

# Aji Susanto Anom's Black and White Photographic Works: A Study of Visual Psychology

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**Abstract:** This study aims to map the aesthetics and emotional content implied in black and white photographic works by Aji Susanto Anom, a leading photographer from Indonesia. This research uses a visual arts approach and literature study to analyze various aspects which include techniques, compositions, themes, and messages conveyed in the works of Aji Susanto Anom. The research method used is a qualitative analysis of a number of black and white photographic works of Aji Susanto Anom that have been carefully selected. By paying attention to every visual and narrative detail, this study will identify the unique aesthetic characteristics and emotional content implicit in each work. It will also involve an understanding of the context of these works, including cultural influences, traditional values, and Aji Susanto Anom's career journey as a photographer. The results of this study are expected to provide a deeper understanding of how aesthetics and emotional content in black and white photography can be expressed through the works of Aji Susanto Anom. The findings of this study are also expected to contribute to the development of our understanding of black and white photography as a powerful artistic medium in conveying profound and inspiring messages.

**Keywords:** black and white, composition, photography, visual psychology.

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## Introduction

Black and white photography has long been a powerful medium in the visual arts, producing a distinctive beauty and revealing great emotional depth. In the Indonesian context, the term photography comes from two words in Greek, namely *photos*, which means light, and *graphein*, which means drawing (Charpentier, 1985). Black and white photographic works have become an integral part of the development of visual arts, enriching cultural insight and unique artistic expression. One Indonesian photographer known for his inspiring black and white works is Aji Susanto Anom. Using a visual arts approach and literature study, this research will explore visual psychology in Aji Susanto Anom's black and white photographic works. According to Barthes, photos have denotative and connotative meanings. A denotative meaning is a descriptive sign as a result of the fusion of signifier and signified. The denotative meaning is the literal meaning, it can be an analogon. Meanwhile, connotative meaning is the way people reach out to communicate what they think (Wijaya, 2018).

In this case it is important to understand that black and white photography is not just a photography technique, but also a form of profound artistic

expression. The aesthetics of black and white photography include subject selection, visual composition, use of light and shadow, and contrast processing that can strengthen the message and emotions to be conveyed. In the context of Aji Susanto Anom, his work often presents dramatic urban views, intense facial expressions, or cultural objects that contain deep meaning. Black and white photos are very simple photos, so if they are not processed creatively they will not produce anything. Because almost all the subjects in front of the photographer contain a variety of colors or colors, a black and white photographer is required to be able to translate the colors contained in his subject into black and white gradations. (Herlina, 2003).

Apart from that, in the context of photography, art psychology can help in understanding how the visual and aesthetic elements in black and white photography influence the feelings and emotions of art viewers, especially photography. Black and white autography has a unique charm and is able to produce a deep influence on the feelings and emotions of art viewers, especially in the context of photographic art, namely considering its influence, there are several factors that can be explained. First, the monochromatic aesthetic beauty of black and white photography can inspire feelings of nostalgia and romance. Without the distraction of color, black and white images often highlight details and contrast that create a dramatic and impressive feel. It can evoke deep feelings of melancholy, stimulate memories of the past, or create a sense of wonder at the immortalized subject.

Second, the use of tonality in black and white photography can strengthen artistic expression. The sharp contrast between highlights and shadows provides a visual dimension of depth, allowing for stronger emotional expression. For example, dark shadows can create a mysterious atmosphere or emphasize solitude, while bright highlights can convey brightness or warmth.

Apart from that, black and white photography is also able to direct the art viewer's focus on composition and visual structure. By removing color, attention is drawn to form, texture and pattern, creating a more immersive aesthetic experience. The photographer's skill in utilizing these elements can evoke a deep sense of awe and appreciation for the work of art.

Another feature of black and white photography is its ability to communicate narrative and emotional power without words. A black and white image can depict a complex story, touch the heart, or convey a deep message just through its visuals. This allows art viewers to experience and interpret the work according to their own experiences and perspectives.

Furthermore, black and white photography is also often used in historical documentation, where it can trigger strong emotional reactions from the viewer. Through images depicting important events or historical moments, black and white photography is able to convey depth of emotion such as joy, sorrow, courage, or hope.

Black and white photography has the extraordinary ability to influence the feelings and emotions of art viewers. From its timeless visual beauty to its ability to convey powerful narratives, black and white photography continues to play an

important role in conveying profound and universal human experiences through the visual medium

It is very important to pay attention to photographic composition when taking each photo object, namely as a means of arranging each visual element in such a way that the resulting photo is not only beautiful but also more interesting and able to clearly express the photographer's aims and objectives, namely what is being communicated, and what the photographer wants to convey to every lover of the art of photography, both in selecting objects and locations to include in photographic works. a good composition that is pleasing to the eye or eye. Regarding whether it is delicious or not delicious, it goes back to the perception of the photo viewer. (Wulandari, 2015).

With a good composition, the photo will more effectively display the creator's message and have a stronger impact (Herlina, 2007). How to arrange it as a shooting technique with the desired concept in order to produce a photographic work that has artistic value. content Emotions in black and white photography can vary greatly, from joy, sadness, confusion, to awe and solemnity. Black and white photography has the unique ability to convey emotions in a universal way, considering that the limited use of color can focus attention on the essence of what is intended. delivered by the photographer. Black and white photography produces dramatic photographs and creates its own world in the photograph. Colors are lost and it is made as if the colorless world has its own message which can be produced from geometric shapes, color contrasts, and shadows cast (Zen, 2022).

The visual arts approach will make it possible to analyze every visual element in Aji Susanto Anom's works, starting from shooting techniques, visual composition, to the message to be conveyed. Literature study will also be an important part of this research, because it will involve an in-depth understanding of the cultural context, history and development of fine arts in Indonesia which is the background to Aji Susanto Anom's works.

With this research, it is hoped that new insights can be found about how the aesthetics and emotional content of black and white photography can be expressed through the works of Aji Susanto Anom. It is also hoped that the results of this research will provide a deeper appreciation of black and white photography as a medium that is rich in meaning and inspiration in the visual arts. Every form of work produced from photography has nothing but a goal and concept of creation which starts from a basic idea which develops into practical implementation with the support of equipment and techniques expressed through visual language. Furthermore, through experimentation and exploration of the exposure target and the process of presenting it until it becomes the subject matter of the photographic work. (Rahman, 2008).

## **Methodology**

The current study comes from many perspectives which is different from the two previous studies, namely those conducted by Kayansa & Wirakesuma (2023) and Putra et al. (2023). Kayansa & Wirakesuma (2023) took the object

on the bicycle and Putra et al. (2023) takes the object of women workers in Badung Market. These two studies do not address black and white photography.

Research that explores the visual aspects in Aji Susanto Anom's black and white photographic works offers a deeper view of the creative process and artistic expression in photography. In-depth analysis of composition is an important step in understanding how each visual element is placed in a work. The visualization of black and white monochromatic photography is capturing and speaking through photos without the presence of color by relying on strong and clear visualization of depth and contrast. The strong visual implications of conveying messages through black and white monochrome photography can present emotionally evocative images, regardless of the recording media used. In the world of modern digital photography there are many conveniences, both in the form of hardware and software, which continue to develop in line with technological developments, which if utilized properly will produce extraordinary visual implications. (Sutedja & Fairuz, 2021)

This research uses a qualitative analysis approach which allows researchers to pay attention to and explore the meaning and values contained in each photographic work. This research involves in-depth observation of every visual and narrative detail in photographic works. Researchers will identify elements such as composition, lighting, shooting techniques, as well as the message or emotion the photographer wants to convey. The results of the analysis will be interpreted to reveal the unique aesthetic characteristics and emotional content implicit in each work. To support qualitative analysis, researchers may refer to theories or concepts in the fields of visual arts, aesthetics and cultural studies. For example, composition theory in photography, semiotic theory to analyze visual symbolism, as a reference for understanding the emotional content in a work.

Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) states that the meaning of the word psychology is the science of the soul, including individual behavior and the mental processes that occur therein. This includes the study of thoughts, feelings, motivation, perception, as well as interactions between individuals and their surrounding environment. In a broader context, psychology also includes research on human development, psychopathology, and various other psychological aspects that influence human behavior and experience. The word psychology emerged around the 16th century and comes from Greek, namely from the words "psyche" which means soul and "logos" which means science. If interpreted literally, psychology is the science of the soul or the science that studies mental symptoms. So psychology was originally knowledge about the human soul (Ariyani, 2014).

According to Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), visual is an adjective which means something related to sight or things that can be seen. This includes everything related to the process or ability to see with the eyes, or things that can be seen visually, such as images, colors, shapes, and so on. In a broader context, this visual term can also refer to fields of study or science related to human vision, such as visual psychology or visual design.

Sutedja & Fairuz (2021) explains that visualization of monochromatic black and white photography is capturing and speaking through photos without the presence of color by relying on strong and clear visualization of depth and contrast. The strong visual implications of conveying messages through black and white monochrome photography can present emotionally evocative images, regardless of the recording media used. In the world of modern digital photography, there are many conveniences, both in the form of hardware and software, which continue to develop in line with technological developments, which if utilized properly will produce extraordinary visual implications.

Research that focuses on contributions to the study of visual arts, especially in black and white photography, has very important value. Through the research results, a deeper understanding of the aesthetic and emotional aspects of photography will be obtained. This is not only useful for researchers who want to develop further studies, but also for artists and art observers who want to deepen their understanding of black and white photography.

## Results and discussion

Figure 1 with a description of the work (Night one suro changes mother's face, many guests visit not only because they miss her) Evening one suro #1 parangkusumo, 2023.



[Source: Aji Susanto Anom's Instagram Social Media, 2023]

Figure 1. One of the Aji Susanto Anom's black and white photographic works

The work in Figure 1 shows a black and white photo with lots of human shadows which can create a very dramatic and attractive atmosphere. These shadows often add visual depth and give a mysterious feel to black and white photographs. With many human shadows, each shadow can represent a variety of things, from actual physical presence to deeper symbolism. These shadows can also give rise to feelings of an unreal or hidden presence. Image composition and photography techniques are aspects that influence the purpose and representation of a photo. Choosing the right photography technique when shooting is an important thing that must be done by photographers. (Kurniawan, 2017).

Shadows displayed in an arrangement that looks beautiful and harmonious can create a very strong aesthetic impression. The resulting contrast between the shadow and the background can also add dimension and visual sharpness. In photography, three-dimensional subjects are transformed into two-dimensional images. Some of the subjects will form image areas. It can be a plane in the form of a regular curve, such as a car wheel or window shutter. It can also be an area in the form of an irregular curve, such as the silhouette of a human body or something else (Sadono, 2015). Human shadows can be interesting subjects for psychological analysis or as symbolic representations of concepts such as the past, memory, or presence. The contrast between dark and light areas is also very important in the visualization of black and white photos. Strong contrast can provide strong dramatization to an image, highlight the main subject, or create an interesting combination between visual elements. Taking photos must pay attention to the composition of supporting objects in each frame so that the main object remains a POI (Point of Interest) (Atnin, 2018).

In addition, black and white photo visualization often strengthens emotional expressions. By focusing on shape, line, and composition, we can better capture the essence of the message the photographer wants to convey, whether it is about beauty, strength, sadness, or other emotional forces. The semiotic theory that influences contrast in the visualization of black and white photos can be seen through the use of strong visual symbolism. Many photographers still uphold the originality of a photograph, so digital manipulation carried out by digital applications is considered to eliminate the originality of the photo (Mulyanta, 2007).

In this context, the contrast between dark and light areas can be interpreted as representing a duality or contradiction in the message the photographer wants to convey. In semiotic theory, the semiotic concepts of signifier and signified can be applied. The strong contrast between dark and light areas becomes a signifier that strengthens the signification of the message to be conveyed. In this case, it can be seen in the photograph above, the strong contrast between darkness and light can depict the conflict between strength and weakness, life and death, or happiness and sadness.

In this work, human shadows also have the ability to evoke emotions in the audience. The expressions and poses of these shadows can depict various emotions, ranging from happiness, sadness, busy situations with their respective interests. These emotions penetrate the thoughts and feelings of the photo viewer, creating a deep experience and arousing feelings of empathy and sensitivity to various human feelings. as a work of fine art, photography can be studied as an effort to explore the images behind the specific symbols that are the object of study (Salam, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

The study of aesthetics and emotional content in black and white photography by Aji Susanto Anom through a visual arts approach and literature study provides a deep understanding of visual beauty, dramatic subject selection, use of strong contrast, and deep emotional expression. These works show that

black and white photography is not just a photography technique, but is also a form of artistic expression that is capable of conveying deep messages and arousing the emotions of the viewer. Through this research, it is hoped that we can continue to develop an understanding and appreciation of black and white photography as a powerful artistic medium for conveying deep and inspiring messages. Thus, this research not only aims to understand the aesthetics and emotional content of black and white photography individually, but also to find out how these works contribute to the development of understanding of visual art and how deep messages can be expressed through a photographic work. Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide inspiration and a deeper appreciation for the art of black and white photography as a medium that is rich in meaning and emotional values.

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