



Aesthetic Composition in Ansel Adams' Photography

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ABSTRACT

Photography is the art and practice of capturing images or recording pictures using camera devices to create visual beauty for its audience. One of the most beloved genres of photography is landscape photography, documenting the natural beauty of a place so that it can be retold through visual communication. Ansel Adams is a world-renowned photographer and vocal environmental activist, whose work has become iconic in the world of photography in discussing the importance of preserving the natural beauty of the world. This study aims to explore and analyze the aesthetics of visual composition in Ansel Adams' photographic works. The main focus will be on how Adams utilizes the basic principles of visual composition. Using a qualitative descriptive method approach, this research analyzes Ansel Adams' legendary photographic works, exploring how aesthetics and visual composition can form a language of visual communication in photography for the general audience.

1. Introduction

Photography is the art and practice of capturing images or recording pictures using camera devices (Saidi, 2015), which generally relies on light to create images recorded on light-sensitive media, such as film or digital sensors. The photographic process involves the manipulation of light, lighting, visual composition, and a range of other techniques to capture moments, expressions, beauty, or specific messages within the recorded images (Gunawan, 2013). Photography has many varieties, ranging from human portraits, natural landscapes, to the documentation of important events, and has become a vital tool in art, journalism, science, and visual communication (Karyadi, 2017).

Photography is not only a visual art but also a powerful form of documentation. With its ability to capture important moments, photograph everyday reality, and encapsulate the beauty of nature and human life, photography becomes an effective means of immortalizing various aspects of life. Hence, perfect shooting techniques are required to document visuals more effectively. Aesthetics do not just emerge based on a play of taste; aesthetics have their way in the process (Yekti Herlina, 2007).

As documentation, photography plays a wide and varied role:

History and Culture: Photography serves as a silent witness to historical events, social changes, and cultural developments. Through captured photos, we can witness significant events, such as political revolutions, cultural events, or environmental changes.

Tourism and Travel: Photography is an important tool in documenting travel experiences and tourism. By photographing visited places, local cuisine, and interactions with the local culture, these photos become precious memories and tell the story of the journey.

Environment and Nature: Photography can also be used as a means to showcase the beauty of nature and the environmental challenges faced. Through stunning images, photography reminds us of the importance of preserving nature and appreciating its biodiversity (Liz Wells, 2022).

Everyday Life: As documentation of daily life, photography reflects the diversity of society, daily routines, and precious emotional moments. Family photos, portraits of friends, or daily activities capture unforgettable memories.

In a rapidly changing world, photography serves as a reminder of the past, a catalyst for discussions about the present, and inspiration for the future. By combining technical expertise and artistic creativity, photography becomes a universal language that bridges various cultures, generations, and worldviews. As a visual documentation, photography has the power to alter our perceptions of the world, give voice to the unheard, and unite us in profound human experiences.

Landscapes are expansive and beautiful views of nature or the surrounding environment. This term refers to natural scenery that includes elements such as mountains, hills, valleys, rivers, lakes, forests, seas, skies, and all other natural features that form the overall picture of a region or location.

Landscapes often become objects of attraction in photography, paintings, and other visual media due to their natural beauty and their ability to captivate viewers. Experiencing breathtaking natural landscapes can also provide peace, inspiration, and reverence for the wonders of nature. Additionally, landscapes can refer to views or panoramas of cities or urban environments that are interesting, such as skylines, city parks, and famous monuments. In this context, landscapes can encompass architectural and cultural elements that are characteristic of a city or region, emphasizing the importance of preserving the natural environment to maintain balance on Earth.



Figure 1. Ansel Adams (Source: <https://www.anseladams.com>)

One of the prominent figures in the history of photography who has inspired and influenced generations of photographers is Ansel Adams. Adams' works, particularly in black and white landscape photography, are not only known for the extraordinary natural beauty he captured but also for the remarkable aesthetic of visual composition he applied. Ansel Adams was an American photographer famous for his work in photographing the landscapes of the United States, especially in Yosemite National Park. He is renowned for his black and white photography techniques that emphasize detail and extraordinary contrast in natural landscapes. His works are not only appreciated for their beauty but also for their influence in promoting environmental conservation and the protection of national parks. Adams was also a vocal environmental activist, and his work has become iconic in the world of photography.

This research aims to explore and analyze the aesthetic of visual composition in the photography works of Ansel Adams. The main focus will be on how Adams utilizes basic principles of visual composition,

such as line arrangement, shape, negative space, and proportion, to create aesthetically profound and captivating works (Setiawan & Ag, 2015). Adams is known for his ability to manipulate composition elements in black and white landscape photography to create depth and captivating dimensions for viewers. Through the use of techniques such as zone system, contrast, and tonal gradation, Adams succeeded in producing works that not only capture the beauty of nature but also convey profound emotional messages.



Figure 2. Ansel Adams Photography (Source: <https://jugaadmag.com>)

Landscape photography plays a role as a medium to capture objects and depict the visual reality of coastal nature by considering composition, moments, sharpness of space, and exposure triangle settings to achieve photographic works that align with the concept (Panca Taqwa, 2022). Landscape photography is the art and practice of capturing the beauty of nature through a camera. It involves creating images that showcase the beauty and grandeur of nature, including mountains, lakes, seas, forests, and other natural elements. Landscape photography is not just about recording landscapes, but also aims to express the emotions, atmosphere, and natural wonders that surround us.

One of the main challenges in landscape photography is capturing the beauty and complexity of nature in an engaging and captivating way. This involves selecting the right locations, appropriate lighting, good composition, and proper photography techniques. Landscape photographers often have to deal with changing weather conditions and various other challenges to capture the perfect image. However, when successful, landscape photography can produce stunning and captivating works of art. These images not only showcase the beauty of nature but can also inspire, motivate, and uplift the spirits of their viewers. Landscape photography can also help remind us of the importance of preserving nature and the beauty of this universe.



Figure 3. Ansel Adams Photography (Source: <https://www.yosemite.com/things-to-do/leisure-activities/ansel-adams-gallery>)

Using modern technology, such as digital cameras and image editing software, landscape photography has become more accessible to many people. However, this also poses its own challenges in maintaining the authenticity and quality of the images, as well as preserving the environmental sustainability of the landscapes being photographed. Overall, landscape photography is not only a way to capture the beauty of nature but also a form of artistic expression that can inspire, entertain, and educate us about the natural wonders that surround us.

According to Ansel Adams in one of his photographic works, "I believe there is a relationship between the experiences of art and of nature, in that both have definite functions at appropriate social and creative levels. Works of art, literature, or music have little value or human benefit if held available only to the few. If such is not of general human benefit what are its reasons for being? Comprehending the natural world is, in itself, an act of creation and should be universally shared." For Ansel Adams, landscape photography is not just about visual aspects alone but more than that, visually, photography provides a creation of nature globally. By understanding and analyzing the principles of visual composition used by Ansel Adams, this research is expected to provide deeper insights into how to produce aesthetically impactful photographic works. Additionally, this research is also expected to appreciate Adams' legacy as one of the most influential figures in the history of photography, and consider its relevance in the context of contemporary photography.

1.1. The Aesthetics of Photography

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that studies concepts such as beauty, artistry, and the feelings of pleasure or displeasure that arise from sensory experiences or perception (Amoga Leto Octaviano, 1967). It also refers to the judgment and appreciation of beauty in various forms of expression, including visual arts, music, literature, and other creative forms. Aesthetics addresses questions about what makes something beautiful, how perceptions of beauty change over time or from culture to culture, and what distinguishes good art from less good art. Additionally, aesthetics can also consider concepts such as expression, feeling, truth, and values in the context of the experience of beauty (Ngurah Dharma Chintya, 2020).

Photography has a broad cultural dimension. Its existence as both technology and art not only reflects or explains civilization but also contributes to shaping it. The aesthetics of photography face unprecedented challenges. The aesthetics of photography are in a complex and problematic situation when explaining the status of photographic art. The Carrollian aesthetic experience perspective can be used as a solution to address this complexity (Setiawan & Ag, 2015).

1.2. Black and White Photography

Black and white photography is a type of photography that uses a grayscale from black, white, and various shades of gray in between to create images (Sutedja & Athoriq, 2021). This is one of the most classic and oldest forms of photography, with a long history that spans the early development of photography. Although color photography has become popular since its development, black and white photography remains a choice for many photographers because of its ability to capture atmosphere, detail, and strong contrasts in images (Fiandra & Sudaryat, 2019). This is one of the most classic and oldest forms of photography, with a long history that spans the early development of photography. Although color photography has become popular since its development, black and white photography remains a choice for many photographers because of its ability to capture atmosphere, detail, and strong contrast in images.

1.3. Landscape Photography

Landscape photography is a genre of photography that focuses on capturing expansive and beautiful natural landscapes (Setyowulan et al., 2023). Landscape photography aims to capture the beauty of nature, including mountains, lakes, rivers, forests, grasslands, and other natural elements. Its main goal is to record the beauty and uniqueness of landscapes, as well as to express the feelings and experiences associated with the photographed locations. Landscape photography often utilizes natural light and weather conditions to create compelling and captivating compositions. Landscape photographers

frequently employ various photography techniques, such as proper lighting, good composition settings, and the use of specialized photography equipment, such as wide-angle lenses, to capture the entire beauty and scale of natural landscapes.

1.5 Point of Interest

In photography, "point of interest" (POI) refers to the main subject or interesting element in a photo. The POI is a part of the composition that is the center of attention or main focus in the image, and often serves as an attractive focal point for the viewer's eyes.

POI in photography can be various things, depending on the type of photo taken and the photographer's purpose. Some examples of POI in photography include:

1. Human subjects: People in the photo can be the main POI, whether it's individual portraits, group shots, or interesting actions.
2. Natural landscapes: Landscapes, mountains, lakes, beaches, or other natural elements can be the POI in landscape photos.
3. Buildings or structures: Historical buildings, interesting modern structures, or unique architecture can be the POI in architectural photos.
4. Other interesting objects: Interesting objects like sculptures, art installations, classic vehicles, or other unique details can be the POI in photos.

It is important to pay attention to the POI in photographic composition to create compelling images with strong visual appeal. Good composition settings, lighting, and framing can help strengthen the POI and make it stand out more in the image.

1.4. Visual Composition

Photography is a visual art that utilizes composition, lighting, and other techniques to capture moments and convey profound messages. In terms of composition, photography places the main subject as a point of interest, serving as the focal point in conveying messages and impressions to the audience.

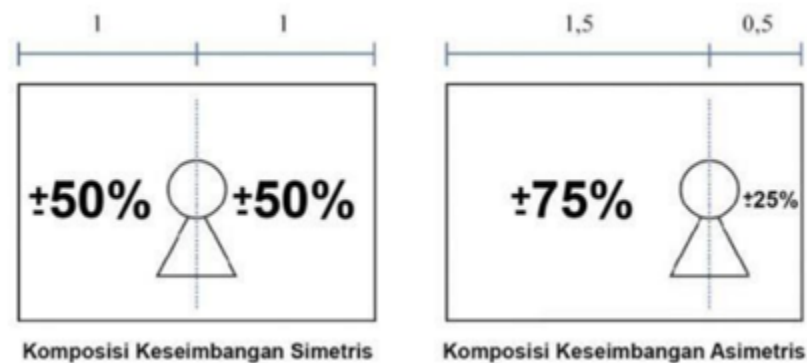


Figure 4. Symmetrical and Asymmetrical Balance (Source: Asri Cikita, 2018)

Symmetrical and asymmetrical composition (Riky Santoso, *Komposisi Simetris* www.Keeindonesia.com, n.d.), Symmetrical composition involves placing the main subject balanced in the center of the frame. Symmetrical balance occurs when elements along the central axis of the image are identical or visually similar. This creates a sense of harmony and stable balance. For example, if the photographer divides the image vertically or horizontally, both resulting parts will have visually balanced elements.

On the other hand, Asymmetrical balance involves placing the main subject in visual balance even though the point of interest is not in the center of the frame. Asymmetrical balance, on the other hand, occurs when different elements, but with balanced visual weight, are placed in various parts of the image. This creates a more dynamic and engaging visual interest because our eyes are drawn to the contrast between these elements. Asymmetrical balance is often more natural and directs our attention directly to the strongest focal point in the image. Both symmetrical and asymmetrical balance play important roles in photographic composition, and the choice between them often depends on the artistic goals and messages that the photographer wants to convey (Prasetyo, 2021). Balance is intended to

provide meaning in placing the point of interest in the visual framing of a photo, so that it becomes more balanced in visual weight and comfortable to be seen by the audience's eyes (Martinus Eko Prasetyo, 2022).

2. Method

The research method used is descriptive qualitative. According to Bogdan and Guba, qualitative research method is a scientific research procedure that produces descriptive data (data collected in the form of words, images/visuals, and not with numbers), in this case producing descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from the observed phenomena (Setyowulan et al., 2023). The author collected data by selecting several landscape photography works by Ansel Adams, then these photos were analyzed aesthetically in terms of visual composition balance using Symmetrical and Asymmetrical approaches. Through previous research conducted on several landscape photography works by other photographers, the author attempted to demonstrate how the application of symmetrical and asymmetrical balance composition impacts the visual impression in the landscape photography genre.

3. Results and Discussion



Figure 5. Maroon Bells, near Aspen, Colorado, 1951 (Source: Ansel Adams Photography)

Figure 5, Maroon Bells, near Aspen, Colorado, 1951 Showcasing the beauty of the Maroon Bells mountains. The applied composition is Symmetrical balance, as the point of interest is on the snowy mountain as the main subject and its position in the middle of the frame visually demonstrates balance in the center of the frame. This gives a clear focus impression on this landscape photo and details of the mountains are visible from a distance in the photo even though this landscape photo is in black and white.



Figure 6. Skier, the High Sierra, Yosemite National Park, 1930 (Source: Ansel Adams Photography)

Figure 6, Skier, the High Sierra, Yosemite National Park, 1930 Showing how a skier in the middle of the snow is performing stunts and captured visually in this work with an asymmetrical balance approach. However, it can also be said that this is a third part in the composition. Ansel Adams captured a moving visual while still maintaining a balanced arrangement and appearing comfortable to the audience's eyes

with a beautiful aesthetic composition division, the background is the view of Yosemite National Park mountains, and the front side has snow-covered ground textures making this visual contrastive and dimensional in black and white.



Figure 7. Horizontal Aspens, 1960 (Source: Ansel Adams Photography)

Figure 7, Horizontal Aspens, 1960 It is a visual photo with many trees in a forest, interestingly in this visual composition is the application of the rule of thirds, in an asymmetrical balance where the point of interest of one photo is mostly tall trees which appear contrasting and different from one tree in the foreground. Providing depth dimension of the visual within one frame, and contrast due to the difference compared to other tall trees as the background of the forest.

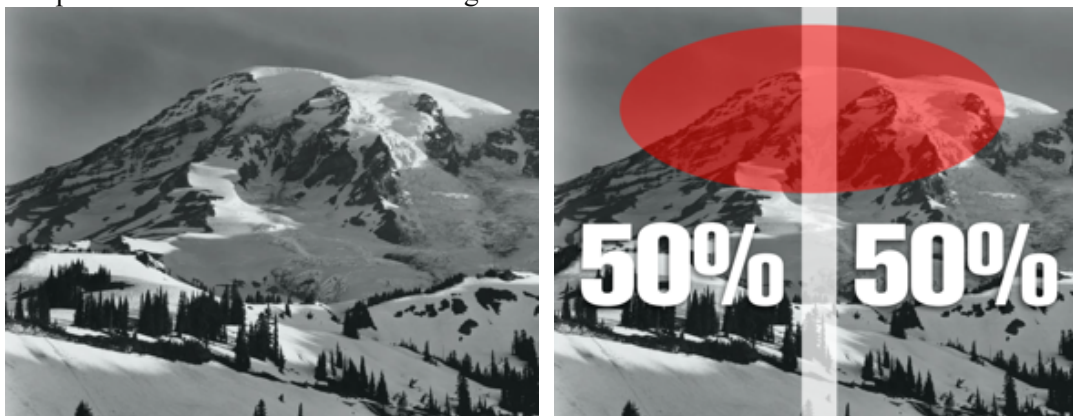


Figure 8. Horizontal Aspens, 1960 (Source: Ansel Adams Photography)

Figure 8, Horizontal Aspens, 1960 It is a visual photo with many trees in a forest, what is interesting in this visual composition is the application of the rule of thirds, in an asymmetrical balance where the point of interest of one photo is mostly tall trees which appear contrasting and different from one tree in the foreground. Providing depth dimension of the visual within one frame, and contrast due to the difference compared to other tall trees as the background of the forest.



Figure 9. a tree (Source: Ansel Adams Photography)

Figure 9, it is a large tree found in a certain area photographed by Ansel Adams, in the quote he said, "When words become unclear, I shall focus with photographs. When images become inadequate, I shall be content with silence." This composition looks comfortable to view, the point of interest in this visual frame could be said to be the large tree or it could also be the sun in the distance on the right side of the frame. The application of symmetrical balance composition makes this photo balanced and dominant in the eyes of the audience.

4. Conclusions

Based on the research conducted, it can be concluded that all of Ansel Adams' photography is in black and white style, and the landscapes captured in visual photography show real events in aesthetic beauty for the audience. The photos produced are timeless, and the beauty of the landscapes presented provides important information about the importance of preserving nature for our surrounding lives, which can be communicated through visual photography. Ansel Adams' black and white landscape photography provides a deeper emotional depth, showing photographs taken long ago, but the story of its beauty certainly does not fade after decades in the present time, as it represents historical documentation messages and memories.

In terms of aesthetic visual composition, Ansel Adams' photography mostly applies symmetrical and asymmetrical composition styles, with the placement of points of interest comfortable to the eye. Symmetrical balance composition shows rigid balance, and neat arrangement because it is in the middle of the frame. Meanwhile, asymmetrical balance composition, shows more exploration of visual elements that are not rigid and usually like moving subjects or subjects that differentiate from the background, irregularities that are composed to remain comfortable to the eye. Thus, it can be said that composition is one of the important considerations in creating nuances and placing photo subjects as points of interest to convey specific impressions and messages to the audience.

This research certainly still needs to be further developed from other technical analysis aspects, such as color, light application, selection of subjects as points of interest, and camera settings. Or further similar research can be conducted with different genres of photography works.

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