

The Contemporary Existence Value and Significance of Static Images - Postprint

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Abstract

As a medium for information dissemination, the image has traversed a path from genesis and evolution to the diversification engendered by technological advancement, establishing itself as an independent modality beyond textual symbols. This reality, while presenting the contemporary panorama of information dissemination, has profoundly impacted traditional excerpt-based image transmission, constituting not merely a choice confronting practitioner communities, but more fundamentally a challenge and opportunity. This article proceeds from photographic technology to elucidate the role and future prospects of static images in the evolution of information dissemination, articulating technological possibilities as catalytic for rather than terminal to communication—a forced reorganization of the industrial landscape impelled by deep-seated demands. As a significant form of communication, static images will inevitably cultivate more definitive perspectives through their stance on reflecting reality, thereby achieving greater clarity of direction and enhanced expressive impact.

Full Text

The Contemporary Value and Significance of Static Imagery

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Abstract: As a vehicle for information dissemination, imagery has evolved from its origins through technological development into a diversified form that exists independently beyond textual symbols. This reality not only presents a contemporary landscape of information communication but also profoundly impacts traditional snapshot-based visual transmission. This transformation represents not merely a choice facing industry practitioners, but rather a challenge and opportunity. Starting from photographic technology, this paper elaborates

on the role of static imagery in the development of information dissemination and its prospects, arguing that technological possibilities should be understood as promoting rather than terminating communication—representing a forced re-organization of the industry and a deepening of demand. As a crucial form of communication, static imagery will inevitably foster more definitive viewpoints through its stance on reflecting reality, achieving clearer directionality and greater expressive influence.

Keywords: information dissemination; static imagery; value output; visual possibility; stance

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The act of picking up a mobile phone to receive information has become second nature, while the social obligations once borne by print media have diminished. The same event can now be presented through multiple angles of mutual verification—for instance, at a traffic accident scene, dozens of phones may be raised, seemingly bringing us closer to “reality.” Previously, the singular viewpoint or intentional proposition that static imagery possessed could easily be dismissed as “subjective,” yet this subjectivity continues to permeate every screen and becomes diluted by digital distribution. Getting closer to “reality” does not mean obtaining it. In the ravaged streets of Aleppo, Libya, the understanding of “liberation victory” versus “persistent dark tyranny” differs between Europeans, Americans, Libyans, and even complete outsiders, each interpretation filtered through the imagery and mediated by considered reflection. Are viewpoints predetermined or objective? The trap of “new electronic expressionism” [?], amplified by overwhelming information volume, makes reality as difficult to confirm as it was in the era of traditional photography.

1.1 Photographic Perspective

Bayard’s “Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man,” created in 1840 shortly after photography’s invention, was admittedly a prank yet revealed a crucial insight: photographic perspective could be manufactured. Photography differs from fine art’s perspectival representation that strives for realism. Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675) famously employed lens-like technologies to achieve remarkable precision [?]. Beyond this, photography’s “truth” is more superficial, making “objectivity” a concept that can be grafted onto images. No case exemplifies predetermined perspective more vividly than the 1994 O.J. Simpson murder trial. *Time* magazine unabashedly manipulated Simpson’s portrait with darker tones, making him “look more” like a criminal, while *Newsweek* used the identical photograph where Simpson appeared merely as a suspect. This occurred two years before Photoshop 4.0’s release—simple tonal adjustments could produce such implicit

perspectives, and subsequent technological advances enabled even more rampant manipulation, with viewpoints implanted inversely. From Trotsky's "gradual" disappearance from photographs with Lenin to the ambiguous authenticity of bin Laden's corpse, such incidents persist throughout history. Does this mean static imagery's credibility is completely exhausted? Since no viewpoint exists without limitations, the directionality of information dissemination has never been absent.

1.2 The Value Orientation of Imagery

We have repeatedly memorialized classic moments of significance. Beginning with the photographic documentation of Yan'an as a Soviet area, the value of static imagery as an information carrier was long established. Comrade Mao Zedong once stated: "Mastering ideological leadership is the foremost task in mastering all leadership," and establishing value output forms the foundation of such leadership. Since the War of Resistance Against Japan, Mao consistently emphasized the significance of liberated-zone newspapers and periodicals in the war effort, giving rise to renowned publications like the *Jin-Cha-Ji Pictorial* [?]. It was the Party Central Committee's high regard for propaganda work during that period that fostered the visual documentation and dissemination from the War of Resistance through the Liberation War. Even under extreme hardship, film remained a crucial strategic material. Note: it was precisely the more direct transmission of photographic information that enabled the Chinese Communist Party's image to be established during a period when the illiteracy rate reached 80%, allowing its stance and ideology to be promoted. The irreplaceable role of those print media images in ideological transmission exemplifies how static imagery constructs historical value. Mastering ideological leadership begins with information dissemination, and information with a viewpoint finds more direct, rationalized presentation within images.

1.3 The Scale of Control

As a carrier of values and perspectives, imagery originates from reality and influences people's re-understanding of reality through different propositions. An "out of control" state represents accidents emerging from control itself. Value output is also a form of control, where objectivity remains difficult to measure and value serves as the direct impetus for transmission. The perspective of an ISIS extremist photographing American forces would certainly differ markedly from that of a Western news agency journalist. Intentional extraction of reality for viewpoint output is determined by the value system behind the perspective, yielding different expressive power according to one's mastery of static imagery. In Duncan's famous photograph *Retreat* from the Korean War, the captured image of American soldiers reveals desolation in the bitter cold, with emotions amplified by background knowledge. The "defeat" perceived by Chinese viewers and the "tragedy" seen by Americans represent normal differences in value-based cognition. As information producers, photographers are controllers of

perspective who have never been absent from critical moments, and outstanding communicators remain rational actors.

2.1 The Limitations of Streaming Media

The evolution of the 4G era has propelled the development of streaming imagery. Changes in the rhythm of human activity have made short videos an emerging media form. Platforms like Kuaishou and Douyin, having solved technical bottlenecks, implement their own traffic regulation strategies based on algorithmic differences, allowing more people to drain their phone batteries. Superficially, this medium's advantages appear more diverse: platform traffic generates revenue (Douyin's valuation alone reaches hundreds of billions of dollars); telecommunications upgrades bring greater traffic benefits; individual value seems homogenized in the competition for maximum perspective effect, where participation becomes the sole threshold. Negroponte's "new hope and dignity" [?] seems within reach. However, is everything about digitization truly perfect and simple? Just as AI technology's creations for humanity will inevitably replace humans? The reality is likely otherwise. As organic, animal bodies, development is the only path against decay; pastoral idylls merely represent nostalgic attachment. Within ever-accelerating speeds, people continuously strive for greater efficiency with unchanging time. Airplanes redefine distance; medical maintenance continuously updates average lifespans. Consequently, humanity's demand for time becomes ever more insatiable. Algorithms determine the videos you might see, and perspective is also a quality of algorithms. People are increasingly comfortably "personalized" by networks, a transformation akin to life within a cocoon—slowly and pleasantly solidifying oneself. This comfort represents customized viewpoint output, reflecting only big data and AI's understanding or sustenance of individuals, maintaining loyalty to ensure ultimate platform revenue. Compared to manipulating a photograph, this is merely more insidious; the principle remains unchanged.

2.2 Further Visual Possibilities of Static Imagery

If streaming media is readily accepted through screens, then the most basic infrastructure remains a threshold. Nearly all humans have likely encountered static images—as packaging materials, posters, or even trash. Everyone's perception is influenced by fresh information, with the most fundamental precondition being concise acquisition. Between a sheet of paper and a screen lies a long temporal iteration. Moreover, when facing static images like Xie Hailong's famous work *Big Eyes*, the contemplation represents a certain demand for material and inner communication that technology cannot alter. The difficulty of taking a photograph persists, making striking, moving static images as rare as diamonds. Newspapers and magazines did not collapse because of technology, but because of the gap between producers' capabilities and reality, causing content provision to decline and creating a "Matthew Effect" where similar content crowds together—the same principle applies universally.

Static imagery' s stable producers, values, and output project more onto the picture plane, influencing others and confirming one' s own stance through cross-sections of reality. Static imagery' s diversified expression is more direct. In terms of traffic, static images may be easily scrolled past. Yet just as painting continued its journey after photography' s emergence, meaningful human activities have not disappeared due to new technology. One of photography' s functions is to interrupt time—a skill, not a technology that controls everything. As Dorothea Lange of the FSA stated: a photographer becomes a photographer, and a lion tamer becomes a lion tamer—not by accident [?]. Behind the photographic moment lies the cognitive expression of the extractor. When reality passively becomes a two-dimensional frame, it represents a deliberate “writing” achievement. Consumer imagery—casual mobile phone snapshots—represents accidental measurement of reality, not the original formation of perspective. This cannot be replaced by quantity. Moreover, viewing contexts and editorial methods exert enormous influence on photographs.

Static images on mobile phones are approximately the same size, with little variation in format. Consequently, shooting methods must adapt. The smaller the effective area, the less possible it becomes to densely stack forest-like information. Perhaps a single detail—such as the gaze in a pair of “big eyes” — can move countless people to cognitive sensation. More producers should understand reality' s extraction methods and communication principles from the medium itself. What seems endlessly fresh may become clichéd convention, yet the potential for developing static imagery with clear perspectives from everyday events remains vast. Subjective, simple recording cannot be measured as objective. After excluding this cognition, we need not obscure the “controlled” perspective inherent in static images—it has never changed.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv –Machine translation. Verify with original.