether such interaction can continue to the end: Does this painting have enduring charm? What are the lingering things hidden inside that refuse interpretation? Does it retain some secrets? (Paton, 2005:53)

It can be seen that the audience's cognitive process of artworks is gradual and progressive. To ensure the audience's enthusiasm in receiving information, it is necessary to use content analysis strategies.

Conceptual Transmission and Content Analysis

In this research plan, the study will be based on the feedback path of the audience's perception of image information, namely how viewers perceive images, how they realize the conversion between images and information, and how they construct the "reality" in images, which involves the need for content analysis of image information. Content analysis, also known as quantitative ideal and the methodology of natural sciences, is used to analyze cultural texts. Content analysis was initially developed by social scientists during World War II to analyze the news industry based on emerging mass communication media, and later during World War II, this method was elaborated (Krippendorf, 1980). Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins studied nearly 600 photos from National Geographic magazine over the past thirty years. They used content analysis to process a large and complex dataset and conducted coded quantitative analysis of the results, which is very similar to the research objects involved in this study.

These authors insist that content analysis can include qualitative interpretation. Content analysis and qualitative methods are not incompatible. On the contrary, some discussions on content analysis believe that its "reliability" definition equates reliability with quantitative analytical methods (BallandSmith, 1992; Neuendorf, 2002; Slater, 1998).

A general approach to studying visual images is to understand the symbolic nature of texts: that is, the constituent elements of texts always point to a broader cultural context and are part of it. The goal of content analysis is to analyze the referring activities of various text groups in a way that is repeatable and valid, providing a method and guidance for quantifying the examination of elusive individual understanding activities and visualizing expressions of cognition activities that are not visible.

However, content analysis is not always advantageous in the interpretation of visual images. Some aspects of visual images are not suitable for content analysis. It is almost exclusively focused on the composition mode of the image itself. As a result, it rarely involves the production or viewing of images, and this method's disregard for the audience may be the most enduring criticism it faces. In this sense, content analysis is very similar to constitutive interpretation, which also pays little attention to the production or viewing of meanings. It is the indifference to image viewing that strengthens the belief of proponents of content analysis in its repeatability. Critics such as Mike BallandSmith (1992) and Gregory Smith (1998) and Don Slater pointed out that to achieve repeatability, different interpretations of the same text by different people must be sacrificed. Finally, some critics also argue that content analysis is not sufficient to adequately handle the cultural significance of images. Based on the above analysis, the appropriate use of content analysis does not overly rely on data summaries and is one of the methods to obtain correct information feedback.

Importance and Impact

Research is undoubtedly important, but how to better communicate research results to more people is another issue that every researcher needs to address. In this research direction, starting from exploring the underlying logic of visual cognition, the research will present the achievements of the audience's interpretation of semiotic meanings in image symbols based on real feedback from subjects. In the presentation process, immersive atmosphere will be borrowed, and various methods such as charts, explanations, and guidance will be integrated

to gradually convey the research results to the audience. In disseminating visual perception logic and providing image creation solutions, it plays a positive and important role.

Reference

1. Clarkson, A. & Worts, D. (2005) 'The Animated Muse: An interpretive program for creative viewing', *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 48 (3) 257-80
2. Paton, J. (2005) *How to Look at a Painting*, Wellington, NZ: Awa Press
3. Krippendorf, K. (1980) *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodologies*. London: Sage.
4. Ball, M.S. and Smith, G.W.H. (1992) *Analyzing Visual Data*. London: Sage.
5. Slater, D. (1998) 'Analysing cultural objects: content analysis and semiotics', in C. Seale (ed.), *Researching Society and Culture*. London: Sage, pp. 233-44.
6. Neuendorf, K.A. (2002) *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. London: Sage.