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Photography and urban space: Representations of class and women in Erik Prasetya's work

Daru Tunggul Aji^{1*}, Ahmad Sofiyuddin bin Mohd Shuib²,
Amar Leina Chindany³, & Novan Jemmi Andrea⁴

¹ Visual Communication Design Study Program, Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, Bantul, Indonesia. Email: darutunggulaji@isi.ac.id

² Department of Graphic Design and Media Digital, Faculty of Art and Design Universiti Teknologi Mara, Perak Branch, Malaysia Email: ahmad396@uitm.edu.my

³ Visual Communication Design Study Program, Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, Bantul, Indonesia Email: amarleinachindany@isi.ac.id

⁴ Department of Photography, Faculty of Recording Media Arts, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, Bantul, Indonesia Email: novan.jemmi@isi.ac.id

* Corresponding author

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Abstract: Through photography, the city is not merely a spatial space, but also positioned as a medium. The subjects of the photographs are presented in a political context to depict the reality between humans and the city. This article investigates the relationship between photography and urban space through Erik Prasetya's photographic works, which are divided into two forms. First, the visual representation of workers on the street. Second, the representation of women in relation to the image of modernity. Using Gillian Rose's visual methodology, visual data is analyzed to show the representation of the working class on the one hand, and women on the other. The results of the study indicate a gap between the image of modernity and the working class. The working class in Jakarta struggles to experience modernity fully. Meanwhile, in the second classification, the visual analysis reveals that metropolitan women are portrayed as having freedom in private spaces (malls with all their modernity), even though what is actually represented is the bondage to the pressures of modernity itself.

Abstrak: Melalui fotografi, kota tidak sekadar menjadi ruang spasial, tetapi juga diposisikan sebagai medium. Subjek foto ditampilkan secara politis untuk menggambarkan realitas antara manusia dan kota. Artikel ini menginvestigasi relasi antara fotografi dan ruang kota melalui karya foto Erik Prasetya yang dibagi dalam dua bentuk. Pertama, representasi visual pekerja di ruas Jalan. Kedua, representasi perempuan dalam hubungannya dengan citra modernitas. Melalui metodologi visual Gillian Rose, data visual dianalisis untuk menunjukkan representasi kelas pekerja pada satu sisi, dan perempuan di sisi lain. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya kesenjangan antara citra modernitas dan kelas pekerja. Kelas pekerja di Jakarta hampir tidak bisa menikmati modernitas. Sementara itu, pada klasifikasi kedua, analisis visual menunjukkan bagaimana perempuan metropolitan adalah mereka yang memiliki kebebasan di ruang privat (mal dengan segala modernitas), meski sebenarnya yang terepresentasikan justru keterikatan dalam tekanan modernitas itu sendiri.

INTRODUCTION

Through photography, the city can be positioned as a spatial space and a medium. It is a space and medium where symbolic social interactions, class contestations, and power relations are often displayed (Arnold, 2021; Rizov, 2024). Referring to Marshall McLuhan's terminology, "the medium is the message", the media is not merely a medium for conveying messages, but is the message itself (Luhan, 1964). As a medium (photography), visual communication is not simply a value-free visual product. Behind the visual material presented are issues of social class, power relations, identity, gender, ideology, and how representation operates within it (see Orisich, 2018; Türkay, 2025). As Hall (1997) stated, "Representation is not a reflection of reality, but a construction of reality". In practice, the mediatization of urban space becomes a complex material related to the existence of society and photography. There is a symbolic interaction between the city and the individuals it mediates. Beyond technical matters, photography and urban space have a strong relationship regarding social construction.

As part of visual culture, photography has experienced rapid development. Not only in terms of its tools and categorization, but the role of visuals in social life has been able to dominate and change perspectives, providing constructive power in the contestation of social class. In media studies, photography and visual culture are inseparable. Visual culture focuses on the efforts of images to visualize social differences. Rose (2001) explains that visualization cannot be considered a reflection of social reality. Visuals are always intertwined with conventions and production contexts that determine how something is displayed and

interpreted (Bonetto & Lo Monaco, 2018). Even when linked to aspects of social class, representation as a form of reality construction often presents a paradox. In this perspective, photographic visualisation does not provide a direct depiction of social class, but operates through absence and aestheticisation.

Cities and modernity offer people numerous benefits. Urban space offers an idealized life, from social class to lifestyle. Modernists have shown an optimistic belief in the power of science, rationality, and industry to change the world for the better. By Goffman's concept, Giddens (Barker, 2009) tries to illustrate the fundamental divergence in socio-spatial activities. If the front room concerns how a person prepares himself to be "on stage" and socially acceptable, then the back room becomes a space where a person can be more relaxed, and as it is with more relaxed rules, without any social "demands".

Goffman (1956) presents a dramaturgical perspective in "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life." Goffman uses the metaphor of theatrical production to offer a way of understanding humans' interactions and behaviours. He argues that social life is a "performance" performed by a "team" of participants in three places: "front stage," "back stage," and "off stage" (Cole, 2024). In street photography, urban space is similar to a stage where the "front stage" is designed and set not only by the inhabitants who are then used as photo subjects, but the photographer also contributes to setting up the "front stage". Through their perspective and compositions, the photographers build the constructive power of an atmosphere. This is where the front stage in Goffman's concept is built. A city resembles a stage. Behind the grand stage, there is always another stage to be discussed. There is always a relationship in these two (spaces),

as Massey (Barker, 2009) argues that space is a social construct and impacts on questions of power and symbolism, namely the power of spatial geometry. Moreover, it is modernism that makes urban space so complex and sensitive, in the sense that social relations are constructed between those who have power over the "ownership" of space, the photographer, and those who are "captured".

About urban space, photography has the power to become an instrument of urban experience, in the sense that, with the photographer's awareness, photography is empowered to organize and present what is to be seen and remembered, while placing experience and memory as part of urban reality (Arnold, 2021). Through photography, the city is not merely documented but presented as a space of interest and attraction. Sontag (1977) noted that photography has transformed how we perceive and articulate the world. Furthermore, Sontag states, "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge and, therefore, like power." The concept articulated by Sontag refers to the act of photography, which can be applied to the context of photography and urban space studies. In practice, photography does not merely record space but also shapes and claims it as an object of knowledge. Sontag adds that photography has altered how we perceive and articulate the world. The relationship between photography and urban space is not neutral or value-free. As Sontag (1977) states, photography has transformed how we see and articulate the world.

In one part of his book, Svarajati (2013) tells how the presence of photographs in modern human history is not just a visual matter but creates a new

way of looking at reality and human existence. Thus, between the city and photography exists a relationship that implies a relationship found in a performance, which is the relationship between the stage and its documentation. The photographer captures the stage's interesting aspects in the form of photographs (Svarajati, 2013). In Indonesia, a prominent street photographer is Erik Prasetya. Erik Prasetya is one of the most influential photographers in Asia, according to the 2012 "20 Most Influential Asian Photographers" survey by Invisible Photographers Asia. He had worked in various genres of photography before deciding to specialize in shooting the streets. He has been a street photographer for at least 25 years. Susan P. Mains argues that photography conveys a place through its spatial and temporal dimensions, going beyond mere reflection of the landscape to catalyze the photographer's engagement with mobility (Mains, 2022). In fact, street photography can also be considered close to the flaneur, a term for observing city life by involving oneself with that life (Starrett, 2020).

Erik Prasetya has produced many monumental photographs. His photographs of Jakarta tell more about urban society and its activities. It focuses on the people as the community's central element, rather than the city's physical facilities, such as buildings. Buildings are part of the community itself, not the central part of the community (Kusrini, 2016). For Prasetya, city facilities were not always formally and physically documented. Streets are not limited to formal and physical objects. Street characters occur in other public spaces: city parks, stations, malls, river basins, and others (Prasetya, 2014b).

Zhuang Wubin, a curator at Asian Art, commented in October 2009 on Erik

Prasetya's works: His photographs express the need to move away from the fetishes that drive most photographers. Erik Prasetya has created an unparalleled collection of documentary journals about Jakarta, the Southeast Asian city where he resides. Perhaps Erik Prasetya's most significant contribution to contemporary Southeast Asian photography is his concept of banal aesthetics (Prasetya, 2014a).

Photography is political. It can reduce the innocence of both the photographer and the photographed. Mechanically, photography has created a relationship between the photographer and the object of the photograph. There is a consciousness of seeing and being seen, which is why visual politics is at play. It cannot be judged as an exaggeration that when Erik Prasetya accompanied Sebastio Salgado to photograph in Indonesia, in the context of the Exodus project (1996). Erik heard the Cilincing people who were so poor at that time quipped in Javanese, "*seneng, wis motret awake sing kere*" ((you must be) happy, (because) you have photographed us who are poor) in the quip contained an awareness of different classes, perhaps also different skin colors, as well as the knowledge that poverty gives pleasure to the upper class who watch it (Utami, 2013).

There are several discussions related to photography, urban space, streets, or within the scope of the street photography category, some of which will be shortly reviewed here. The first aspect is the nontechnical aspects of street photography, as researched by Erik Prasetya (Wulandari & Destiadi, 2019). According to her, nontechnical aspects could be seen in terms of visual artistry, dimensions, and colours. From these nontechnical aspects, Erik's works would be analyzed. This nontechnical aspect analysis revealed that photos could be

viewed in greater depth. Each photo conveyed to the readers that a photo could have an implied message even if taken candidly.

Kusrini (2016) presents her review of the photo book *Jakarta: Banal Aesthetics* by Erik Prasetya. The article claims that Jakarta is a city with a dynamic society. The streets are never quiet and never sleep, even at night. Buildings, transportation, workers, and high mobility become part of Jakarta's visuals, simultaneously telling the story of its people's economic and social disparities. The beauty of the photo is evident in the imagery displayed, which explores manual techniques adapted to the conditions and situation, as well as the story to be conveyed.

Street photography has a distinctive characteristic: the tendency to photograph the subject as closely as possible. This practice, for the most part, produces striking photographs. As stated by John Hadley, "In close-up street photography, the proximity of the camera to the subject and the element of surprise work in tandem to produce a striking and evocative picture" (Hadley, 2022). Often, this practice is carried out candidly, without the knowledge of the subject. Usually, to immediately capture often overlooked moments (Jan Kamps, 2020).

Unlike those researchers, this research examines photography not only as a means of conveying messages, but also as a social instrument presented through the eyes of others positioned "offstage" in Goffman's language. The photographer's position (Erik Prasetya) is offstage, with his visual power to process reality into visual assets that affect how things are perceived. Purnomo emphasized that street photography is a genre within the world of photography that produces photographic works in the form of recordings of life's moments occurring in urban settings. The resulting photographs are taken candidly

without directing or arranging the captured moments (Purnomo, 2025).

The interconnectedness of urban space (Jakarta's congested streets), photography, and Erik Prasetya's display of class contestation through 35 photographs in the street photography category, presented in a postcard design, is complemented by a short narrative on the reverse side. The Jakarta Postcard series is a collection of street photography about Jakarta. The Jakarta postcard series is dedicated to photographing the city where Erik Prasetya has lived for 30 years. According to him, Jakarta is not a friendly city. People scramble over each other, and the strong become the winners (Prasetya, 2014). Erik Prasetya not only presents the routine but also builds and affirms the pattern of life in the urban space, both for the working class and the women of the metropolis.

Besides class, women in urban spaces are a fascinating topic of discussion in Erik Prasetya's works. Erik Prasetya, in particular, as seen in several published photo books, pays special attention to how women are connected and interact in urban spaces. Through fashion, expression, gesture, and socio-economic activities are presented as forms of everyday life. Class and women become essential topics of discussion. The Representation of women in street photographs must be read comprehensively in terms of both quantity and visual quality. This is because aesthetic factors impact the visual effect and its reading. In this context, Deverteuil & Doucet (2024) provide an interesting note. According to them, photography in relation to urban spaces is not something neutral but a representational practice that shapes the city to be recognized and understood. Through the visual assets presented by Erik

Prasetya, we gain insight into how tensions and inequalities arise between classes.

Class can be understood as the position of an individual or group determined by resources and cultural capital. In this context, social class is displayed through daily activities and visual empowerment; class-related identities become visible when connected to the hustle and bustle of the city. Erik Prasetya's photographs not only display the setting of time, atmosphere, and place but also show conditions that have the potential to become an arena for negotiation between parties.

The images in Erik Prasetya's photographs serve as traces of the relations between production, distribution, and space, specifically in terms of class and gender. Class is shown through the camera's framing, presented by the photo's subject, but it represents the economic structure, inequality, and disparities in urban spaces. Massey (1994) presents how public space is always coded and signified as belonging to men, thereby subordinating women's presence in public space. Massey's argument regarding how women are framed and presented in Erik Prasetya's photographs is interesting. It raises subordination issues and points to space as a dynamic and political social interaction, where gender, class, identity, and power are intertwined in producing spatial meaning. Brent Luvaas (Luvaas, 2022) argues that street photography is a dynamic and collaborative practice of creating places in which places constructed and photographed as a visual narrative are deliberately left unfinished and incomplete.

Furthermore, urban space as a visual and social interaction domain is mediated by full distance and interest in photography as a practice of representation

(Bate, 2016) states that photographs are not neutral representations of reality but constructions based on specific perspectives and ideologies. Bate explains comprehensively how photographic framing and composition relate to the "gaze" that determines the subject's and the viewer's positions. This determines the perspective between the subject and the viewer of the photograph. He adds that "Representation is not a mirror of reality, but a process of selection, framing, and mediation through which meanings are produced in photography" (Bate, 2016). Bate's argument is important for understanding the visual constructs presented by Erik Prasetya.

Photography is interdisciplinary, especially as part of visual culture. Photography studies should be responsive to new phenomena related to entities outside of photography. In Indonesia, studying photographic works relating to urban space, class, and women provides a new perspective in photography. There are at least several reasons why this study offers novelty. First, in the discipline of photography, the scope of design is more dominant than the scope of study.

Meanwhile, the development of science, industry, and social life is advancing at an increasingly rapid pace, necessitating the creation of studies that prioritize interdisciplinary aspects. By examining photography, urban space, class, and women, this study aims to transcend conventional boundaries and explore sociocultural aspects that extend beyond the realm of visual assets. This research provides diversity, especially in the scope of studies that are still minimal in the field of photography, when compared to design (in the discipline of photography, there are known studies and designs). Therefore, the novelty of this research stems from its interdisciplinary approach and thematic analysis of photographic

works, specifically those of Erik Prasetya. Previously, photography was viewed as an entity with little connection to other disciplines. Photography must be viewed, contextualised, and analysed critically to understand social dynamics. Photography and urban space become a medium for examining existing inequalities.

METHOD

This research was conducted by sampling Erik Prasetya's photographic work in the photo book "Jakarta Postcard Street, Rain, & Style" published in 2014. Each sample was analyzed using Gillian Rosen's visual methodology to examine how visual modalities operate. Furthermore, this research was interdisciplinary in exploring how visual assets relate to factors such as urban space, class, and women.

The classifications of the 35 photos presented in Erik Prasetya's Jakarta Postcard Street, Rain, & Style were undertaken by considering the photographs and paying attention to the narrative on the opposite page. Through Barthes' Imagery, Music and Text (Barthes, 2010), Barthes discusses the structural building in photography. The structural building in photography is difficult to stand alone; a photo needs another structure, namely, in text (at least containing titles, explanations, and comments). Therefore, the totality of information is presented by two different structural structures (one of which is the linguistic face) (Barthes, 2010). The two structures support each other in building meaning. For this reason, the classification is also based on the structure of the text behind the photo.

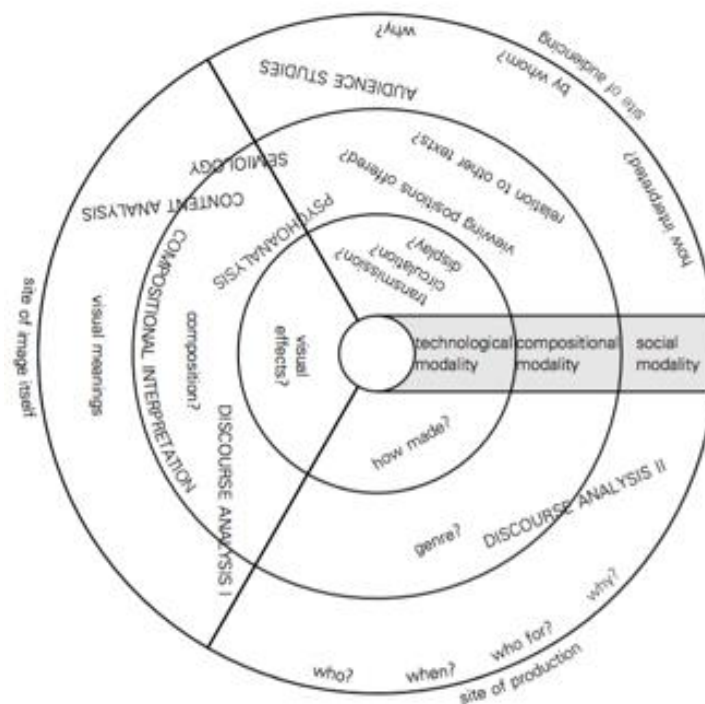
Classification is performed as an initial stage to obtain visual material for analysis. Through his photographic works, Erik Prasetya presents a dialogue between the demands of daily life and urban spaces. The density of the streets, interactions

between characters, gestures, and expressions dominate the works presented. Classification is based on location: streets. Street lanes are considered capable of providing identification related to class and density. The first classification is deemed necessary because it pertains to photography and space. Five photographs were obtained from this classification. The second classification is based on political stance and spatial Representation, which is significant for understanding how photography and urban space present political elements. The Representation of

women in modernity focuses on identifying the sample of workers on the streets.

Data analysis was then carried out from the research samples using Gillian Rose's visual methodology. Gillian Rose presents three domains in visual interpretation: First, the site of the production of an image. Second, the site of the image itself, and the site where various audiences see it. Each mode or site has three modalities for critically understanding images: technological, compositional, and social.

Figure 1
Diagram of Gillian Rose's research method



Source: (Rose, 2001)

Gillian Rose identified three areas that became the focus of analyzing visual material. These areas describe which perspective or position the researcher will take when conducting a study: Site of Production, Site of Image Itself, and Site of

Audience. This research referred to the site of the image itself to interpret the Representation and meaning of Erik Prasetya's photographs. Furthermore, in this aspect, the technological modality in producing visual effects, the compositional

modality with the interpretation of spatial composition, and finally the social modality in exploring the visual meaning were studied.

In the technological modality, the research examined how the empowerment of shooting features, such as ISO, Speed, and Diaphragm, was determined to create a specific visual impression. In the composition section, the composition was presented as a visual speech pattern, allowing the viewer to see how the pattern was built and its potential for social meaning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There is little analysis of Erik Prasetya's work, partly due to the limited interest in photography studies. Photography is more of a design interest, not a research one. However, several articles have analyzed and discussed Erik Prasetya's photographs. Nontechnical aspects such as aesthetic analysis, sociology of art approaches, and visual semiotics have been explored. However, photography's interdisciplinary nature and position have not yet been investigated. Unlike previous studies, this article discusses photography and urban space: the Representation of class and women in Erik Prasetya's work.

The classification of the works presented in the book *Jakarta Postcard Street, Rain, & Style* was not only based on the photographic works, but also considered the narrative on the opposite page. Barthes (2010) talks about the structural building in photography. The structural building in photography is difficult to stand alone; a photo needs another structure, namely, in text (at least containing titles, explanations, and comments). Therefore, the totality of information is presented by two different structural structures (one of which is the linguistic face). The two structures support

each other in building meaning. For this reason, the classification was also based on the structure of the text behind the photo.

Two classifications were obtained by classifying based on the visual aspect (photo work) and the accompanying narrative. The first category comprised the visual Representation of workers on the road, identified in 5 photos, and the representation of women in the context of modernity, found in 2 photos. Representation was key in this research. Representation relates to how the world is socially constructed and represented to and by us (Barker, 2009). Representation is closely related to what is depicted in the media. Media culture refers to the media's tendency to broadcast messages through its formats, trends, and content, which reflect the cultural reality of society in two distinct ways. First, impressions in the media are reflections of social reality; conversely, social reality is formed from these media impressions. Women in the media have become objects of media culture (Trijayanto, 2017). As a photographer, Erik Prasetya utilizes visual reality through photography to depict and represent reality in photographs. Erik Prasetya builds a representation of the capital city society, complete with its hustle and bustle. In this case, street photography has the power to make reality.

VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF WORKERS

Jakarta is one of the fastest-growing cities in the world, and one of the largest metropolitan cities in Southeast Asia. The bigger the city, the more complex the problems it presents. Of course, one of them is the problem of class. Social class refers to the hierarchical differences of a person or group that can be seen in their daily life (workers) and the habits associated with their type of work. Erik

Prasetya displays photo works in the background of places with dense activities, such as Sudirman, Gatot Subroto, and Salemba Raya. Visualization is carried out through aspects of the setting: place, time, and atmosphere.

Through Erik Prasetya's work, photography creates images of urban space, demonstrating what can be

displayed and what needs to be marginalized. This relates to photography's role in constructing reality. Erik Prasetya emphasizes the city's narrative, not only as an object but also as a space of tension. In the sense of the importance of being alive in modern spaces, it is also "torturous" for its workers, as seen in the five photographs below (see photos 1-5).

Photo 1

On the way home from work



Source: Prasetya, 2014a

Photo caption: On the way home from work, commuters walk down the poorly lit Dukuh Atas bridge, racing to catch the Bogor-bound train. There are so many women using the commuter line. Ironically, the women-only trains do not operate during office hours (at least in the year this picture was taken). Despite the dirty air, Sudirman Station is one of the most well-organized stations, featuring orderly stalls, free mobile phone carriers, bicycle parking, lush trees, numerous counters, ATMs, and announcements reminding passengers to smoke in designated areas.

Photo 2

Uncomfortable walking



Source: Prasetya, 2014a

Caption photo: Many jobs require women to dress elegantly, including wearing high heels. They are uncomfortable walking on uneven sidewalks or standing in crowded public transportation, as shown by photo 2. Many women carry two shoes. Additionally, they have two bags to accommodate their many belongings. This photo was taken in front of Plasa Semanggi, where, without consideration, a 300-meter-long crooked sidewalk has been created to provide car access to the mall. The weak public interest (pedestrians) is defeated by the strong private interest (companies and cars).

Photo 3

The situation on the eve of heavy rain



Source: Prasetya, 2024a

Caption photo: The situation on the eve of heavy rain. Workers scatter to find public transportation to go home. When it rains, the bus stops often become shelters, offering an alternative to the bridges. The bus waiting area becomes so crowded that those who arrive later must find refuge as needed. Sometimes the Trans Jakarta bridge is a good choice.

Photo 4

Rain is a fun season for umbrella taxis.



Source: Prasetya, 2014a

Caption photo: Rain is a fun season for umbrella taxis. They are generally school-age children who earn money while playing. This year's *ojek* service costs around Rp 2,500, covering the distance from the building to either a private car or a public transportation stop.

Photo 5

Still smiling



Source: Prasetya, 2014a

Caption photo: Still smiling. Perhaps regretting not having an umbrella, a woman runs after a bus with the protection she needs. Sidewalks are often flooded due to clogged drains and inadequate construction. Female mid-level workers and above usually dress formally and carry more than one bag. It is a hassle, but they no longer feel comfortable carrying backpacks. Backpacks, while practical, do not match the dress code. Backpacks are considered suitable only for new female employees and men.

Referring to Gillian Rose's methodology, three photo analysis levels exist. First is the technological aspect, which in this case is the camera equipment and creative strategies used to produce visual effects that are carried out using camera settings. Second is the interpretation of the composition of space; how the composition becomes a pattern of speech (visual), and lastly, the social aspect. Visual meaning is related to sociocultural factors, which are how the working class and women are represented in Erik Prasetya's work.

In the first classification, the five photos presented in the table above were recorded at low speed in fairly dense and fast traffic conditions. It can be identified from the setting and atmosphere. In photo 1, commuters descend the poorly lit Dukuh Atas bridge, racing to catch the Bogor-bound train. Erik uses the term "commuter" to indicate workers who commute daily for a considerable distance.

In addition to using a low speed, it was noted from the five photos (in order: 1/15, 1/15, 1/15, 1/15, 1/30) that Erik could have added speed and raised the light sensitivity level through ISO to obtain the optimal exposure balance. The low speed on the camera setting builds a dense visual construction and creates a sense of "hustle and bustle". It is emphasized through the narration.

Regarding composition, almost all of the five samples presented were designed to "have a point-of-view-direction towards the lens". Since the photo's subject was taken from the front, both the motion effect and the angle of view are directed towards the camera as the medium. As a speech pattern, such a composition can direct the audience to participate in feeling the impression of being rushed and immersed in emotion. Through the composition, Erik placed the background

as a supporting force. The event behind the subject was positioned as a force to accentuate the emotions of the main subject. As seen in photo 1, the office building is still glittering with activity, while the commuters look shabby as they walk down the road to the station. They have run out of energy to work.

Photo 2 was taken before Plasa Semanggi, the symbol of modernity. In it, a woman worker removes her office shoes to change into other shoes. Erik displayed the "front stage" for a worker. In the 3rd photo, the situation appears before a heavy rain, with workers scurrying to find vehicles to go home. The composition was designed to be crowded, emphasizing the dense atmosphere of the metropolitan city.

The speech pattern presented through composition is slightly different in the 4th photo. Jalan Salemba Raya, a crowded area, is depicted in a photo of an umbrella *ojek* service. The main proportion that builds the impression is not on the child's figure as an umbrella *ojek* person, but on the fragment of the crowded atmosphere in the angkot (a small type of public transportation in Jakarta), with a woman sitting near the door. From the camera setting as part of the technology, the speech patterns presented through the composition can help in social interpretation. This Jakarta postcard series only captures the Sudirman-Thamrin-Gatot Subroto axis. This axis is important because it has been the benchmark of Jakarta's orderly and progressive areas (Prasetya, 2014). Urban spaces and streets can be positioned as spaces and media full of class interests and representations. The visuals presented by Erik Prasetya illustrate power space contestation in several ways. Among them are the setting, which includes place, time, atmosphere, fashion, and the interplay between visual materials.

Placing urban space as a medium means it is not just a messenger but also the message itself. Citing McLuhan's popular statement that the medium is the message. Furthermore, urban spaces are positioned as the "front stage". It is a space where reality is not presented as it is. It is full of imagery. In other words, it is full of interests.

In the order of society, the leading actors who play the most roles are the social classes. As Erik Prasetya displays, the working class constructs a modern image through workers' efforts, featuring a worker in a metropolitan area with office attire and accessories like office shoes, bags, and watches, embodying modernity. They want to be perceived as modern and enjoy working for modernity. However, the working class is still the working class.

Jakarta Postcard: Street, Style & Rain illustrates the relationship between one reality and another. The setting for the Sudirman-Thamrin-Gatot Subroto axis is interesting; instead of showing the glittering city, Erik shows the other side. It is they, the working class, who make the city sparkle. The wheels of production continue to move, with significant implications for the city's progress. The Representation of the metropolitan city is not directly shown; the photo's subject depicts the opposite: a city with inadequate public transportation and crowded sidewalks. The urban space constructed as a space capable of building dreams of modernism and lifestyle is depicted in contrast. The working classes, who scurry around in all the chaos, not only build their dreams but also build the city's modernism and perpetuate those who own the means of production. The interaction between

workers, modernity, and urban space is presented from the perspective of the other. Rather than an idealized depiction, Erik Prasetya targets the middle working class who can barely enjoy the modernity and glitter of the city.

Representation of Women about The Image of Modernity

The following description analyzes women within the space of modernity. Unlike the previous description, which positioned women as working class, the following analysis examines women within the image of modernity. This research analyzes two photos (photos 6 and 7).

The rapid economic progress of many developing countries has led to the growth of middle-class lifestyles and consumption (Anwar, 2020). The visual elements in a photo interact with each other, between the photo's subject, the background, and other components. From a technical perspective, the two images in the classification of women's representation in modernity are presented in a more positive light. Regarding camera settings, Erik uses speed (1/125 and 1/60, respectively), which differs from the first classification, which is characterized by a crowded tendency and relatively low speed. From the speech pattern (composition) presented, the photo's subject is positioned in front of brands that characterize the modernity of a metropolitan city. Women are placed to convey the message of modernity. In general, Jakarta does not provide women-friendly public spaces, let alone stylish or sexy ones. The hospitality is offered by private spaces, such as malls or closed business districts (Prasetya, 2014a).

Photo 6

Modern, and for all its limitations



Source: Prasetya, 2014a

Caption photo: All its limitations, the mall is where female consumers can dress modestly without harassment—money talks, of course. Malls are not usually considered public spaces. They are private spaces because they are guarded by corporate security personnel. However, malls are also places where people learn new manners. In almost every mall in Jakarta, there are women-only parking spaces, in addition to valet services. On public streets, women rarely come first.

Photo 7

Woman, mall, and lifestyle



Source: Prasetya, 2014a

Caption photo: Malls, cafes, and air-conditioned buildings allow people to wear fall or winter clothes. The warm vests and ties worn by executives in New York were once standard in Indonesia. The buildings offer a respite from the hot and stuffy air of the open city of Jakarta. Being out in the open dressed like that is a struggle in itself.

Space becomes more political when Erik links it to the image of women in the media. It is as if the spaces of modernity provide flexibility and freedom of expression, even though this makes women the objects controlled by these spaces. There is a free but binding order; nothing is friendly except those with economic capital who can afford to spend. What Erik Prasetya describes reflects a trend: clothes, accessories, hairstyles, and lifestyles reinforce how women are portrayed in the media. Living under the shadow of capitalism, she becomes her other self. Society has an unwritten rule that when you go to a shopping centre, you must look fancy with the latest hairstyle and fashion. This shows unfriendliness and represents how the industry builds and determines images. Ray provides a compelling explanation of photography in the context of modernity, not only as a documentary or artistic tool, but also as a field of sociocultural ambivalence. Photographic images reflect the tension between social realism and modern aesthetic constructions, reflecting shifting values and perceptions in modern urban society (Ray, 2020).

Women and photography have been a long-standing topic of conversation (Banerjee & Mitra, 2025; Košir & Lakshminarayanan, 2023; McCullough, 2024; Türkay, 2025). It is about how women are positioned in front of the lens and the photographer, and their relationship with urban cultural spaces. In the media, women are often portrayed as subjects closely tied to the culture of consumerism, particularly in discussions about cities and modernity. Women's desire to be or become more beautiful pushes them into the space of consumerism. In the cultural studies

paradigm, the issue of women and their relationship with social construction and consumer culture becomes essential. Ultimately, women are continuously portrayed as constructed through their consumption. This situation leads women to an increasingly solid position in social and economic exchange (Intan, 2021). In the two works above, the first photo shows a woman in a mall, walking in front of an outlet bearing the inscription of one of her time's famous and popular cell phone brands.

Meanwhile, the second photo shows a woman wearing thick clothes and carrying a red lip-shaped bag. Behind (the image's background) is a banner that informs about fashion. Both photos were taken in a well-known shopping centre in Jakarta. The two women featured can be identified as consumers. By shopping, the women featured in the Jakarta postcard: *Street, Style & Rain* consciously show they are part of the glittering metropolis. Erik's narrative is slightly different from the previous classification. In these two photos, the narrative inaccurately represents the struggles of workers and consumers in the metropolitan area, despite their being the driving force of the metro economy. In this second classification, Erik builds the reality that metropolitan women have freedom, even though they are bound by space, so they must obey the unwritten rules to become modern people. Schwartz asserts that street photography not only records urban space, but also produces and negotiates the boundaries between public and private space—a direct reflection of urban social change in modernity (Schwartz, 2012).

There are two critical points from this research's findings. First, the representation of the working class is

constructed through slow-shutter camera settings to highlight the hustle and bustle of Jakarta's vibrant, modern narrative. A paradoxical impression is created to build another side of the metropolitan city. It represents the subject of the photo and positions urban space as part of the "effect." This means that urban space is not simply positioned as a "background" to reinforce the visual narrative, as is often found in street photography. In the first classification, the working class is strongly highlighted, characterized by its hustle and bustle, yet it has limited access to modernity. The working class serves as a "support" for modernity and as a marginalized other.

In the second classification, Erik Prasetya displays photographs of women using high-speed shooting techniques. To achieve a frozen effect and clarify the visual material, making it appear clear, colorful, and associated with modern spaces and prominently displayed brands. Urban space is portrayed not as the splendor of buildings, but as a terrain for class struggle; modern private spaces (such as malls) provide easier access for women, including public spaces.

Unlike previous research, particularly on Erik Prasetya's works and their relationship to urban space, this study's analysis utilizes Gillian Rose's visual methodology, something previously unseen. Discussions of technical and discursive aspects are presented simultaneously to support interpretation. Integrating visual material analysis with studies of urban space in Indonesia (in this context: Jakarta) opens up more complex interdisciplinary discussions, such as the sociology of space, gender studies, and social class. This research opens up further opportunities for interdisciplinary discussions on photography. Still, the limited sample size and narrow geographic focus (specifically the Sudirman-Thamrin-

Gatot Subroto axis) require comparative studies to expand research on photography and urban space in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This article examines the connection between humans and urban space. Until now, photography and urban space, or in photography categorisation referred to as street photography, have been more oriented towards the sign system in photographic material and oriented towards the mimetic aspect. This article examines the working class from an interdisciplinary perspective, exploring how it is represented and the role of women in urban space. Both are at the intersection of driving modernity. Erik Prasetya's rich photo book entitled *Jakarta Postcard Street, Rain, & Style*, published in 2014, presents visual material about the daily lives of the people of Jakarta. From the photo book, the photographic works are classified for later study.

From the two classifications, the first is the visual representation of workers on roads, and the second is the representation of women in relation to the image of modernity. Conclusions are obtained in three domains: technology, composition, and meaning. In the realm of technology, camera settings (iso, speed, and shutter opening) significantly impact the visual quality produced. In the first classification, Erik Prasetya tends to use low speed to strengthen the impression of the "hustle and bustle" of the working class. This level also affects the understanding of composition, specifically how it, as a speech pattern in photography, can emphasize the position and freedom of the photo subject represented through the setting of the place, time, and atmosphere. These two levels are helpful for interpretation.

From the first classification, the interaction between workers, modernity, and urban

space is shown through the perspective of the other. Erik Prasetya targets the working class in Jakarta, who can hardly enjoy the modernity and glitter of the city. There is a relationship of interest between the working class and modernity. What is displayed at the "front stage" level in Erving Goffman's terminology? The demands of the working class, appearing in the name of modernity, become an image that is not neutral. Meanwhile, in the second classification, Erik builds the reality that metropolitan women have freedom in the private space (malls with all modernity), even though what is represented is the bond and pressure of modernity itself.

The discussion on photography and urban space shows the multidisciplinary nature of photography as a science. The visual aspect of photography is always connected to the social life of the community, so that opportunities for further research are always wide open. Moreover, technological development

always accompanies the growth of cities and their impact on the structure and lifestyle of society. This research attempts to critique the photographic phenomenon of urban space. This effort is expected to contribute to the development of further discussions and the compilation of history and theories in street photography.

The empirical focus on the work of Erik Prasetya (a Southeast Asian photography figure) and the context of Jakarta provides an interesting contribution to the scope of photography and urban space. This is relatively rare in international literature, which often focuses on Western metropolitan cities. This research can fill a geographical "blind spot" regarding photography and urban space. There are several notes for further research. First, researchers can add analysis of the "site of production" and "site of audience" through in-depth interviews. In addition, comparative studies on urban space photography in Jakarta and other cities are needed.

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