



DECONSTRUCTING HEGEMONIC GAZE IN PHOTOGRAPHY

FOTOĞRAFTA HEGEMONİK BAKIŞIN YAPISÖKÜMÜ

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Abstract

While the attribution of different meanings to the male image in visual culture involves interventions in forms of representation, it can lead to the objectification of subjects and the reinforcement of stereotypical social roles. With the notions imposed by masculine constructs, society, and today's social media, it is observed that there is a hierarchy of binary gender structuring, power imbalances are frequently encountered, and an attitude that restricts the shaping of representations. This attitude, which can be defined as the hegemonic gaze, refers to the historical and cultural tendency to shape visual narratives in a way that controls the representation of the subject in the complex relationship between photography and representation. Deconstructing the hegemonic gaze in photography emphasizes subverting traditional representations and narratives, focusing on subject empowerment, and questioning prevailing social expectations. Using photography as a strategic language, artists contribute to a more inclusive and emancipatory visual culture by subverting normative constructions and promoting a photographic gaze that reveals the complexity and diversity of masculinity. In this context, the study discusses how the constructions designed within the framework of the gaze on the photographic field are represented, their role in the construction of gender perception, and their effects in the context of the works of artists who set examples of how traditional power dynamics are defeated. As a result of the study, the relationship between photography and the context of artists and their works, which question the hegemonic gaze, and point to rethinking, will be revealed.

Keywords: Photography, Hegemonic Gaze, Masculinity, Gender, Representation.

Öz

Görsel kültürde erkek imgesine farklı anlamların yüklenmesi, temsil biçimlerine müdahaleler içerirken, geleneksel olarak öznelerin nesneleştirilmesine, basmakalıp toplumsal rollerin pekiştirilmesine sebebiyet verebilmektedir. İktidar kurgularının, toplumun ve günümüzde sosyal medyanın dayattığı mefhumlar ile ikili cinsiyet yapılanması hiyerarşisine, güç dengesizliklerine sıkça rastlandığı ve temsillerin şekillenişinin kısıtlandığı bir tutumun olduğu gözlenmektedir. Hegemonik bakış olarak tanımlanabilecek bu tutum, fotoğraf ve temsil arasındaki karmaşık ilişkide görsel anlatıların öznenin temsilini kontrol edecek biçimde şekillendirilmesine yönelik tarihsel ve kültürel eğilimi ifade etmektedir. Fotoğrafta hegemonik bakışın yapısökümü, geleneksel temsili ve anlatıları yıkmayı, özneleri güçlendirici yaklaşımlara odaklanmayı ve süregelen toplumsal beklentilerin sorgulanmasını vurgulamaktadır. Fotoğrafi stratejik bir dil olarak kullanan sanatçılar, normatif yapılanmayı altüst ederek, erkekliğin karmaşıklığını ve çeşitliliğini gözler önüne seren bir fotografik bakışı teşvik ederek daha kapsayıcı ve özgürleştirici bir görsel kültüre katkıda bulunmaktadırlar. Bu bağlamda çalışma, fotografik düzlemdeki bakış çerçevesinde tasarlanan kurgulamaların nasıl temsil edildiğine, cinsiyet algısı inşasındaki rolüne, geleneksel güç dinamiklerinin nasıl bozguna uğratıldığına dair örnekler oluşturan sanatçıların eserleri bağlamındaki etkilerini tartışmaya açmaktadır. Çalışmanın sonucunda hegemonik bakışı sorgulayan ve yeniden düşünmeyi işaret eden sanatçılar ve eserlerinin bağlamının fotoğraf ile ilişkisi ortaya konulmuş olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fotoğraf, Hegemonik Bakış, Erkeklik, Cinsiyet, Temsil.



INTRODUCTION

What is conceived as hegemonic has varied considerably from culture to culture throughout history. The traditional social dominance of men has defined a gender hierarchy that continues to underpin societies. For much of history, and particularly in the West, the characteristics and power dynamics of the dominant masculine figure, defined by physical size and strength, aggression, and power, began to be questioned and transformed in the 1960s, although they are still widely observed today. The sexual revolution, the struggle for civil rights, the relationship between the individual and power, the growth of the gay rights movement, and the counterculture of the period revealed that the necessity of gender definitions had to be blurred (Barbican, 2023). In the postmodern and contemporary periods, artists have consistently sought to destabilize the narrow definitions of gender that define social facilities to encourage new ways of thinking about identity, gender, and sexuality. Exploring stereotypical representations of the masculine subject, they have produced powerful visualizations that subvert the archetype by reconstructing the traditional representation of masculinity, defined as dominant heterosexual masculinity.

R. W. Connell borrowed the concept of hegemony from a phenomenon such as Gramsci's analysis of class relations in Italy, where Connell states that hegemony is not a superiority of one group of men over another group in terms of masculinity, but a superiority rooted in religious doctrine or practice, mass media content, wage structures, house design, welfare, taxation policies, etc. (Connell, 2016, p. 268). Hegemony does not imply superiority based on power, cultural domination, and the elimination of all other options. Another or "other" groups are relegated to a subordinate position through the influence of certain power facilities.

In sociological studies, it directly manifests itself in patriarchal societies where men's behavior is culturally idealized, various duties are imposed through gender roles, and certain behaviors and characteristics associated with masculinity are legitimized, and it is also observed in art history in a normative manner. This structure, which categorizes individuals through their bodies based on biological characteristics, constructs gender as binary and creates its construction in many other social and cultural fields. This mechanism, which tends to control individuals through their bodies, assigns a superior role to masculinity while marginalizing all other forms. The declaration of femininity as secondary similarly creates a hierarchy among men by asserting both cultural and anatomical structure.

According to Connell, talking about the contradiction between the social process and the body does not sufficiently move away from the doctrines of biological difference and biological determination. The body is controlled and transformed in social practice without ceasing to be a body. The physical meaning of masculinity develops through the personal history of social practice, and through the life course in society. In Western countries, for example, images of ideal masculinity are most systematically constructed and encouraged through competitive sports. The combination of strength and skill involved in playing games such as soccer, cricket, and baseball well is a means of evaluating one's degree of masculinity. Therefore, the interest in strength and skill becomes a proposition rooted in the body, rooted in social practices such as organized sports through years of participation (Connell, 2016, p. 132-135). The media is turned into a mechanism through which individuals are characterized as "weak, powerless, other" with its attitude of concretely signifying the body through images. Artists with works that conform to the designed conditions are shown as deserving of a superiority that affects cultural status. Connell's perspective draws attention to a critical analysis of how dominant masculinity is constructed, maintained, and resisted in society. While emphasizing the intersectionality of masculinity by acknowledging that experiences vary according to factors such as race, class, and sexuality, it also demonstrates the need for a critical examination.

Pierre Bourdieu attributes the power of the masculine order to the fact that the male-centered view imposes itself on a situation that makes it appear neutral, without attempting to prove its rightness. He emphasizes that the gendered division of labor operates like a machine to affirm masculine domination through the social order (Bourdieu, 2015, p. 22). This symbolic structure that is constructed brings along debates on gender and the notion of the gendered body. The organization of gender on a very large scale must, in important respects, be simplified from human relations. The forms of femininity and



masculinity established at this level are stylized and problematized in many ways. Thus, the interrelationship of forms of femininity and masculinity is based on a single structural reality, the global domination of men over women. This hegemonic structure is always constructed in relation to women, but also in relation to various forms of masculinity that are relegated to subordinate positions (Connell, 2016, p. 268). The works of male artists who problematize subordinated forms of masculinity, in which they try to defeat this hegemonic structure they experience, also emerge as a critique of the hegemonic gaze in the world of images.

THE CONCEPT OF HEGEMONY AND ITS PRESENCE IN PHOTOGRAPHY

When the history of photography is evaluated through male images, it is possible to talk about a process in which images of elements associated with masculinity come to the fore. In this process, especially in the use of photography in mass media and media, male images play an important role in this relationship in terms of marketing a lifestyle. In order to be “stronger, more successful”, “tougher, more fearless” images are created, and “masculinity standards” are tried to be established. The portrayal of dominant male behavior as ideal, gay men, men of a certain racial or ethnic origin, or other men who do not conform to the established standards are defined as the other. Just like the representation of the female image in the media for male viewers, the representation of men is maintained through photographic representations, especially in areas such as fashion, advertising, and medicine, with the expectation of conforming to certain standards due to idealized subjects and images such as the body, plastic surgery, and the clothing industry. Bourdieu argues that gendered alienation is at the root of specific privilege. Exemplified by social games in the establishment of masculinity, where the bet to be won is a form of domination, he states that men carry the double-edged privilege of indulging in games of domination because they are raised to recognize these games and especially because they are designated as dominating beings very early on by the founding ceremonies (Bourdieu, 2015, p. 98).

While the concept of representation in visual culture refers to the presentation of various aspects of icons, identities, and images, it can also cause some negative perspectives when it turns into a hegemonic structure. In this context, visual culture can reproduce or challenge existing social norms. Here, a critical approach to the concept of representation is important for understanding established gender norms and power structures and can be a potential means of challenge. To point to representation is to refuse to believe that our relation to the world is one of immediacy and transparency, and therefore to question this mediation, which sometimes tries to convince us that it does not exist (Soulages, 2022, p. 278). This questioning leaves the door open for a re-examination of the concept of truth or other imposed titles. Presenting events in a more objective way helps the viewer to question the accuracy of familiar systems and hierarchies. In this regard, photography provides an important ground for the uncanny dissection and examination of a phenomenon naturalized by society. Photography is not a sign, but first and foremost an image, not an object of reproductive imagination but the subject of a creative imagination, not a technical tool but the most important opportunity of art, a remnant that can and should always question the beautiful and the sublime. It invites the viewer to interpret, question, criticize, create, and think (Soulages, 2022, p. 396).

Gender intersects with other social identities during daily life practices, and will be experienced differently depending on age, social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. Therefore, whether representation reflects the “real individual” can be related to the questions of whose reality, which reality, and according to whom. Stuart Hall defines what he calls “constructivist” representation as a view that touches on the most personal issues, that the terms sex and gender, male and female, whether words or images are cultural signifiers that construct rather than reflect gender definitions, meanings, and identities (Hall, 2017, p. 453). These typological constructions, which are frequently encountered in Western societies, play an important role in turning masculinity into a hierarchical phenomenon. Nevertheless, it should be noted that all these designed structures lead to the formation of oppressive practices. This situation is purely political. Including alternative perspectives in the system underlines the emergence of a method that subverts the rules of the normative and discusses the power relations that feed the hierarchy of masculinity in the coding, processing, and construction of the masculine in the practice of photography.



Many works in art history and visual culture challenge stereotypical depictions of masculinity, pointing to alternatives and more diverse forms. Artists often examine the concept of masculinity and explore ways to redefine it while questioning it through visual means. The relationship between photography and masculinity in terms of representation has a multifaceted structure, albeit one of dual complexity. Within this multifaceted structure, there are arguments about how photography is used in the construction and reinforcement of historical and contemporary notions of masculinity or in challenging this establishment. The main topics to be examined here are the socio-cultural construction of masculinity in media and visual culture, the representation of masculinity in photographic language, the effects of digital culture and contemporary art on representations of masculinity, and the role of photography in these intersections.

Hegemony is won in a negotiation between rival social, political, and ideological forces, back and forth through the discussion, exchange, or renewal of power. The concepts of hegemony and negotiation allow us to rethink reality and representation, avoiding the fixed model of reality or the fixed set of codes to represent it. The genderization of cultural forms makes it clear that prioritizing certain cultural forms or characteristics should be seen as part of the patriarchal culture's struggle to define "reality" (Hall, 2017, p. 455-456). The notion of the hegemonic gaze in photography is an expression of the historical tendency for images to be constructed through and in a way that reinforces traditional gender roles, to be presented from a dominant male perspective in a way that objectifies and marginalizes women and other forms of masculinity. This approach, which mostly refers to male-oriented perspectives, is based on various cultural structures that are hierarchical and shaped around certain norms.

While the history of photography constitutes the representation of a hierarchical structure of masculinity, on the other hand, the works of artists who prioritize the individual also reveal a process that challenges traditional depictions of men. This attitude, which has gained momentum especially in the postmodern approach and in the process leading up to the present day, enables the creation of works that present alternative masculinities, reveal the diversity of male experiences, and criticize a fixed singular male identity. Photography has been an important medium for exploring and deconstructing traditional notions of masculinity. While the dominant male gaze is often questioned through feminist critique, it is important to note that not all male artists perpetuate the masculine gaze and many actively produce work to challenge and transform notions of representation.

Photography is a powerful tool for shaping and communicating social values, including those related to gender, identity, and race. As with other art disciplines and media, it can support or subvert the normative structure. This makes photography a critical field of study in the interaction between representation, power, and the individual. In this context, photography has come to understand itself not only as a "representation" of a subject or concept but also to reflect on its own media specificity and conditions based on form (Moser & Schröder, 2012, p. 6).

Throughout history, especially in Western cultures, masculinity has generally been associated with power, authority, and sovereignty. In the media, advertising sector, and the arts, men are portrayed as strong, independent, and influential in parallel with this associated attitude. In the images in these sectors, those who do not have the mentioned features are excluded. In the history of photography, this idealized situation often visually represents the standards of dominant fiction. This attitude has the effect of limiting the enrichment of visual culture and pointing to a discriminatory side in terms of gender, sexual identity, and ethnicity. In the historical process, especially with postmodernism, awareness of these issues has increased, and many artists and activists have started to question and change the traditional masculine gaze and masculine representations.

The goals of the corporeal meaning of masculinity are primarily concerned with the superiority of men over women and the sense of empowerment associated with hegemonic masculinity, which is necessary to dominate women, over other groups of men (Connell, 2016, p. 135). Connell's perspective provides a framework for critically analyzing the representation of dominant masculinity in photographic art. It encourages artists to challenge norms, subvert stereotypes, and contribute to a more complex and inclusive understanding of gender identities through visual storytelling. Throughout the history of



photography, various artists have been interested in Connell's ideas on dominant masculinity and have produced work that explores these concepts in parallel. Some artists have responded to this ongoing hegemonic gaze by subverting and deconstructing traditional representations of masculinity.

The production of work that turns many paradigms upside down brings with it the democratization of images, allowing for broader forms of presentation. Black bodies, trans men, or other marginalized masculinities reveal images that are significantly different from mainstream representations of masculinity. Photography has an important place in this intersectionality. *"With photography, not only were the norms and rules of previously established iconographies of the human body questioned and expanded but also entirely new forms of representation were created through the photographic medium, in part due to the wide range of applications of photography in the arts and sciences."* (Moser & Schröder, 2012, p. 6).

In their documentary photography, many artists from different cultures have created works that challenge stereotypes by presenting images of the impact of economic and social factors on men's lives, questioning simplistic narratives of dominant masculinity and offering alternative visions of masculinity. Numerous contemporary photographers have created work to critique, deconstruct, and challenge the normative construct of hegemonic masculinity and related issues. The works of Peter Hujar, Wolfgang Tillmans, Ren Hang, Sunil Gupta, and Tommy Kha constitute the main framework of this study in the context of the relationship between the hegemonic gaze, masculinity, the concept of representation, and photography. This hegemonic gaze established through the male body is analyzed in the context of male photographers who criticize this structure to which they are exposed. The artists, who explain with performative visualizations the assignment of gender roles to bodies based on biological structure, being defined as gendered, what is defined as "normal" or what is defined as "real", seek methods to break down the hierarchy between the masculine gaze and masculinities with their photographs.

Peter Hujar: Reconfiguring the Idealized

Peter Hujar, an American artist known for his urban-centered art and queer portraits, usually uses male subjects in his images, his approach goes far beyond the objectifying tendencies associated with the masculine gaze. His photographs often show dynamism through authenticity and the stories of his subjects. By challenging hegemonic masculinity, and traditional power dynamics and depicting the diversity of masculinity, he invites the viewer to engage more emotionally with his subjects.



Figure 1. Larry Ree Backstage (Hujar, 1974).

In his work, he often explores notions of identity, body, and marginalization, revealing the experiences of marginalized individuals or those who are ignored in society. By offering a more detailed perspective on masculinity, desire, and queer, he offers an activity against the masculine attitude. It makes a significant contribution to the discourse on gender, sexuality, and representation in photography.

Hujar never victimized his subjects by nurturing the urge to capture their victimization. By revealing his world, by transferring his own desire to his subjects, he has also granted them their autonomy (Rexer, 2006). While revealing a lost world in visual culture, he does not present the portraits of his subjects as a novelty, he documents their true identities.



Figure 2. David Brintzenhofe, *Applying Makeup (II)* (Hujar, 1982).



Figure 3. David Wojnarowicz, *Reclining (II)* (Hujar, 1981).

By challenging prejudice and legal restrictions against homosexuality and other-identified individuals in Europe, the U.S., and beyond, his work highlights how artists from the 1960s onwards have constructed a politically charged visual aesthetic (Bunyan, 2019). By reconfiguring the idealized representation of traditional masculinity, he subverts the archetype.

Tommy Kha: Masking the Experience

Tommy Kha illuminates how the intersections of race, gender, and identity operate culturally. The artist presents a narrative that exposes the limitations of his agency and the hegemonic systems that create this limitation while utilizing what is associated with his face within space and context. His photographs address issues of gender, identity, masculinity, objectivity, and visibility. His images offer a critique of representation and a formalism that can also be read as a stance against oppressive systems. Drawing from his experiences as a queer Asian-American, his works reveal that the hegemonic and normative structure cannot include him, and therefore many individuals, as they are. The artist combines self-portraits and portraits with the traces of his stories and experiences in the new culture he settled in while exploring his personal geography. While resorting to self-portraiture as a means of self-discovery, there is also a cultural challenge to the Asian phenomenon in American culture.

In the series “I’m Only Here To Leave”, Kha and his relatives place cardboard cut-out images of the artist on their faces in real spaces. This relationship is presented to the viewer as an exploration of being an Asian biological male, of fitting in, of being an outsider, and of the queer. “*As a queer Asian-*

American who grew up in Memphis, I haven't seen myself represented in the media or the canon of Western Art. I think literally placing myself in representations is part of the way I'm trying to figure that out." (Sales, 2022). Kha says, exploring the possibility of placing himself in corners of the Western art world that have historically been ignored by whiteness and heterosexuality. At the same time, with his idealized masculinity and the masks he places over Asian bodies, he connects to this situation, especially by Western culture.



Figure 4. I'm Only Here To Leave, Take II (Kha, 2016).



Figure 5. I'm Only Here To Leave, Take XIII (Kha, 2017).

Kha dramatizes the sense of belonging by producing an alternative self-representation by highlighting the distinction between body and photographed body, representation and image, performance, and humor (Stone, 2017). Kha's photographs can be considered as "counter-images". Counter-images are ways of thinking that fall outside certain hegemonic discourses and can serve to undermine their normative systems. It is a way of making sense of oppressive power structures by decentering them and naming often invisible and unjust systems, and ultimately creating ways to change or resist them (Furuya, 2018). In a country where authenticity is no longer possible, perhaps even undesirable, Kha is trying to forge a diasporic identity, though not far from cultural identity. Isn't the expectation of authenticity an American invention? Kha's depictions of the Asian immigrant presence emphasize the resilience of a community that has found a way to survive despite repeated displacement (Stone, 2017).



Figure 6. I'm Only Here To Leave, Take II (Kha, 2017).

In the photograph titled “Take II” from the same series, he creates a contradiction by placing an Asian face on a white body and conveys to the viewer that it is necessary to question where this disconnect begins. Aiming to create surreal images by choosing models from different races and body types, Kha aims to question hegemonic culture and the concepts of inclusivity. *“By placing my face on other bodies, I wanted to see if it was possible to appear more queer, more Asian, more male, or more desirable. It resonates that my body doesn't belong here.”* (Furuya, 2018).

Ren Hang: Deconstructing Traditional Visual Culture

Chinese photographer Ren Hang, one of the most important artists in the history of photography with his controversial images, has explored issues of nudity, sexuality, genderlessness, and the body. Although his work emphasizes race and sexuality, it also contains many prominent features related to gender. Through the concept of gender, the images of subjects that incorporate the themes of the human body and nudity challenge social taboos. By using nudity, Hang deconstructs traditional visual culture and social norms and reveals the body as a space of freedom.

When examined in the context of masculinity in representation, his work reveals his critique of dominant forms of masculinity that are culturally idealized and associated with power, control, and gender roles, while blurring the cultural trauma on Far Eastern subjects who are often included in gender categories by the West. Without assigning any gender role to the body, it can be read as a cultural critique in the context of Chinese society, where discussions about sexuality and gender are censored. These uninhibited images advocate for greater freedom of expression and acceptance of different gender identities and forms of masculinity.



Figure 7. Untitled (Hang, 2014).

Politicizing Ren's work through a Western lens risks falling into the same combination of Eurocentrism and outdated Cold War politics that envisions the Chinese state as an all-consuming, inescapable authoritarian regime that dominates and dictates the entire lives of everyone who lives in it. In this vision, Chinese culture, identity, and people are entirely shaped by hegemonic culture, such that Ren Hang's work can only be seen as something in opposition to it (Gan, 2020). The Western perspective is problematic because it decontextualizes Hang's work. It makes the work of a Chinese artist who looks to the West for freedom and a representative of a type of experience created from a Western perspective. Through the way he manipulates his models and his attention to color and composition, his work implies an internal dialogue around control, desire, and romantic impulse. Hang's photographs refer to purposeful events, activities, and actions, oscillating between being controlled and aesthetically oriented and control and its aestheticization (Gardner, 2019).



Figure 8. Untitled (Hang, 2014).

Hang's photographs capture the free spirit of his generation just before the storm of gentrification hit. This is an organic world that Hang uses her intrusive flash to illuminate. None of these queer subjects appear repressed, perhaps contrary to the expectations of many unfamiliar with this context. They do not hide in the dark, choosing to frolic in poorly lit "dirty back alleys", comfortably and playfully flirting with the "photographic gaze" (Zairong, 2017). Hang's work creates a bold space of active exploration of gender, masculinity, and the body. By using concepts such as vulnerability, sensuality, and contact, which are not included in traditional images of men, Hang points to the need to revise perceptions of masculinity and to adopt a more inclusive and diverse understanding of race and identity. By offering alternatives to the hegemonic gaze and representation, he encourages the viewer to rethink preconceptions about gender and identity. This approach to gender challenges traditional visual culture and demands a questioning of the limits of representation.



Figure 9. Untitled (Hang, 2014).

The Far East is constantly questioned in Western culture. Especially in visual culture and indirectly in the blind spots of society and history, the self-expression of individuals or artists should be explored. For over a century, Asian and Asian American photographers have explored these questions by creating ways of seeing that paradoxically avoid the trap of visibility, the trap of being defined by foreign policies and historical flashpoints. By valorizing the least noticeable recesses of everyday life, these photographs create radical shifts in vision. They suggest that the only way of seeing that can liberate us is to see ourselves free of the burden of readability or relatability (Wang, 2023).

Wolfgang Tillmans: Examining the Relationships

Visualizing themes of identity, sexuality, and subjective experience, German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans focuses on opening the masculine gaze to criticism. Tillmans' work provides an important ground for examining the relationship between hegemonic masculinity, photography, and representation. Masculinity, the male body, gender, and identity constitute the main themes of his approach, even though he works across multifaceted concepts. Especially in his portraits of men, he challenges traditional notions of masculinity by emphasizing nudity and body analysis and invites the viewer to consider alternative representations of male identity. Through composition and lighting techniques, she interacts with traditional gaze and imagery to offer alternative ways of seeing.



Figure 10. Frank, in the Shower (Tillmans, 2015).

Readings of gender and representation in his work show that he focuses on normative, dominant forms of masculinity that are culturally idealized and often associated with control mechanisms and gender roles. In his images, where aesthetics come to the fore, it is observed that he resorts to the phenomenon of privacy in a way that breaks the systematic structure in visual culture. In his photographs, in which he presents nuanced research on gender and its representations, he questions the dominant visual culture

with unusual compositions, scales, and installations. This richness of the photographic medium, which can also disrupt the hierarchy within itself, is revealed through the artists' styles. This subversion of photographic conventions can be interpreted as a rich critique of hegemonic structures related to gender, identity, and masculinity.



Figure 11. Damon, Shower, Head Up (Tillmans, 1995).

Tillmans' work can be read as propaganda for sexual freedom, stemming from an awareness that many problems in the world stem from people being conservative about their sexuality (Lubow, 2022). With a semiotic approach, the critique of representation shows the necessity of an oppositional reading strategy. All perspectives on identity and visibility politics reveal how societies and power facilities feed normativity and to what extent gender, body, and other phenomena are intervened. Stuart Hall argues that no meaningful element should be considered apart from its context and interaction with texts, images, and signs (Hall, 2017). Therefore, meaning is constructed together with all these elements. It can be said that the signs in images have a continuous connection, and that different information and concepts will emerge when they communicate with different contexts, and that the concept of representation will shift to a debatable ground.



Figure 12. Dan (Tillmans, 2008).

Tillmans offers an alternative visibility that supports the notion of sociality, not only by destroying the normative symbolic order through radical ambiguity, didacticism, and discourse but also by transcending the codes of gender and desire, of the body, in a deliberative manner, focusing on the ability to transform without creating a similar index.

Sunil Gupta: A Visionary Approach

Sunil Gupta is an influential photographic artist whose work addresses issues of identity, race, sexuality, gender, and HIV. His photographs often feature self-portraits of homosexuals and marginalized communities. His work can be read as opposing the masculine gaze, challenging traditional norms, and offering alternative perspectives on identity and gender.

His striking images force viewers to confront the hypocritical juxtaposition of accepted normative structures within alternative social realities. His work is a testament to the transparent interplay of the private and the public (Singh, 2008). Gupta often combines the personal and the political in his images, exploring social issues based on his own experiences. By bringing a visionary approach to visual culture and the range of the history of photography that produces the representation of the masculine gaze, he produces pioneering works with socio-political influences. With the alternative forms of masculinity that he blends with multiple cultures, he creates a point of departure for the unresolved issue of representation.



Figure 13. The New Pre-Raphaelites, #11 (Gupta, 2008).

“The New Pre-Raphaelites” series is visualized through Gupta’s use of mythological imagery, symbolism, and the historical. He used his friends and fellow activists as models as an act of resistance, courage, and commitment (Hales, 2023). Applying the formal qualities of the original paintings in his photographs, Gupta created remarkably contemporary images with reference to the 1848 community¹ in composition and use of color. His contemporary portraits, which he associates with a community that stands against the promotion of the ideal, also make a rebellious point about the oppressive structure of gender and sexuality. Reinforced by classical iconography, these portrait photographs claim to be visible throughout history and to exist as a political act.

¹ Pre-Raphaelite: The Pre-Raphaelites were a secret society of young artists (and a writer) founded in London in 1848. They opposed the Royal Academy’s promotion of the ideal as exemplified in Raphael’s work. The name Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood referred to the group’s opposition to the Royal Academy’s support of the Renaissance master Raphael. They were also in revolt against the trivialization of genre painting, which was extremely popular at the time. They believed that artists should ‘go to nature’, an art of serious subjects rendered with maximum realism. Their main themes were initially religious, but they also used themes from literature and poetry, especially love and death. They also addressed modern social issues. (<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/pre-raphaelite>).



Figure 14. The New Pre-Raphaelites, #07 (Gupta, 2008).



Figure 15. The New Pre-Raphaelites, #13(Gupta, 2008).

Gupta contributes to a broader discussion on representation by moving away from the objectifying and often heteronormatively structured perspectives and images associated with the masculine gaze. His photographs contribute to a broader movement that aims to break down stereotypes, emphasize the transitivity of identities, diversify representations of gender and sexuality in contemporary art, challenge traditional norms, and promote a more inclusive visual culture. His style, which retains the power to shock even from a contemporary perspective, provides visibility to historically maligned communities and reflects struggles around rights, identity, gender equality, migration, and racism.

The artists' deconstruction of masculinity and masculinity through their photographs, their examination of forms of struggle, and their emphasis on forms of masculinity, and alternative masculinities play an important role in this process in terms of the questionability of concepts. With their works, the artists aim to subvert or overturn traditional concepts, challenge stereotypical systems, and contribute to a more inclusive and intersectional social understanding in which the notion of gender is discussed, and intersectionality is emphasized.

CONCLUSION

While the examples of the works include alternative ways of seeing created by the artists against the limits of the dominant culture and the dominant gaze in visual culture, they primarily draw attention to the Western art canon. They put forward important arguments to open up the elements imposed on representation and the notion of reality for discussion. Structures that make hybridity visible, such as costumes, masks, and fragmented body structures, involve performativity and question the stereotypical image world.

Historically, the non-Western male body has been represented or presented as “powerless” through a complex process of subjectification through the Western gaze. Considered in this context, Ren Hang and Tommy Kha’s photographs can be read as a deconstruction of the gaze toward the Far East. Peter Hujar and Wolfgang Tillmans reveal the normative structuring of art history and representation with their works in a perspective that criticizes their own Western cultures. They do not present a mode of

production that is stuck in a tradition based on aesthetics, appreciation, and beauty, they do not create a different version of the same as queer art, but by subverting this facility, they draw attention to a visuality that belongs to different, alternative, and political visions, not a new “normal”.

The deconstruction of the gaze reveals the enriching dynamic structure of the history of photography and reveals the impact of photography and art on society and culture. The artists’ work and styles, in opposition to the hegemonic gaze and the dominant male establishment in the history of photography, play a crucial role in challenging social norms, promoting inclusivity, and contributing to a more liberated understanding. Their work invites the viewer to investigate the mutable nature of representation, identity, and gender roles. These artists contribute to a richer and more inclusive history of photography and visual culture by offering alternative narratives to the dominance of the male gaze, drawing attention to gender and sexuality, race, and ethnicity, and exploring different experiences in Western and Eastern cultures, among others.

By providing a comprehensive analysis of the hegemonic gaze and its deconstruction, this study provides a valuable resource for literature reviews in the fields of visual culture, gender studies and photography. Integrating the theoretical perspectives of scholars like R.W. Connell, Pierre Bourdieu, and Stuart Hall with in-depth case studies of contemporary photographers, it lays a critical foundation for future research. It enriches and deepens understanding of how power, identity, and visual storytelling intersect, by disrupting dominant narratives and showcasing alternative forms of masculinity. The study’s interdisciplinary approach, intersecting sociology, art history and media studies, makes it an important reference for scholars and contemporary artists exploring the dynamics of masculinity, representation, and power in visual media. The examination of various artistic strategies that challenge normative structures offers important paradigms for expanding existing frameworks on gendered visuality and photographic discourse. Addressing concepts such as identity, race, queer, power, patriarchy, dominant masculinity, and family, the artists present masculinity in its myriad forms, full of contradictions and complexities. Embracing the idea of “multiple masculinities” and rejecting the notion of a singular “ideal male”, these works advocate not only the context of masculinity but also an understanding and visual memory that is liberated from social expectations and gender norms.

This study, which discusses how the constructions designed within the framework of the gaze on the photographic plane are represented, their role in the construction of gender perception, and their effects in the context of the works of artists who create examples of how the dynamics of traditional power are defeated, suggests that new questions should be asked about how digital media and artificial intelligence transform the hegemonic gaze. Future research should focus on how AI-generated image production and algorithmic representation affect the perception of gender and how the hegemonic gaze is reproduced or transformed in the digital environment.

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