

ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PRAGUE
FILM AND TV SCHOOL OF ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN
PRAGUE

The "Phantom" in photography

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Final Theoretical Master Degree Project

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Prague, 2019

The author affirms that she based her work only on the sources and literature named in the Acknowledgment Section and that this diploma thesis is an original text of her own.

Abstract

The thesis deals with the idea of the blur in photography and its aesthetic significance. It uses typical examples and comparative methods to analyse the meanings, the uses and the expressive potential of deliberately unfocused photography. As a unique way of expression, the blur runs through the creation of photographic art, and is often considered more artistic and appealing than the idea of “clear”. In addition to finding different ways to present the “blur” in photos, it is also important to see that the creation of the blur in photography is the result of multiple variables and how these variables interact is discovered and discussed.

Keywords

photographic focus; blur; visual communication, aesthetic ideals;

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Introduction

The topic of this thesis is the concept of blur in photography. This thesis focuses on the history of blurred images and the different forms of it.

In photography, blurred images exist in various ways; the visually blurred images are not the only form. Blanks, color blocks, and shadows are all blurred expressions. Scientifically, blur is relative and without certain standard; people measure blur based on their visual subjectivity, as they measure the height and weight of a person, or the bright and dark of light, and the cold and warm of hue in photography; which are all relatively and therefore the boundaries are blurred. For visual arts, such as painting and sculpture, blur takes many different forms. For example, artist could present blur in the form of scattered point perspective, multiple perspective points in one painting, with complex shades and color blocks, as Zhang Zeduan did in the famous Chinese painting "Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival".

What's more, besides the blur of the outline, the blur also emphasizes on the difficulty of recognition, resulting in ideological and psychological blur. In addition to visual arts, blur is also seen in music, literature, as well as philosophy. The thoughts and meanings deeply embedded in art works, may or may not be intended by the artists, are the obscure beauty that is hard to explain. This ever-changing and difficult-to-catch emotional experience, or the changing emotional state when appreciating art are also blurred.

In conclusion, in order to master and apply blur in photography and make the best artistic use of it, one has to understand the concept of blur and its different expressions in different forms comprehensively.

Chapter I: The existence of blurred images

1.1 The existence of blurred images in history

Whether it's commercial photography, photojournalism, documentary photography, portrait photography or art photography, photographers utilize realistic photos to express emotion and scenery. The realistic moment puts time and space at your fingertips, and revitalizes the charm of the subject beyond the power of words. In addition to realistic reproduction, the advantage of photography is also the medium of “fantasy”.

From the perspective of image quality, photographs began from blurred images. France announced the birth of photography to the world on August 19, 1839. Due to the limitation of photosensitive materials, photographs required extremely long exposure at the time, and therefore, they were blurred. Even so, people and society admired photography very much, because of its realistic functions that cannot be achieved by painting.

As noted by Rosenblum Naomi, “The camera's images appeared and remained viable because they filled cultural and sociological needs that were not being met by pictures created by hand. The photograph was the ultimate response to a social and cultural appetite for a more accurate and realistic representation, a need that had its origins in the Renaissance.”¹

At the beginning of photography, photographers often captured the blur by accident as a result of underdeveloped technology. With the development of technology, the camera became light and easy to carry, the lens became more sophisticated, while the

¹ Naomi, Rosenblum. (1997) *A World History of Photography*. New York: Abbeville Press Publisher, p15

photosensitive materials also improved the clarity of photos and shortened the exposure time. Photos could be completed in an instant. During this period, photography no longer only served the upper class, but also became aware among the public with the help of mass communication. Through books, magazines, and media, photography grew its popularity in all fields.

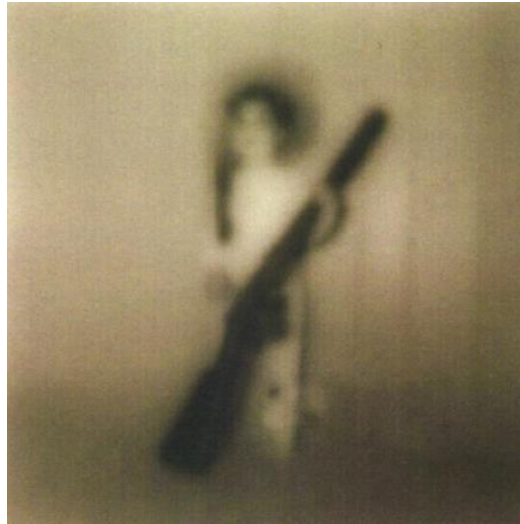


Illustration 1: Anonymous, a blurred photo of late 19th century

Documentary photography became popular among artists and photographers. Artists like that photography record the reality, and in this way, painters may stay inside rather than paint outside. For photographers, documentary photography is to record life; it copies the passing moments and works as a kind of memory and a holder of evidence. Photojournalism requires the highest quality of photos among other genres of photography; however, due to the restriction of lens and focus technology, only extremely skillful photo journalists could capture clear pictures in an instant, when they were lucky enough.

Nevertheless, with the social development and the development of photographic equipment, photographs as copies of reality could no longer satisfy people's artistic needs. The rising of various kinds of art expressions gradually led people to higher aesthetic standards, and the audience shifted to visual arts. As artistic photographs

became more and more popular, pictorialism thrived between 1889 and the outbreak of the World War I. Pictorialism believed that photographs should communicate emotions, and was expected to promote photography to the level of art.

Photographs, in the view of advocates of Pictorialism, “should be concerned with beauty rather than fact”. In their eyes, “optical sharpness and exact replicative aspects of the medium” brought by technical progress can have limitations that hinder “the expression of individuality”. As a result, pictorialists “accepted manipulating the photographic print as an emblem of self-expression”². The rise of Pictorialism was considered the beginning of blur consciously adopted by photographers when taking photographs. Then, the blur officially made its name in the world of copy-like image.

As photography was defined as a visual art, its role as a medium of “fantasy” was enlarged. Photographers’ pursuit of the abstract concept of blur also grew.

1.2 The understanding and culture of blur

The word “blur” can be interpreted as having two meanings by referring to the basic meaning in the Chinese Dictionary. When referred as an adjective, it means: “indistinct, unclear”. When used as a verb, it refers to “confuse”³. In addition, according to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, the word blur means “something vaguely or indistinctly perceived” when used as a noun. When used as a verb, “blur” is defined as “to make dim, indistinct, or vague in outline or character”⁴.

So whether it is in Chinese or English, blur is an indistinctive boundary. In disciplines

² Naomi, Rosenblum. (1997) *A World History of Photography*. New York: Abbeville Press Publisher, p297

³ *The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* (2012). Beijing: The Commercial Press, p913

⁴ *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1998), Beijing: The commercial press & Addison Wesley Longman China Limited, p143

of literature, science, aesthetics, philosophy, etc., we can also find traces of blur.

In addition, blur can also be interpreted as being careless and thus missing something important or not so important. This casual or unconscious blur (being careless) then is transformed into a kind of "confusion". Another explanation of blur is the vague understanding of things and a state of emptiness, as people may review visuals and morality in same way. The fascinating blurred image is regarded as the incarnation of wisdom without words, just like the status of Wabi-Sabi in Japanese philosophy, or a outlook of being ignorant on life in Chinese Buddhism. When think of Wabi-Sabi, people may first think of religion or Eastern philosophical thinking, or a culture. Wabi-Sabi portrays the beauty of the incompleteness, including the imperfect, the incomplete and the non-permanent. In generally terms, it also means simplicity, silence, humility and nature. Wabi-Sabi is derived from the three marks of existence in Hinayana, namely impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anattā).

Indeed, the culture of Wabi-Sabi is an idea, a philosophy of art, and a worldview. Nowadays, this kind of aesthetic thought has been integrated into daily life and art. Many people in Japan and China are pursuing this culture in their lives. As early as the 19th century, artists from different countries had received this kind of philosophy, which then influenced their artistic creations. The following part will discuss the combination of Wabi-Sabi, art, and religious ideas, and expand the content and discussion on this topic.

What Wabi-Sabi wants to express is a concept that is unclear (blurred). It's like every Japanese knows what Wabi-Sabi is, but when asked for an explanation, they may hesitate for a long time and say apologetically that probably only the Japanese can understand. This mysterious and blurred concept is the essence of its beauty. It is a bit rough and somewhat bleak, but it must be natural and blurred, existing with

unfinished and isolated imperfections. Leonard Koren also mentioned in his book *Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers* that Wabi-Sabi "is a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. It is a beauty of things modest and humble. It is a beauty of things unconventional."⁵

Many Japanese arts over the past thousand years have been influenced by Zen and Mahayana philosophy, which particularly emphasize the acceptance and contemplation of the imperfection, constant flux and impermanence of all things. Like the wisdom in Buddhism, Wabi-Sabi can be unspeakable. Such expressions, incomplete as they are, make it difficult to understand the concept through direct language and leave us with a blurred image. Without specific form, such aesthetics is unspeakable and difficult to grasp.

In addition, Koren noted, "Some Japanese critics feel that Wabi-Sabi needs to maintain its mysterious and elusive-hard to define-qualities because ineffability is part of its specialness. Wabi-Sabi is, they believe, a teleological benchmark-an end in itself-that can never be fully realized. From this vantage point, missing or indefinable knowledge is simply another aspect of Wabi-Sabi's inherent 'incompleteness'."⁶

⁵ Koren, Leonard. (1994) *Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers*. Berkeley, Stone Bridge Press, p7,

⁶ Koren, Leonard. (1994) *Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers*. Berkeley, Stone Bridge Press, p17

When it comes to the embodiment of Wabi-Sabi's incomplete beauty, we can say the Spanish artist Javier Viver developed this concept in his work "The Revelation of the Imagery of Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris (1875-1918)".



Illustration 2/3: Javier Viver, Révélation s. Iconographie de la Salpêtrière, Paris,1875-1918

This is a transformation of Viver's early album. The album records the faces and bodies of the patients in the Salpêtrière psychiatric hospital. Javier Viver's work is a good example of the imperfect and fleeting feature of blur. The relationship with Wabi-Sabi is co-existing and established through a consensus ideology. It is not difficult to feel from the "Revelation" that the spiritual core of Javier's works has the oriental Wabi-Sabi style. The similarity between his works and the Wabi-Sabi spirit is that for both, it seems like ultimate energy was put into things seemingly inconspicuous. In other words, it pushes a state of incompleteness to something aesthetically beautiful.

In addition, regarding the explanation of Wabi-Sabi and the blur, another French artist Yves Klein, who not only introduced certain Japanese concepts to Europe but also integrated the concepts into his own philosophical thinking, should be introduced. Yves Klein has always been defined as minimalistic and surrealist, and his work is not only consistent with the aesthetics of Wabi-Sabi, but his aesthetic and philosophical system has been influenced by Zen. More importantly, his work is also a kind of personal understanding of the blurred images, because photographers can't just use the ghost image as the only form of the blurred images. In fact, color blocks or blanks in art works are also one of the forms of rendering of blurred images in the visual mind.

Through a momentary illusion, I recognized the oriental traits of Javier Viver's work, so they have a sense of intimacy, and Javier Viver gained artistic inspiration from the oriental concept in others' translation. Although it is possible that misunderstandings exist in translation, the illusion and misreading will not prevent the artist from creating interesting works. Perhaps this is another form of expression which expresses the beauty of the incompleteness.

As for Yves Klein, he is an artistic genius with a complex personality, who spent only eight years of his life as an artist. His pioneering conceptual art, monochromatic art form, and the concept of void brought great enlightenment to the art of the second half of the 20th century. In 1958, he held an exhibition in Paris called "vide". Before the exhibition, he evacuated all the items in the exhibition hall and whitened the walls. He used nothing but "empty" as his piece of work to open to the outside world. For this unprecedented work, Albert Camus, a famous French existentialist writer, wrote a line in the guestbook after the exhibition "With the Void, Full Powers."⁷

⁷ 'With the Void, Full Powers.' A card left for Yves Klein by Albert Camus at the Iris Clert gallery in Paris, at the opening of *The Void*, April 1958. © Yves Klein Estate, ADAGP, Paris / DACS, London, 2018
<https://www.christies.com/features/What-impired-Yves-Klein-9153-3.aspx>



Illustration 4: Yves Klein, *Untitled Blue Monochrome (IKB 241)*, 1960

These examples all prove that the concept of blur does not necessarily exist in objects that cannot be clearly seen with the naked eye; the idea of blur is also expressed in philosophy. From a literary point of view, besides the blurred outlines, blur also underlines the ideological and psychological blur that results from ambiguity. In scientific theory, blur is relative, as there is no specific standard to measure a person's height and weight, which depend on visual subjectivity. In photography, the light and dark in exposure, and the cold and warm of hue are also relative and unidentified, in another word, blurred.

1.3 The impact of technologies

The concept of blur photography refers to the photographic technique and approach through which the photographer, by breaking the mechanical and technical functions of the camera that are designed to record clear images, creates photos that are blurred in a way that expresses emotions and creates an atmosphere of reflection and subjective imagination to the objective things within the human vision. Blur

photography can be divided into two types, one is expressed visually; abstract photography and impressionist photography belong to this type. The other is expressed through themes like emotions, ideas, and thoughts; dada photography and surreal photography belong to this type.

There are many uncertain and arbitrary elements in blur photography. There are also many different possibilities for blurred works. The connotation of blur is so broad that different audiences have their own thoughts and understanding of the practice. If a binary opposition is applicable, blur will be subjective while clear is objective. In fact, there are many forms that can be used in order to achieve the blurred effect whether it is the blur of mechanical technology or blurring a collage of ideas. Of course, in various forms, the effect of blurred themes changes. The forms used in postmodern art are splendid, and a single scene can no longer satisfy the needs of the audience. If one wants to meet the different needs of the audience, the blurred meaning will be the result of a wide range of transcendence of clearness. On the other hand, blur is ahead of the perception of reason. The photographer's constructive thinking can be reconstructed and transformed, which requires unlimited imagination, knowledge, and an accumulation of experience.

As early as the 19th century, there was discussion about the nature of photography. As for this new technology, many questions were often raised. How far is the blur photography from art, "is photography even an art"? were two typical ones. In fact, it is not that photography does not qualify as an art, but photography is simply a medium. Compared to paintings and other traditional art forms, there is a lack of purity in photography. The public rarely asks whether painting or sculpture are art forms. As for photography, it is very different in terms of creation, history, and use from traditional art forms. During its early days, photography, as an emerging medium, wandered on the boundary of art.

Nevertheless, in the early days, blur was a genuine record, a faithful reproduction of objects in front of the camera, a copy-like image, and blurred similarities seem to replace the creativity that the artist has shown in the creative process. Many journals published articles on this kind of controversy at the time; the French journal "Ray" discussed a lot about whether photography was regarded as a science or an art. Charles Pierre Baudelaire said, "If photography is allowed to supplement art in some of its functions, it will soon have supplanted or corrupted it altogether.... it's true duty... is to be the servant of the sciences and arts – but the very humble servant, like printing or shorthand, which have neither created nor supplemented literature."⁸

It is precisely because of these standards that photographers have made two reflections in order to prove that photographs are not mechanized images. On one hand, since the 1950s, "painting photography" appeared; photographers hoped to reduce the impression of "copying" things through careful arrangement of picture elements. Blur is a good example of this change. By taking photos that are out of focus, photographers create blurred effects, and present blurred conception. In order to let the picture have a deeper meaning or a scene with religious overtones, some photographers use the colloidal dichromic acid etching method to imitate the texture of cloth. On the other hand, some photographers pursued "pure photography."

⁸ Baudelaire, Charles (1955). *The Mirror of Art*. Jonathan Mayne editor and translator. London: Phaidon Press Limited.

<https://www.csus.edu/indiv/o/obriene/art109/readings/11%20baudelaire%20photography.htm>

Chapter II: The manifestations and application of blurred images

2.1 The concept of blurred images

The comprehensive meaning of blurred images gives us the artistic conception of expressing the unclearness of the viewing object; it can also lead people to another very flexible space to think, and the size of the elastic space depends on the viewer's own life experiences and aesthetic awareness. The author believes that blurred images are a blurred state between clear and unclear. Some works are not clear, but people can understand them with their inner feelings. Some works are clear, but what is conveyed is not understandable. As people grow, their perception of things deepens. The high-definition visual display is increasingly causing people to doubt the clarity. We seek to break this superficial phenomenon routine and are eager for the inner essence behind the high definition. Time constantly moves on in one direction, so the clear things we see cannot be absolutely clear; they are also changing. Through the research, the author finds the expressive power of blurred images has a great potential in visuals. The author further finds that the viewer may discover his or her own clear picture from the blurred images; at the same time, blurred images awaken the most beautiful and touching force that embedded deeply in humanity - the beauty of emotion. Blurred image plays a very good visual intermediary in visual expression, and is accompanied by the rich vitality and emotions.

2.2 Manifestations of blur

2.2.1 Blur of vision

Blurred image is one of the most direct and easy-to-understand expressions of blur, and it is not difficult to find this in the works of many photographers. Such blur in visual usually conveys meanings through philosophy and sociology which interpret the

content.

Hiroshi Sugimoto, the Japanese photographer exemplified this point of view through his early portfolio *Architecture*, which leveraged intentionally blurred photos to convey his philosophical thinking. The portfolio presented only striking outlines of a group of buildings that allow people to identify which buildings they are. The blurred photos, like mist in front of the audience's eyes, block the viewer's contact with the buildings. Other than outlines of these structures, there is nothing but desolate gray in Hiroshi Sugimoto's images. It would be difficult to analyze the ideas of Hiroshi Sugimoto only through the scenes in the images presented in these elusive clues.

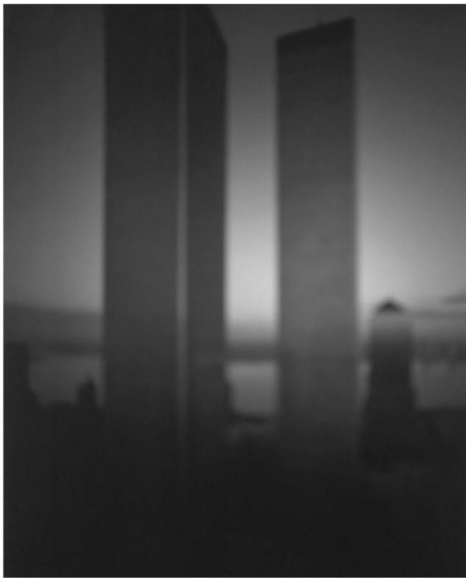


Illustration 5: Hiroshi Sugimoto,
World Trade Center,1997



Illustration 6: Image of the World Trade Center model that appeared in the 301st issue of 301 *Casabella*, an Italian magazine.

Thus, Hiroshi Sugimoto pushed those most ingeniously constructed buildings in the history of world architecture to the edge of blur, melting their distinctive shapes and details, and transforming the architectural forms of these buildings into phantoms, so as to restore the essence of a "building".

As noted by Hiroshi Sugimoto, the works were his visual experience and reflection on

how “the early-twentieth-century modernism” was a “stripping away of superfluous decoration” and how “the spread of democracy and the innovations of the Machine Age swept aside the ostentation that before had been a signifier of power and wealth.”⁹

Nancy Spector (1959-), curator of the Guggenheim Museum in the United States, read the series of "Architectural" by Hiroshi Sugimoto, "Hiroshi Sugimoto returns the building to its essence." The curator implies that the mist in the picture is blurred, which not only does not disturb the viewer's understanding of the image but instead focuses his attention on the building as if standing in the distance and staring at the building. Sugimoto's commentary on this series in his essay "Before Growing Moss" is, "Buildings are the tombs of architecture, and I, facing the tombs of these buildings, focus on the infinity and photograph the ghosts. The building is not scattered."¹⁰

Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographic composition is not completely original or creative in expression. The blur presented in those photos is derived from the infinity focus of the lens, which is like replacing the human eyes with lens and looking back at the past of the buildings, so that the viewer, from the time and space, when he or she sees the works, can recall fragmented memories of the buildings and thus constitute a zone of blurred gray between reality and memory. The buildings in the photos thus turn into memory holders, extending the length of time that photos can accommodate.

Blurred photos also have a profound psychological impact on people. The deeper connotation behind the blur can be felt when people look at them, as the blur and unintuitive feelings make the viewer think more and analyze the photo from different angles.

⁹ Hiroshi Sugimoto's reflection on *architecture*. <https://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/new-page-5>

¹⁰ Hiroshi, Sugimoto. (2012) *time exposed* (essays by in Japanese with photographs)
Nanning: Guangxi Normal University Press, p18

2.2.2 Blur of title and text

The concept of blur is not always reflected in an image, but once this ambiguous form is included in photography, it becomes an indispensable part of the photo. Many times in the process of photographic creation, photographers gradually form a concept, and through the precise refinement of language, they have the title of creation. The title is like a mirror which reflects the content, problems, and meaning of the photo in a vivid way. Sometimes the title can also inspire the viewer's thoughts, allowing the viewer to interpret the meaning of a picture or a group of photos through his or her interpretation of the title.

The title can be ambiguous; it is undoubtedly a game of arrangements and combinations of words. When a photographer produces a group of works, people sometimes see the name given next to it as "untitled" or "work number". It seems as though the author intentionally blurs the meaning of the photo. Without the restriction of words, viewers may use their vast imagination more freely. Nevertheless, the name is also a topic that the photographer will have to consider. However, the photographer is able to blur the content and consciousness of the picture as they like.

Just like the content of Cy Twombly's painting "Untitled", some may say that his paintings are just some pencil lines, others may say that they are a few marks of irregular circles, or crayon scratches, left idly wandering and scattered across the canvas. The illusion of formal abstract lines psychologically makes people full of curiosity and exploration, and an attractive charm exists among them. The significance of the expression of the work has also increased by a certain height.

Cy Twombly said, "each line is now the actual experience with its own innate history. It does not illustrate — it is the sensation of its own realization."¹¹ It is exactly these

¹¹ Quote of Cy Twombly, a written art note on a painting he created in 1957.
https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Cy_Twombly

abstract lines that attract people, making them curious and driving them to explore. Twombly led viewers to the end of a blurred concept as if looking for a relationship between the human and the soul. Viewers are unable to obtain valid information from the title, and therefore not confined by the title.

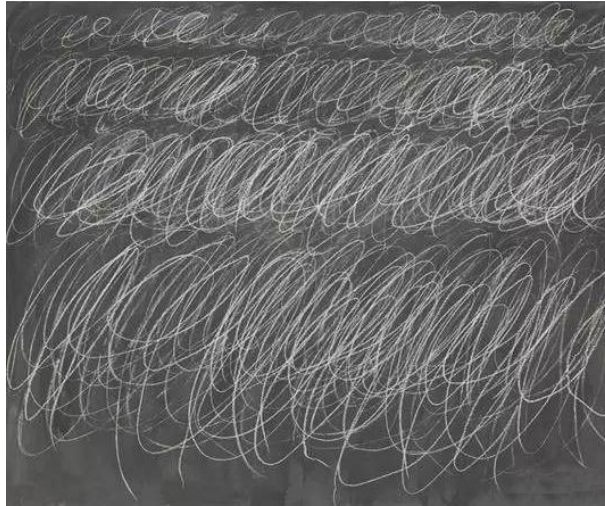


Illustration 7: Cy Twombly, *Untitled*, 1968

In addition, the Twombly picture always has a large area of white space, and the text is handwritten. From the aesthetic point of view, the handwriting is not appealing, but the words themselves may be related to the cultural background of an important period, and thus the innate sense of high quality of the language defeats the scribbled writing. Only noticing the existence of symbols on the screen, is undoubtedly a blur of text vision.

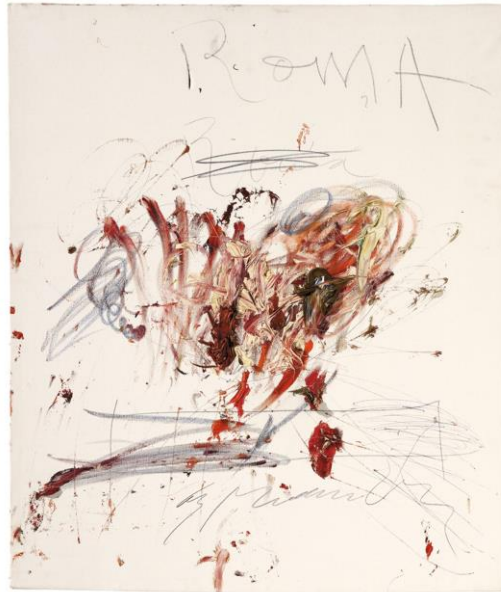


Illustration 8: Cy Twombly, *Untitled (Roma)*, 1962

The title of the photo is part of the text. By imitating the text, photos reveal the blur mentally and visually. Image, text and music are all approaches to express and narrate. In the history of western art, narrative works exist in architecture, music, drama, sculpture and many other kinds of art works. But of the works passed down, a majority are stored in the text like the case of Four Books and Five Classics¹² in China. It explains in one way why text took was superior for a long time in the competition against other types of expression and narrative. Knowing this, it is not surprising to hear the opinion that the best way to grasp the essence of a story is to read the text of it, rather than hearing it or watching it through a film. The charm of text is endless as it expands the horizons of imagination.

The imitation of text by photography is in fact a reflection of social laws well explained in *The Laws of Imitation* by Gabriel Tarde, a French sociologist. Imitation is a human characteristic, a basic social phenomenon originated from the relationship among people. In this regard, Tarde made his point clear: imitation starts from within a group where the lower strata imitate the higher rank. Then imitation spreads outside the

¹² Four Books and Five Classics are the authoritative books of Confucianism in China written before 300 BC

group quickly. But as different groups get blended, the outside world has a huge impact on the group.¹³

What is imitated is often desired and noticed. It explains why painting used to borrow themes recorded in books. It was actually an imitation of image from text. Another example is the imitation of pictorial photography on painting in terms of composition and narrative content. Oil painting was born before the invention of photography and still in a position not to be “threatened” by photography at that time. The position of oil painting represented an “advantage”, which is why, according to Tarde’s *The Laws of Imitation*, the existence of pictorial photography was necessary.



Illustration 9: Caravaggio, *David and the Giant*. Illustration 10: *Simulator*: Miguel Iturbe

Criticism of the imitation is a topic not to be ignored. In terms of realism, photography obviously wins out over painting. The value of paintings used to be questioned by critics, stirring up a long rivalry of painting versus photography. Out of self-examination, photographers turned to more avant-garde approaches like blurred focus and incomplete composition. Rather than religious theology, they started putting their eyes on the environment around them.

This is to say that as early as the beginning of photography, the status of painting was

¹³ Gabriel, Tarde. (1903) *The Laws of Imitation*. New York: The Mershon Company Press, p366-371

questioned, as the way that photographs captured exactly what was seen dwarfed even the best painter's depiction of reality through the brush. Painting and photography have always been a topic of debate and learning. In terms of realism, photography obviously wins out over painting. And yet, there is still no way that a painting using conventional techniques—and non-conventional techniques, for that matter— captures the full range of color, shade and texture that a photograph does. The value of painting lies in the fact that it can be a subjective expression of one point on the timeline and thus extends time. A painting can be filled with the painter's personal expression. On the other hand, photography cannot change any point on the timeline. It is like a machine that repeats the same thing again and again. In the early days, it was a disadvantage for photography, but with the development of art and thought, photographers have successfully explored many new possibilities of photography.

In the visual field, blur is an indispensable keyword. Influenced by post-modern art, visual art is undergoing transformation, and image art culture seems to be in a melting pot, which is no longer a rare topic. Anthony J. Cascardi said, "the image is turning to a philosophical aesthetics."¹⁴ Images are everywhere in the world; whether in representation or in various media, blurring goes beyond its own meaning. Autumn in Tokyo, Japan Yeyuan Commercial Street is already such a visual space station. All most all buildings have been dematerialized. The exterior of the buildings are equipped with large LED screens. The tourist attractions are also equipped. with screens to attract tourists' attention; "image first" seems to be a good title. As the name implies, for audience, it leads the their visual thinking go before their intrinsic consciousness; for photographers, it is a manner of self-expression; for businessmen, it is a means of profiting, and for philosophers, it may be an exploration of new idea.

2.2.3 Blur of artistic conception

¹⁴ Cascardi, Anthony. (2007) *Text and Image after Plato*. Beijing: The Academic Monthly <https://max.book118.com/html/2017/0716/122472161.shtml>

"Ideology" has a very important status in Chinese traditional aesthetics. In Classical Chinese Art, whether it is painting, poetry or music, the highest pursuit of aesthetics is to construct an image world outside the physical world. This imagery world is "artistic conception". The so-called artistic conception refers to the original creation of the artist. It arises from the sudden conceiving and feeling of the artist's deepest contact with a creature. Artistic conception is not just as simple as a photo of a camera. Therefore, artists need to have a complete and comprehensive perspective on their unique understanding and interpretation of the work to capture that moment. In particular, the order and structure of music and architecture directly reveal the inner harmony and the rhythm of the universe.

The photographer's expression of artistic conception usually borrows the "spiritual vividness" of the aesthetic features of ancient Chinese landscape paintings: not only for external appearance and imitation, but also with internal aesthetic standard, which is the insight into the objective world reasonably reflected in the overall arrangement of content in the image. The combination of feelings and scenery is an important factor in ancient Chinese paintings. The blurred image combines form and spirit into one. It is the resonance between the painter and the audience. The viewer needs to use his or her experience to feel and explore the ambiguous artistic conception. In *Symbols of Eternity: The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, Michael Sullivan, a renowned western art historian, answered the question as to why Chinese landscape painting attaches great importance to the natural scenery. Sullivan argued that "Chinese painters are philosophers in the first place. Similar to poets, Chinese painters focus on the blur and uncertainty of their objects and pursue artistic conception and vividness in hope of infusing certain subjective ideas and thoughts into their works"¹⁵.

For example, the work of the Chinese painter Zheng Taijun conveys a unique artistic conception. As a Buddhist believer, Zheng shows Chinese traditional freehand in his

¹⁵ Sullivan, Michael. (1988) *Symbols of Eternity: The Art of Landscape Painting in China*. Guangzhou: Lingnan Fine Arts Press, p11

work *Open the Window to the Heart*. He paints with ink on linen; by varying the ink density, Zheng's work presents the light gradation. Such technique enables viewers to experience a broader space and time, just like the existence of the universe. The composition is also more abstract and concise. According to Zheng, he has no drafts for painting. He creates freely, and the only thing he needs is a relatively ethereal state. In this way, he can adjust the composition according to the track of ink, and finally achieve the balance and perfection of the picture.



Illustration 11: Zheng Taijun, *Open the window to the heart*, 2014

The characteristics of this piece are simplicity and profundity. In the universe, a circle that reminds people the moon is created in a clear movement, with ink moving in a clockwise direction. In the center of the circle are the cloud and mist. According to the title, it is the window to the heart, the eye of wisdom, obtained through meditation and spiritual awakening. In Chinese and Buddhist thinking, heart has two functions, one is to control emotion, and the other is about intelligence.

In the creation of photography, artistic conception is usually the ultimate expression of the emotion of a photograph. Blur is a form of such expression. It is a good way to express the artistic conception with blur, because it combines objective performance

with subjective reappearance.

In addition, the work of the American photographer Ernie Button is also a good example of blurred artistic conception. At first, he sought his work to be different planets floating in the universe; then, these photos derived from the fantasy phenomenon that he found in an accidental drinking incident. The glasses are particularly glamorous in light. These photos are made from a few drops of dried single malt from Scottish whisky. Because every time the whiskey dries, it produces different patterns on the glassware, and finally creates a picture like the cosmos.

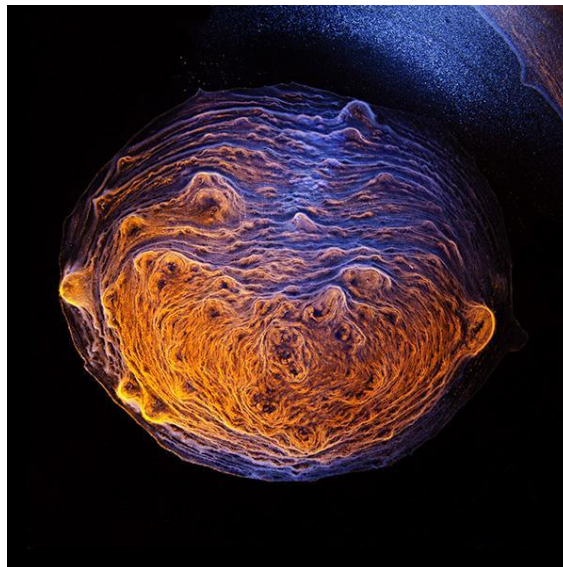


Illustration 12: Ernie Button, Vanishing spirits - Dried remains of single malt scotch

The blurred image always has a dreamlike artistic conception, and this kind of conception has two aspects. One expresses the existence in space; the other proves the “non-self”. The highest state of Buddhism is the realm of “non-self”. Blurs are advantageous in the expression of artistic conception in visual image. Compared with the Buddhism, the artistic conception blurs is the highest pursuit of photographers. The blur, focusing on intention, is an artistic upgrade of the true record. Although the artistic conception of the virtual phase is higher than the artistic conception of the reality, the virtual phase cannot be presented in a vacuum. It attaches to the basis of realism and

expresses the meaning of realism. The blending of the two is the principle of constructing a photo. The essence of the artistic conception is "life is a rhythmic beat", a rhythm that speaks of beauty without words. When viewers see unsure and unfamiliar images, they are involved in a kind of self-life experience. When they walk into a space, first look at the image that is still on the wall, the viewers have already memorized it in a video form.

The Chinese Confucian thinking is that there will be a combination of self and non-self. For non-self, although people are tiny in the world, they can portray the whole world in their heart. For the photographer, the depiction of the artistic conception is a creation by expanding the visual horizon. Therefore, in image vision, the artistic conception is a psychological phenomenon and a life rhythm. The characteristics of the artistic conception can be classified into three points from the psychological point of view: first is the innocent heart; the sincere expression is the most basic feature of the artistic conception. The second is the endless fun; On the basis of innocence is the dynamic aesthetics of the blurred artistic conception. Lastly is the spirit of all things, which is the most essential feature of the artistic conception, containing the wisdom of all things.

2.2.4 Blur of correlation

As science and technology develop, people's psychological needs and purposes of photography become diverse. Regardless of whether a photo or a group of photos is taken, the ultimate purpose of the filming, or the scope and direction of its application, determines how the viewers look at a photo. People try to use photos to find a connection with something, and use this association to express a link between the inner world and the outer world, mostly from their own experience, understanding or imagination. Sometimes, in order to pursue the final outcome and effect of a desired photo, photographers need to combine the theory and practice to design a so-called "authentic" photo. This diversified photography method can be simply recording the

appearance of the object being photographed and describing the appearance purely.

French photographer Christine Muraton is used to capturing the wonderful moments of the objective world. From the picture, people can see her inner hope for the illusion and the rebuilding of an inner world. Her subjective consciousness embeds the ethereal world in the picture. For her, photography is the perfect combination of reality and illusion, and expresses the essence of things in an indicative way. In order to create a supernatural psychological phenomenon in the real world, Muraton builds a fairytale-like illusion and the blurred thoughts dynamically flows out from it. What the illusion embodies is an aesthetic of artistic expression, a blurred form of human flow, and unlimited expansion in the picture. It is through such a blurred image that the content of her narrative correlates with the blurred expression form, and is presented in a narrative way.



Illustration 13: Christine Muraton, *Hidden Games*.

Apart from purely describing the appearance, photos convey more content than the simple record. In Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, he mentioned that after his mother died, he was obsessed with “looking for the truth of the face he had loved”. But in many of his mother's photos, Barthes was unable to identify

her. He could only recognize “a region of her face, like her nose or forehead, the movement of her arms, her hands”, but “never recognized her except in fragments. To him, it is to say that “he missed her being, and therefore he missed her altogether. He kept looking through his mother's photos and finally found the photo taken in a winter garden satisfactory. The photo was dilapidated, and the dark tone had already whitened. He had to look at it very carefully to find two children on the photo, a 5-year-old girl and a 7-year-old boy; the brother and sister's expressions are immature and the movements were blurred. All of that was recorded in real moments.

As noted by Roland Barthes, he rediscovered his mother in the photo. He identified “the assertion of a gentleness” his mother had maintained all her life from the figure of a sovereign innocence constituted by “the distinctness of her face, the naive attitude of her hands, the place she had docilely taken without either showing or hiding herself, and finally her expression”¹⁶. In the process of rummaging through the photos, Roland Barthes followed the correlation that the blurred photo had with his mother. Regardless of the incompleteness and blur of a photo, the essential traits of the person in it can be reflected, and the living habits and environment were recorded. This is the correlation between the blurred photos and people, which can prove the existence of truth and help us discover the peculiarity of what is recorded in the photo we see.

The broken photos have their value, and the blurred photos can also communicate authentic sentiments. Photos evoke viewers' cognition of the past and help them describe the characteristics that are captured intentionally by documentary means or revealed in a small movement inadvertently blurred by the lens, a wave of hand, a turn of body or even a smile. These blurred photos presented in various forms evoke true memories; on the other hand, they also distort and transform memories.

2.3 The essence of blurred photos

¹⁶ Barthes, Roland.(1981) *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang Publisher, p65-69

People all try to understand the essential meaning and function of each photo and discover the essence of the individual from the whole, that is, the blurred image. If all the photos have the same characteristics, it is the commonality of the photos. Photographers convert visuals in front of the lens into photos and construct visual grammars that express the meaning and concept of photographs. Whether photos are single or in group, viewers can view and interpret photos from different directions and levels of understanding. First of all, for everyone, a photo is a photo, and it is also a flat object that can be viewed and placed. Photos are illusions of the visual image outside the lens that presented on photographic paper. Viewers often read and observe images from this preliminary level to understand the essence of the work.

Therefore, the essence of blurred photos can be analyzed through three levels. Materially, in most cases, a blurred photo can be on photographic paper, soft fabric or hard metal, etc. Images are obtained by the photosensitive material, and some of the images are directly changed on the photographic paper. Photo are two-dimensional and still; on this flat medium is the illusion of the visual image outside the lens.

Description, how blur is expressed, is the upper level of analyzing blurred photos. This level focuses on highlighting the meaning of the photograph through formal language. This requires the photographer's own background to improve the entire work; photography has its own rules and order, and the order is reflected in four aspects: observation, instant exposure technique, the choice of the composition of the edge of the subject, and the focus of the photo.¹⁷ Photographers transform the language of the world into emotion through these four aspects, and then transform the emotion into a composition in photography, so that the photo has its own meaning. From a visual point of view, the photo is flat and static. It is limited to record a certain point or moment of the horizon.

¹⁷ Barnbaum, Bruce. (2007) *The Nature of Photographs*. New York: Phaidon Press Inc., p38

Psychologically, when a photographer or other audience is watching the world, each of them will have their own virtual image, which is called the psychology of the photo. A photo with commercial value and a photo with artistic conception express the psychological space through their "space depth". The psychological expression of an image is developed from the four aspects mentioned above, from which photographers create photos that highlight the inner world that they want to express.

If memory is a bridge connects the narrative and time, the focus is the beam that connects the psychological and descriptive aspect of a photo. On this point, color photos and black-and-white photos have different interpretations. Color photos are more flexible, for rich color gamut contains information of the color of era, and through color, the real world is visually seen. Compared to the color gamut of color photos, it is black, white and gray latitude in black and white photos. Different latitudes contain different psychological emotions. Whether it is a traditional film camera or a digital camera in the digital era, emotions differ with even a little bit change in tolerance.

Early photography art, with the development, interference and integration of technology and art, shares a common program. Natural photography, graphic photography, impression photography, etc., differ from each other because they each has a standard. For modern era, there is no clear answer to the what is blurred photography and the standard of blurred beauty, and comes with it, it is the boundless choice and possibility.

Chapter III Aesthetic Cognition of Blur

3.1 The aesthetic implication of the inner beauty of blurred images

3.1.1 Transformation of visual form

General visual form viewing reflects the inherent attitude and viewpoint in people's mind that relate to the viewer's own experience and personal cultivation. Walter Lippmann put forward a concept in "Public Opinion", that is the modern society is the more and more tremendous and complicated upgrade of information; with the tension in life and stress in work, and accompanied by the limited circle of activity, people's energy and the ability to concentrate fall below the healthy baseline, and it is impossible for them to maintain a fresh and susceptible state at all times. Therefore, people can only know and understand what is happening through the visual effects presented by various visual media around them. Once the external information content is too much or complicated, it overloads people's ability to absorb. Therefore, minds need a relaxing and easy-to-understand visual space without too much triviality, and the visual steering happens naturally, from tedious to simple, from concrete to abstract, and from clear to blurred.¹⁸

The form of blurred image brings people not only the resting dock of soul, but also the reflection and self-progress space. Similarly, people need the art form such as blurred image has, and naturally there will be an inevitable result of the presence. Getting rid of the restraint brought by the regular visual clarity, the turn in visual rises. Diane Arbus once said, "Brassai taught me something about obscurity, because for years I had been hipped on clarity. Lately, it's been striking me how I really love what I can't see in a photograph. In Brassai, in Bill Brandt, there is the element of actual physical darkness,

¹⁸ Lippmann, Walter. (1998) *Public Opinion*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, p58-64

and it's very thrilling to see darkness again.”¹⁹

3.1.2 Impression of anomalous vision

In order to stand out from similar works, many artists have some blurred works that are contradictory to the artistic conception of the traditional clear picture. In a period of time, on viewing and thinking about visual works, people limit their understanding of the reality of photography to the matching of visual experience, which is the confirmation of visual norms. On the other hand, the blurred image is contrary to visual norms, and it is the vision of reverse thinking; Mostly it is different from the reality in some degree, and even not recognized. Nevertheless, in blurred image, the abnormal blur in vision forms a kind of clarity in the mind. In fact, the abnormal visual impression of blurred images is not necessarily bad. It deviates from the ordinary, abandons experience, tosses habits; sometimes it is a ghostly, strange, dreamy, illusionary or blurred conception, and sometimes it comes from an occasional an uncertain idea. However, on the stage of art presentation, it completely diverges from the visual cliché, avoids the unity of viewing, and satisfies people's curiosity and the desire to explore. The effect of visual abnormality is fresh and special. It is an extension of common sense, but people still need to adhere to life itself, and by blurring the visual experience of viewing, they obtain the space and ideal place to calm their minds that is not separated from the worldly life.

When appreciating art, watch and feel the work as an integrity instead of focusing on certain concrete objects; the beauty of blurred images is carried in the overall works. Rudolf Arnheim believes that “most natural phenomena are not described adequately if they are analyzed piece by piece,” and “the appearance of any element depends on its place and function in an overall pattern.” So, “at no time could a work of art

¹⁹ International Photography Hall of Fame and Museum Website introduction of Brassai (Gyula Halasz) <http://iphf.org/inductees/brassai/>

have been made or understood by a mind unable to conceive the integrated structure of a whole.”²⁰

Analysis of art works starts from determining the overall direction, and then examines the specific meaning of the artist from the details. Anything that is photographed in the picture has its own meaning. Artists pick every element for a certain reason and each element has its own value; and these details are combined to reflect the integrity. The clearer elements are, the more rigid people feel, but if one tries the opposite way, involving blurred elements in the picture, the result is unexpected: "eyes are blurred, mind is clear".

3.1.3 Visual perception of blurred photos

Modern society is relatively relaxing, free, and civilly equal. People have a relatively high standard of living, and thus they have the ability and energy to diversify the style of art presentation, offer a more multi-level and multi-angle way of understanding. The emergence of blurred images unintentionally provides a more relaxing and free space for people to read art than clear works do.

In *Art and Visual Perception*, Rudolf Arnheim demonstrated the importance of visual perception for artistic creation and artistic appreciation, and also proposed the concept of visual thinking. Rudolf Arnheim believes "vision is not a mechanical recording of elements but rather the apprehension of significant structural patterns. Obviously the artist was no more a mechanical recording device than his instrument of sight. The artistic representation of an object could no longer be thought of as a tedious transcription of its accidental appearance, detail by detail."²¹ He also has a famous

²⁰ Rudolf, Arnheim. (1974) *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of The Creative Eye*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p5

²¹ Rudolf, Arnheim. (1974) *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of The Creative Eye*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p6

saying on the narrative of this topic, “All perceiving is also thinking, all reasoning is also intuition, all observation is also invention.”²²

At the same time, Arnheim also carried out a more in-depth analysis of this visual perception activity. Visual activity is a way for humans to observe and understand the world. Although it has sensory factors, it is also a complete cognitive activity. This cognitive activity is greatly influenced by intelligence, so it is also a positive and purposeful activity, and the judgment is made through a concretely perceived schema structure. As mentioned above, visual perception is not a mechanical reproduction of real things like a photo. It is a creative activity. The shape, structure, size, weight and other elements of the object will be an effective coding combination in visual activities. The way, in the end, is presented to the viewer in an overall picture.

3.2 The aesthetic charm of uncertainty

3.2.1 Variable aesthetic cognition

What are the blurred aesthetic features? The blurring in photography focuses on emotion and spirit, and in Chinese painting, it emphasizes on the blending of feels and scenes. Whether for painters or photographers, their pursue is the unspeakable amazement of their work. For viewers, they can only feel the comprehension in mind, but are not able to describe it by words. Similarly, for the photographers, they cannot express the blurred image in words, and this is the feature of blurred aesthetic in image. Discovering the beauty of things leads people to remain faithful to their emotions. Their blurred concept of photographic beauty continually sways between the bipolar of “feminine” and “masculine” styles, and they also always think about why their understanding of aesthetics changes.

²² Rudolf, Arnheim. (1974) *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of The Creative Eye*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p6

In 1907, a German art historian, Wilhelm Worringer, attempted to explain this in a psychological perspective in his book *Abstraction and Empathy*. He proposed two artistic styles in the history of human art, "one art that takes pleasure in creating some recognizable simulacrum of three-dimensional space-the 'real' space of our waking experience, and the art suppresses that spatial illusion in favor of something flatter, more constricted and abstract."²³

One type of art is the art of Greco-Roman and the Renaissance, the art of the South, or the art of reality. Worringer called it empathic art, which is the art that people produce after they have mastered the rational knowledge and have a sense of affinity with the world. In this art, people project their own pleasant and rational emotions into natural objects. The intimate and soft image reflects a harmonious psychological need of human beings for natural objects. This is a reflection of empathy. (The word "empathy" is a concept coined by the German psychologist Theodor Lipps, which Worringer uses in the study of art history.)

The application of Wilhelm Worringer's theory to photographic works is another explanation of why one society is always faithful to one kind aesthetics and may transfer into a belief. He believes that the key reason is the lack of value appeal in this society. Because a society appreciates and pursue the art that reflects the value this society lacks. Abstract art, the blurring of photography, for its harmony, peace and rhythm, naturally attracts societies that desire quietness, and societies without stable law and order, and ideology and that cause the aggravation of personal feel of insecurity due to the moral and spiritual chaos. In such chaotic background, people have a strong desire for tranquility, and thus they will turn to abstract art.

²³ Worringer, Wilhelm. (1997) *Abstraction and Empathy: Elephant Paperbacks*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, pix

3.2.2 Retrospect of the beauty of blurred Image

Photography was born around a century and a half ago. The expression of early art is not the era of mechanical reproduction. The sacredness of painting has always been in museums, galleries, churches, and other places that exhibits art. At the time of photography's birth in France, it was not able to open a new art category. As the technology was not advanced enough and the exposure time was too long, the ambiguous photography was not noticed. At that time, photographers pursued clear images and how to fastly capture the classic moments; photography is merely a medium to objectively copy the objective sight. Photography only showed the progress and development of science; besides, it was also a synonym of luxury. Cameras were huge and consumed very long time to operate; it may take more than eight hours to produce a photo. Therefore, the early photographic aesthetics was only a praise of scientific wisdom; the blur in photo is a casual record, an unconscious press on shutter. That was the beauty of blur in the first half of the 18th century. With the industrial development, and the improvement of science and technology, cameras became small, the quality of imaging was getting clearer and clearer, and the cost of photography was lowered. Photography is finally gradually accepted by everyone, and since then, photography began to form a unique art form and language, and its own aesthetic system and artistic principles. When photography truly entered the society and the human world, a lot of philosophical and aesthetic relationships between people and photography accompanied, and photography aesthetics was born. As the Italian literary critic Umberto Eco mentioned in his book titled *On Beauty: A History of Western Idea*: "beauty begins to appear in the world when the matter created becomes differentiated in terms of weight and number, circumscribed by its outlines, and takes on shape and color; in other words, Beauty is based on the form that things assume in the creative process."²⁴

²⁴ Eco, Umberto. (2004) *On Beauty: A History of Western Idea*. London: Secker & Warburg, p85

The beauty of blur was born in the context of this photographic aesthetic. For example, beginning from the impressionist photography, blurred images appeared in front of the audience. Impressionist photography mainly focused on the visual focus theory of the naturalistic photography; photographers utilized impressionist painting techniques and the gum dichromate process to create impressionist painting like photos. They used soft focus lenses to shoot, and printed photos on textured paper with diffuse filters to pursue a blurred artistic expression that made the work look more like impressionist painting, thereby achieving what they considered artistic. The photographers at the time had a lovely slogan, "make the work look completely different from the photo."

Under the guidance of this theory, Impressionist photographers also use brushes, pencils, and erasers to process photos, deliberately changed the original brightness and darkness, and pursued the effect of "painting", such as Lakroa's "Sweeping" in 1900. People in the park all look like a charcoal painting on canvas. Impressionist photographers completely lost the characteristics of photography in their works, so some people call them faux painting.

These are the forms of pursuit of blurred art. The softness of the picture ultimately wants to express the love of life. The quietness reveals the social theme at that time. Blur often manifests in unclear outlines in the picture, and eyes focus on the changes in light and shadow.



Illustration 14: Lakroa,
Sweeping the Park, 1900



Illustration 15: John Doole Johnston,
Liverpool—An Impression, 1906

3.2.3 The beauty of blur (abstract beauty)

Blurred is extremely important for the conveyance of emotional consciousness and ideology in photography. In aesthetics, it is the experience of ideological and spiritual interaction. For the expression of beauty, it is necessary to have two elements in blur to grasp the soul of the image. One is the environment; the environment is objectively existing and cannot be arbitrarily changed. The other element is the photographer's understanding and attitude towards cognition, which is subjective and changeable; this second element is principal, and it depends on photographers' own educational background and knowledge accumulation. The above two elements are preliminary to achieve blurred beauty. What kind of information can be conveyed by the abstract things in a blur photo? As the abstract itself transcends the scope of the real world that can be understood with the naked eye, it is the ability that every observer desires. When viewing an abstract work, most viewers tend to mock on its simplicity, make fun of it being a common color block, or feel naive and boring about the infinitely magnified partial photographic technique. People may think that anyone who knows a little bit of basic knowledge of photography can make a similar work, but it is not the case. When

abstract graphics are applied to photographs, it is enough to make the audience feel illusory.

For instance, Islamic culture especially advocates mysterious mathematics. Early theologians, scholars, and artists thought that through the intricate and complex abstract geometric patterns, endless wisdom can be revealed. The British writer Dolder Sutton once mentioned in the book *Islamic Design: A Genius for Geometry* that “this art of pure ornament revolves around two poles: geometric pattern, the harmonic and symmetrical subdivision of the plane giving rise to intricately interwoven designs that speak of infinity and the omnipresent center.”²⁵

Although blur is an expression of uncertainty and unfamiliarity, it is similar to writing an article, the purpose is to record the truthful moment of reality at a point in time. The activities and meanings of all the practice of photography are carried out around human life and the living environment. Even if it is blurred, it is expressed on a certain important and meaningful topic of life. But for critics, the expression of these small things and the infinitely magnified picture details also show the important meanings of life philosophy. At the same time, they warn people that they should follow their emotions and listen to the emotional sounds of the abstract and read the potential thoughts from new angles.

The book photographers and photographer artists are same to other artists from different art fields. Their genius lies in allowing people to see the big notions of life, death, love, and hatred can all be reflected in blurred uncertainty. Not only the clear photography presents the theme of life, but shredded clothes, a forgotten glove at the street corner street, or a swaying leaf all can.

²⁵ Sutton, Daud. (2007) *Islamic Design: A Genius for Geometry*. New York: Walker Publishing Company, Inc., p1

3.2.4 Blur and reality

The word diversification is very familiar, and it also applies art. However, with the development in various fields, and the expansion of digital world, diversification can no longer satisfy people's demand for art. Artists are not even satisfied with three-dimensional expression anymore. The illustrations thus diversify further towards multidimensionality. The multidimensional nature of vision undoubtedly expands the habit of thinking. Like a game, as long as the designer adds a new program, the rules of the game will be re-defined to suit different gamers. If combine the unfamiliarity and uncertainty brought by the blur with the reality, it is the embodiment of the "knowledge" in the Taoist doctrine of China.

"Knowledge" is divided into "Great Knowledge" and "Small Knowledge". "Great knowledge sees all in one. Small knowledge breaks down into the many."²⁶ Both are in the midst of everything. For photographers, perhaps like the sages, art is wisdom. If only use "small knowledge", it is limited, not really "Great knowledge." After a period of practice, "Great knowledge" was discovered, breaking through the limitations of "Small knowledge".

It is a widely accepted theory that truth comes from practice. In the practice of photography, increasing the constructiveness of ideas and thus opening up new photographic vision in the process of constant exploration and long-term experience accumulation, is the expression of "great knowledge". From "Great knowledge" and "Small knowledge", it can be concluded that in the blurred image, under the guidance of the reconstruction of the photographer's self-constructive thinking, the presentation of reality is not unique. Photographers must consider various factors, location, light, aperture, shutter, composition, exposure, printing, rinsing, etc. Various factors influence the photographer's "blurred" photos.

²⁶ Merton, Thomas. (1969) *The Way of Chuang Tsu*. New York: New Directions, p40

The ambiguous constructive thinking lies in how photographers use these factors. In digital age, constructive thinking has been well represented; it is vivid, surreal, current, and even more natural. The similarity between the visual perception of film and photography is the viewer's understanding of the visual sight. Photographers create images, and viewers re-establish the "realistic" image like a post-production editor. It is a subjective self-reflection. Although photographers reproduce every detail and color, it cannot escape the subjective understanding of the views. Viewers are individuals, and each individual has a subjective self. Photographers build reality like building a house, not only subject to the subjective influence of viewers, but also the environment in which photos are viewed.

An era reflects an idea, and an art work can also present the idea of an era. The blurred images displayed in different places have different interpretations. In a coffee shop, in newspapers and periodicals, in an office, images have their own meanings in each environment, and there is no fixed interpretation. "Yet these attitudes point back to the break with tradition (Karl Löwith) that occurred when the spirit of the age gained ascendancy over philosophy, when the modern consciousness of time exploded the form of philosophical thought."²⁷ What philosophy needs is nothing but consciousness and discussion about it.

The blur is a subjective reconstruction of reality, not a simple manifestation. The idea of different views also forms new image meanings. Everything in the world is different, with each thought, character and emotion. Therefore, the environment is different, and the thinking brought to the viewers also differs. The ambiguous presentation is not only manifested in a photographer's creation, but also in the constructive photos that are dominated by viewers' thinking, which are not weaker than the true and clear sight.

²⁷ Habermas, Jürgen. (1987) *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, Twelve Lectures*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p52

Chapter IV Reflections on Formal Changes in The Art of Blur

4.1 Today and questioning

Photography is often used as a substitute for reproduction, but today's photography is not a synonym to accessories. The blur liberates the era of mechanical reproduction, and the blurred images are also not auxiliaries. At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, photography entered a new era; the contemporary art emerges, and photography of this period is also a kind of contemporary art. In present days, photography tends to use local cultural knowledge and the creative background of multiple fields, many eternal art transforms its traits in such cross-border art; the current photography is no longer a turning point from "past" to "future", but it is a permanent re-creation of "past" and "future." For photography, no definition can be made to limit it, but people may say that the feature of current photography is a kind of big direction. The feature is similar to the "modern museum" designed by architect Frank Gehry; the invisible vividness and flexibility of steel and concrete break the conventional aesthetic standard and changes the theory of inheritance. These breakthrough achievements demonstrate the intercultural character.

Like the dancing house designed by Frank Gehry, it is filled with unruly creative spirit. When read Gehry's works with ordinary architectural aesthetic experience, one often feels weird and mysterious: the space is unexpectedly disrupted. There seems to be no logic; the relationship between architecture and people is no longer a harmonious unity, but full of provocation and teasing. Perhaps those weird forms implicitly reflect the theme of a certain era at that time, such as complexity, distortion, irregularity and advocating desire. Therefore, no matter whether others criticize Gehry for not respecting tradition, or to marvel at and praise his incredible creativity, Gehry shows that his architecture is the ultimate that an architect can achieve.

“But when we begin to question our projects, to doubt or reformulate them, the present, the contemporary, becomes important, even central for us.” So can “contemporary” be understood as consisting of uncertainty, doubt, and a long-term reflection? “Doubt” is complimentary or derogatory? Rene-Descartes, summed up Boris Groys’ thought, “Define the present as a time of doubt—of doubt that is expected to eventually open a future full of clear and distinct, evident thoughts.”²⁸ The photographer is full of suspicion rather than objection; abandonment is to re-evaluate and determine modern considerations and plans.

Since the twentieth century, culture and politics have dominated photography. The countries of the Soviet Union and the East, various political parties in the West, the Cold War, and all these political incidents have influenced art and even photography. For example, conservative revolutions and reform revolutions have all involved in the art field. Whether it is construction, engineering or sports, it is related, and most of them are opposites. But now photographers are walking out of this environment and rebuilding the relevant photographic concepts; they are experience the era of questioning.

For the future, the modernity of this era can be eternal, and the concept of art collections, libraries, and archives in the museum all proves it; it is a kind of secular eternal. Michel Foucault names this modern field that gathers time that will not disappear "heterotopias". In his 1984 *Heterotopia*, Foucault wrote, “In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates”²⁹ Heterotopia is an opportunity to escape from existing order.

²⁸ Groys, Boris. (2009) *Comrades of Time*, e-flux, Journal#11-December 2009
<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/11/61345/comrades-of-time/>

²⁹ Foucault, Michel. (October 1984) "Des Espace Autres". *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*. Foucault, Michel (Spring 1986). trans. Jay Miskowiec. "Of Other Spaces". *Diacritics*.
<https://foucault.info/documents/heterotopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en/>

The time photographers invested to create works was buried by the works themselves. Photographs were preserved, but the time the photographer consumed to create the work was lost. The process of this time cannot be repaired. However, photographers and artists have a skeptical attitude, so that the disappearing creation time can be repaired in modernity, and it is also a historical compensation for the time lost in the process.

4.2 Subjective consciousness

With the development of human society and the advancement of science and technology, photography has become more and more simple. If it is simply a record of the objective world, a world that humans already know, it is very hard to get rid of the original style for today's multidimensional societies and viewers. If one want make photographic blur more attractive, the requirements for the content, thought and meaning of the work become higher and higher, and if an ambiguous image wants to reach a higher standard, the subject consciousness plays an important role. Subject consciousness is closely related to the explanation of the meaning of the work. It is accompanied by changes in social practice and self-style characteristics. The photographer's consciousness plays a central role in the work, and is also the center of the picture. Therefore, it is necessary to improve self-awareness and explore the inner depth of thought.

The so-called subject consciousness is divided into self-dominant self-consciousness and freedom consciousness to overcome binary opposition. Subjective consciousness is a blurred image work should occupy a prominent position, which can be easily understood as the focus of the picture and an interesting communication point. The photos taken by illustration photographer Wayne Levin are good examples. The center of the picture is a collection of fish and their shadows. Looking at the work, it is just an abstract black dot. When the viewers walk closer, they will find that the black circle is

composed of thousands of small fish arranged in order. The viewers may doubt whether the shooting location is on water. It is not just the visual effect of the blur, even the name of the work - the title is blurred (one of the blurred categories above). Akula column makes people feel for a moment, just like the meaning of Trajan's Column; The literal meaning of column is pillar, and the fish that are densely packed together is the simulation of the shape of the pillars. The author sees them as arranged columns, and this is understandable, but it is interesting to see why the word column is defined. Trajan's column, in the history of society, has a commemorative concept; it is a symbol of excellence and greatness. Photographer Wien also wants to use this point to imply that the fish he photographed are great and commemorative. Thus the photographer applies the subjective consciousness to the center of the picture by the means of the title blur, and this guiding method plays a role in balancing the central idea of the picture.

The famous German philosopher Susanne K.Langer says in her book *Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures* that "The better the symbolism, the faster it has to grow, to keep up with the thought it serves and fosters. That is clearly demonstrated by language."³⁰

In other words, subjective consciousness is the carrier of the photographer's ideological soul, and the manifestation of subjective consciousness is influenced by social factors to achieve its decisive role. Photographers should pay more attention to it, and plan to organize the subject consciousness to achieve a higher level of photography.

³⁰ Langer, Susanne. (1957) *Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, p92

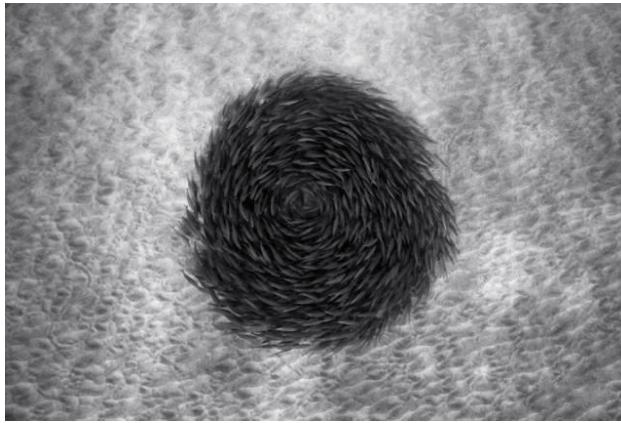


Illustration 16: Wayne Levin, Akule Pinwheel, SC-216, 2000

The photographer expresses his thoughts in a blurred form, and conveys some kind of blurred aesthetics. In addition to the emotions brought to the photographers themselves, this aesthetic also stimulates the rationality and sensibility of viewers' own emotions. It is wrong for a photographer to do it himself. For the birth of a complete artwork, in addition to the artist, the participation of viewers and critics is also important; the interaction among the sender, the recipient and the transmitter is process of collaboration.

4.3 Using blur to reflect the microcosm of society

Society is a complex collection of culture, history, literature, science, philosophy, etc. Image works based on photography in addition to its own development and evolution, are also influenced and infected by social genes. Genes can be inherited, mutated, or recombined to give birth to embryos. The growth of embryos carries the characteristics of these factors, just as children have some traits of their parents. So what is the gene of photography? What are the characteristics of photography? It is a social factor. Photography is inseparable from the influence of these collectives. Each era has its own characteristics. The time is not fixed, and it constantly move forward; the art form also changes in such development. In other words, the photographic feature of blur is inseparable from the photographer's living environment, and the two are corresponding interactions.

No matter what kind of blurred image, it is a microcosm of mixed society, and it is mixed with the subjective consciousness of the photographer. These two aspects cannot exist without one another, and the photographer uses self-subjective to collage, generalize, select and remove unnecessary shooting content, the final image presents a variety of social bodies in different eras. The photographer not only plays a role, but also included in this environment.

Conclusion

By studying related books and many examples of specific blurred images at home and abroad, this thesis analyzes and elaborates the classification of blurred images in detail. Through the study of blur, conclusion is made that blurred images can bring people inner feelings relevant to vision and further understanding in visual communication. In the early days of photography, blurred images were often the compromised result of underdeveloped photographic technology. However, the realistic function of photography was still needed.

With the continuous development of the art of photography, people's ways of appreciating photographic works as well as emotional and psychological connotations they can gain have also gone great changes. The simple "realism" is far from satisfying people's spiritual needs. Therefore, using various expressive techniques to ambiguously change the world is not only an extension of aesthetic ideals, but also an inevitable path for the development of diversification. In addition, as a different artistic approach, blur is always presented daily in different ways. If clarity is one form of beauty, blur is then another form of beauty, like the other side of a coin.

In this paper, some explanations are also made by expressing blur and understanding of Wabi-Sabi. As a part of oriental culture, the spirit and thought of Wabi-Sabi is consistent with our entire values system, exerting subtle influences as a cultural background commonly shared by the easterners. It expresses a state of emptiness in the perception of things, vague, incomplete, and unclear, just like that of blurred images. What both Wabi-Sabi and blur ultimately want to express is a highly extracted ideological connotation revealed in blurred or imperfect form after the transformational process. In addition, by analyzing the essence of blurred images, they fall into four categories, namely blur of vision, blur of title and text, blur of artistic conception and blur of correlation.

It's also suggested that artistic forms such as abstractionism, surrealism, minimalism are considered varied manifestations of blur, as they implicate illegible or incomprehensible thoughts. In addition, this ideological and psychological blur does not only appear in visual art, but also in many art forms, such as music and literature. We need to experience a phenomenon that looks at the latitude of the representation. We can try to learn the philosopher's assertion of photographic vision to understand the beauty of blur. It is not just a source. Just as human excellence does not originate from the same quality.

By summarizing the forms and content of blurred images and dividing blurred images form into two different states, the importance of visual cognition of the inner beauty of blurred images is stressed and to expand possibilities and understanding of blurred images. Blur is a profoundness and agility-based perceptive ability that implements complex mental phenomena in a blurred way and conveys a mind and realm in a more abstract and general way.

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Acknowledgement

First of all, I am especially grateful to my mentor, Thomas, for his guidance and help with my thesis. He recommended and suggested a lot of important information for my thesis. Due to time and personal ability, the author did not analyze and demonstrate this thesis more deeply and accurately, but I will continue to improve and study this topic in the future, and hope that it can be done better. Although the study period is temporarily over, it is just the beginning of a guided tour of photography art. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the teachers and classmates who helped me through every dilemma in the past two years. Through these two years of oversea study life, I also rethink and examine the meaning and value of photography art. For me, this is a very important process of growth and learning. Finally, thank you again sincerely.