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Independent Project

ADAA6000

How do cultural and societal contexts influence the representation of identity in photography, and what impact does this have on viewers' perceptions?

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Abstract

This thesis will examine the relationship between the viewers perception and how we choose to view an image. How this image is then represented with malleable fluidity and history . The social and capital constructs that are present in that period alter how we interpret an image. I will also use theorists to reinforce and develop these arguments while using the subject of mental health as a case study to demonstrate how the concepts I present in my question are present in every image.

Authors declaration

I Joshua Williams confirm that all ideas that I propose throughout this thesis are my own and all ideas from other theorists I use are quoted or referenced in the Bibliography below.

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Introduction

The intersection of representation and the viewers perception is a concept that is fluid, and these concepts can be altered by cultural and societal appropriation. Theorists who address how our perceptions are altered include :Stuart Hall , Allan Sekula and John Berger. Although each of these theorists present a different concept they all comment on society's impact on our perceptions and how an image can change with history ,embed in my research when I explore representation and its relationship of how we interpret images . An area of photographic representations I will explore is the concept of mental health and how what we represent has been a fluid with how society had dictated this .Theorists like Michael Foucault introduced such terminology as the ‘medical gaze’: how we interpret mental health has been impacted by cultural norms and society. My own practice will address mental health imagery as this is a key consideration when discussing culture impact on viewers perception. This Thesis is a discussion of my own concepts aligned with already available research in this field. Debating how we interpret an image , I will explore the conversation around the viewers perception that may be ideologically malleable and will never be fixed as political institutions and other hierarchy’s will always ultimately control the narrative.

Chapter 1: Theory of representation

Historically, representation and photography have had a symbiotic relationship , how we interact with photographs as people, depends on how something has been represented and interpreted. Considering how this trace remains in history ,as we are ideological malleable to the social constructs that surround us. Photographic representation shapes not only how we see ourselves but also the world around us. But who decides what is an ‘acceptable’ form of representation or

rejects alternatives? This chapter explores the relationship between what becomes accepted as the dominant form of 'representation', and what gets rejected.

Photographic representation is controlled by a variety of societal contexts , propaganda and misinterpretation leading to its trace being corrupted. Theorists have studied and examined the concept of representation and have each taken this concept further by exploring how we view representation and how the lens interacts with this concept. This thesis will address the theory of representation through the lens of mental health incorporating a range of case studies and ending with my own practice, as a means to elucidate the changing face of photographic representation.

When considering the concept of representation, we can contemplate the '*Allegory of the cave*' by Plato (Plato, 2012); this allegory follows a group of individuals that spend their lives staring consistently at the wall of a cave, this being their supposed reality. One day a member of the group breaks free from their chains and journeys out to see the outside world: reality: this individual then goes back to the group and talks about what they have experienced. The group rejects this reality and subsequently kills this member of the group. (Plato , 2012).

The Allegory of the Cave is essentially an allegory about representation. We accept what we want to see or have been shown ,rather than the truth of reality. Those that viewed the cave wall and images without understanding the outside world (reality) misunderstood, that the imagery is what they have been conditioned to view their entire lives and therefore that's their representation of reality. It is the consciousness of society that has made them believe is real. In Plato's Allegory this realisation leads them to murder any other form of representation or reality. Demonstrating, how if lead to believe something your entire life it could be argued that your concepts and ideologies are therefore formed and dictated by this concept. Plato's allegory of the cave is the

foundation- of all theories of representation that follow. Again we must question the powers that drive these narratives and view selectively what we are shown as representation .



Fig.1: Representation of Plato Allegory of the cave

When considering representation, it can be associated and interpreted differently amongst different people. In Stuart Halls seminal text , *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* he states that it is a “process by which members of a culture use language... to produce meaning ” (Hall, 1997). When considering representation and its broad spectrum in photography and all types of media, Halls's concept of ‘language’ is an essential consideration. There are different types of communication as well as language (non-verbal communication) is considered a form of language; the way we move, see or smell it is all a type of visual language and often society can manipulate this idea of language causing representations to become misrepresentations as we, as people arguably we are undeniably slaves to the contexts that political constructs dictate to us. Our viewpoints then begin to steer those concepts or images and how we perceive something becomes manipulated or flawed so we as the viewers can

conform to how the language seeks us to interpret images. Language is a key concept when we consider representation and the language that surrounds an image must be considered along with its relationship with the theory of semiotics as it all has an impact on viewers perception.

In the next two images fig. 1 and fig. 2, we begin to consider semiotics and its relationship to what we are presented with, we can examine the theme of vilification between them both, in the allegory by Plato when the man tries to introduce reality to the cave, he is outcasted and subsequently murdered. However, although not in the same aggressive action, we as society vilified Kevin Carter for how he captured the ‘child’ and whether he intervened , although how it is inconceivable that it is reality, his image is a modern problem the world still faces and similarly to the allegory we rejected it and how it forced us to perceive things and therefore demonstrates these images relationship along with how they relate to semiotics.



Fig .2: Kevin Carters -Child with vulture

When we consider the concept of semiotics itself, it aligns with the concept that referenced, in photography we have the signifier and the signified as explored by Saussure “Speech has both an individual and a social side, and we cannot conceive of one without the other.”(Saussure , 1916) demonstrating that speech and signs have a present in any image and they therefore can condition us too see what the artist desires/ dictates . In any image that we view has a variety of signs and symbols that further denote what we are seeing. An image where we can explore this concept is Kevins Carter image from 1994, the denoted from this image : a starving child, a vulture and a desolate landscape and the connoted things from this image are why is the child there, why did Carter take this image from this angle and why is the child so badly malnourished. Another concept that can be explored from this image could be the representation of death that is evoked from the vulture, often in books and media these birds are used a symbol of death and it seems to be a similar conscious choice that Carter has made in this image as death looms over the child. The child's tucked position also connotes the desperation and a sense of defeat that this child feels in this moment of pure desperation. The child seems to have each of these elements, the connoted and denoted are in every image we view resulting in the very concept of representation to be intertwined, with the theory of semiotics and how the reality we view is false and we can interpret what we want as a photographer. However, a key concept that aligns with the above ideas is the ethics that surrounds them, when we tackle representation of any medium there is always be an ethical consideration. Indeed as a modern photographer one should realise

“image-makers and image-users develop the skills to think critically about ethics in their work and the language to define their own ethical practice.”(Photography ethics , 2024).

John Berger who closely examines representations related the past and present. How representations change, based on the historical context they are taken from and social influences that are present as explored in this quote “History always constitutes the relation between a present and its past. Consequently, fear of the present leads to mystification of the past” (Berger ,1972). We can examine this quote and its relation to how we interpret an image, social contracts, cultural interpretations are determined by these power constructs. Regardless of the history, our fears to stray from the modern conformities lead to our interpretations and representations being flawed and therefore often the past and the context is therefore forgotten.

History had demonstrated that there is a direct correlation with how we view an image and the social context or events that surround the captured image . Napalm girl :*The Terror of War: Nick Ut's 1972* show these types of images, at the time were just a series of images among a sea of interpretations of the Vietnam war . Although shocking in any time period , when we view this image today through developed empathy and understanding , it becomes arguably more horrific with our greater understanding of the historical events .When you take away the propaganda of the time as explored by Berger “images were first made to conjure up the appearances of something that was absent. Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented” Images very often outlast the contexts they are captured in and results in people forming their own perceptions of what the images tend to represent. Simply through the case studies of Berger, one cannot perceive what we see as being certified as leading to the open question on whether everything is a misrepresentation.



Fig.3 Napalm girl 1972

When interpreting the idea of representation in photography, often the idea of documentary photography virtually comes synonymous with or influenced by, the idea of ethics and culture. Within photography, we often have the greatest impact on this medium: Written in 1978, *Dismantling modernism reinventing documentary* Sekula explores the concept of ‘reinventing documentary photography’ (Sekula, 1978) he asserts the idea that the only thing a camera confirms is that someone was somewhere and essentially an event happened, everything outside of this idea is influenced by the outside sources such as the social influences in control at present or the ‘capitalist’ lens (power structures). Guy Debord, 1988 *The Society of the Spectacle*, that Sekula references consistently through his writings due to their alignment is thinking in relation to the ‘spectacle’. Sekula insists in his writings that despite the “mountains of evidence” we have formulated from documentary photography in reality all this medium has done is add the “spectacle and renal extinction” (Sekula, 1978) leading us the viewers to forget how one should interpret the social world, as often the social truth and reality goes beyond that of a lens hence, Sekula’s criticisms of the medium and its place in the umbrella of representations and social truths. To further build upon the concepts that Sekula introduces to we can introduce Adam Curtis and his concept of ‘hyper normalisation’ he argues as a society we

now have ‘collective identities’ that have been ‘splintered’ by society's power structures therefore, as a society we have begun to ‘hyper normalise’ anything that demands conformity in the capitalist state once again reinforcing Sekula’s argument of ‘renal extinction’ (Femstermaker , 2021)

When considering my earlier points in relation to language and visual culture, Nicholas Mirzoeff’s series of essays *In the visual culture reader* 1998 are a key consideration and pose significant questions regarding the idea represented as “how one differentiates the visual culture from reality in an era where the visual has taken control of history?”(Mirzoeff, 1998)The concept of history and representation are intertwined in a web of what was and what is, as perceptions of images change over time, and this concept that Mirzoeff considers is key when you consider the impact that social constructs can have on viewer perceptions. As time move forwards so does how we view things , as do social movements, such as LGBTQIAS2+ . Images related to this are often are viewed with a sense of joy and accomplishment in the modern age but in history these images were viewed as evidence related to a crime or sin .Demonstrating that social and cultural contexts in history have a direct correlation with how the viewer perceives an image. When we consider ‘culture’ it is an umbrella term that could be interpreted in the a multitude of ways, it is not simply ‘this is’ rather when we consider culture we look at what the collective say culture is or what a movement influences us to believe . Despite us not realising it, the individual does not control culture it goes beyond us. Mirzoeffs ideas lead us to question whether the visual is ‘truth’ it also, leads us to question our own beliefs and standpoints when viewing images and whether we are manipulated as the viewer by our own beliefs when viewing an image tainting its representation. (Mirzoeff, 1998).

When considering the idea of theory in representation we must not only look to the contemporary examples but also modern examples of how these ideas are perceived and have been progressed. In a modern example in 2007 is that of A. McCauley he explores the idea of representation and the 'ontological' nature. As a society we tend to have a condition that we require ourselves to study the narratives behind a photograph rather than accept the art form as it is in front of the viewer. Photography as an art form can tend to examine photographs compared to other arts, when we view a photograph, we always try to pry beyond the lens looks at the moral implications due to the reality it portrays. Photographs are seen as depicting reality and not some abstract interpretation like a fine art piece. The very idea of photography McCauley states is plagued by the 'democratic' photograph, this idea explore the idea that photography is simply captured to appease the masses. Moreover ,that photography is simply a 'mundane' art form that acts as propaganda to influence the masses and therefore the representations that are formed from photography are all simply there influence the viewers perception. (McCauley, 2007) .

When we begin to consider how one interprets the modern world through the theory of representation it is clear, that as the viewer, our views are impeded and flawed by the capitalist power structures that control the contexts. As all of theorists above have argued, how we interpret an image is controlled by the beliefs of society at the time and despite our desire for individualism we unwittingly conform. I will further explore this concept in the case studies that will follow that will further develop and validate the above arguments and context.

Chapter 2: Case studies

Representation has ideologies that are malleable. These have precedence and foundation in history, dating back to the when (1834) photograph was invented by Henry Fox Talbot.

Representation and its trace lie in all images through language and what we see and throughout this chapter while embedding the concepts that each of the theorists explored, I will begin to explore Mental health Imagery from contemporary periods to the modern day.

Exploration of the ‘medical gaze’ a term coined by Michale Foucault, was proposed in the 1900s. His concept was that, as a society we have taken a regressive backwards step in how we

view ‘medical treatments’ especially in relation to mental health. There was a period where we idolised mental health rather than seeing the otherness that needed ‘treatment’ and in each of the following case studies I explore the concept of the medical gaze in more depth from the 1800s to the modern day. (School of Life , 2015).

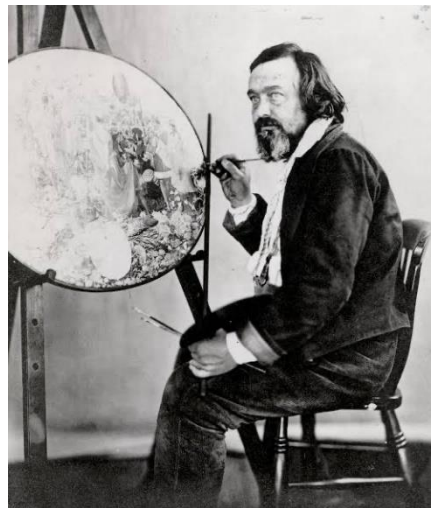


Fig. 4 :Henry Herings Richard Dadd painting

When consider my own practice relation to mental health in its current form, it forces to me to begin to examine how we have represented mental health throughout history. Whether as a society, images themselves have had a direct correlation with how we may perceive a particular mental health disorder.

Above is an image of famed artist Richard Dadd, despite seeming relatively harmless and innocent in this image, Dadd was in fact a murderer. He had murdered his farther and, in this image, he was captured by Henry Hering in a mental institute called Bethlem. Dadd had believed

his father was the 'devil' leading him to murder him, but in the image captured above we are presented with this representation of a gentlemen that seems harmless ,even through what he is captured to be painting there are no connotations to what true nature it is and arguably this a choice. Without the knowledge and context provided with this image, Dadd arguably could be idolised as another artist from the 1800s which he was, but this narrative has been formed by the photographer, Herinng chose to capture Dadd at this angle in, in this setting and by doing this leads us the viewer to be deceived and lost inadvertently, a void of misrepresentation of this individual as in modern day society an image such as this would exist but in a form that would hopefully provide us with the connotations of Dadd's crimes. This however , seemingly demonstrates society's direct influence on how we perceive an image. Due to Dadd being represented in this pose painting in this image it has had a direct affect for how society has therefore perceived Dadd leading him to be idolised in the 1800s by many innocently unaware of his crimes.

Richard Dadd's painting above is an example of how society in the 1800s viewed mental health, they idolised it. This supports the theory that Michael Foucault follows regarding the medical Gaze, medical professionals controlled the narrative in how we view mental health, they are able to modify the story related to each of these cases of struggle that the individuals experienced. Dadd is a case where due to the way doctors viewed him as a case to be studied and revered rather than someone who required treatment, society have created a narrative that surround Dadd that his cases is something to be celebrated yet in the modern day it is clear an individual like Dadd would not be captured in a celebratory way rather he requires treatment demonstrating once again that doctors alone control the narrative that surrounds mental health.

From Dadd's image we can begin to see that the concept that the narratives that surround mental health and its representation are controlled by society. Our perceptions of mental health in the 1800s were formed by the medical professionals that viewed the individuals as someone who required treatment rather like suggested by Kevin Carter the visual language that is perpetuated by Dadd in this image seems to idolise him leading to history to forget his true nature.

As we continue to consider the societal effects on representation and how we perceive things as individuals, we can continue to look to the idea of the 'medical gaze'. As a society in the 1900s looked towards the concept of 'treating' mental illness, looking at it in such a way that it could be cured. A modern understanding of mental health understands it is not something that can be cured instead, it is something that has to be nurtured. In Images from the 1900s, we can see examples of photography that displays people suffering from autism, capturing these children looking like a stereotypical psychopaths, the imagery and representation of these individuals are the polar opposite to how we view Richard Dadd, who was a psychopath. These images are suggesting a narrative that individuals that suffer from autism are the psychopaths that need to be 'cured'.



Fig.5 Children tied to a radiator 1982

When we start to consider the ‘medical gaze’ Jose’s image from Columbia in 1982 poses a key discussion into how we chose to represent children with autism. Society viewed them as ‘others’ but this was only due to how the professionals in medicine chose to label them due to their influence on society the representation of these children was chosen by these individuals. This image is a key concept when we consider society’s role in perception, in 1982 it would be perceived that in the medical world, mental health would have started to be understood as an illness that required nurturing but instead, unlike in Richard Dadd’s representation where an actual psychopath was captured, this image of children were chosen to be the ‘psychopaths’ of society instead. (Fraga, 2023) We could argue that Jose has chosen to capture these children in this way to inspire a debate among society, as Sekula referenced this image could be a part of the ‘pile of evidence’ we referenced in his writings that simply is adding to the spectacle and all this image is confirming is that in the 1980s we had taken a step back in society and rather than celebrating what sets us apart we chained what we view as different showing the fear that an image can promote among society.

As referenced earlier in this text when we view this image we must begin to understand how Foucault's theory of the medical gaze is established. Whilst viewing Fig.5, we must begin to have a deeper understanding of how Foucault's theory of the medical gaze is established and present in this image. Then in the 20th century alternatively society celebrated mental health ,but rather as suggested by Foucault the medical professionals took control of this narrative and begin to decide for society how we perceive illnesses. Our understanding of mental health began to take a stance of isolate and 'cure' rather than beginning to understand the 'why' rather as a culture we decided it would suite the 'biomedical' paradigm to cure this and to therefore in the case of these children to 'chain' them from their own sense of hope so the doctors could feel some sense of gratification. This image also demonstrates the power that an image holds in terms of representation, this image became renowned, has become a staple in history but was perceived differently depending on their culture that surrounded it. In the 1980s this image led to these children's 'gifts' being scorned by society rather in the modern times these children are viewed with gifts that requires our love but this is a direct effect of culture shift demonstrating we do not have our own interpretations or perceptions images rather society chooses this concept for us.

We must consider the modern example of mental health, as mental health as never become more prevalent than it has in the 21st century. Photographic representations of mental health have also begun to morph with the societal perceptions of mental health as we begin to see it as a part of ourselves, we accept even celebrate on the contrary to the perceptions of mental health considered above. Once again Foucault examination of history and how the 'medical gaze' has a direct effect on society, as medical professional perceptions begun to change on mental health

again, it empowered the individual to speak for themselves once again but only due to society's changing perception and representations of mental health as this 'superpower' rather than an ailment. (School of life , 2015).



Fig.6 :From Georgie Wilemas “Boys do Cry”

When we consider mental health, in the modern context it has an endless array of perceptions and interpretations, as society has allowed, we have begun to once again view mental health as something that requires nurturing and talking about and therefore we have adjusted our perceptions. In line with the how medical professions seeks us to embrace their narrative. When we consider the modern perception around mental health often images, are poetic and are representative of one's emotions in a poetic sense as explored by Georgie Wilemen. Her project called 'boys do cry' was created to show the fragility of mental health and was meant to explore our lack of attentiveness to men's mental health while also raising awareness of the struggle that mental health causes, as I personally attest to. Wileman's work is relatable for society and

culture, as when we view this image as the viewer it speaks to what is the stereotypical view as a 'bad mental health day'. As often as a individuals our bed is our safe place, and her works offer a view into the effects that mental health has on the space that surround us. What this image fails to represent and or grasp is the subtlety of mental health . As so often we cannot see the struggle of the individual, rather it is represented by their surroundings or how they choose to position themselves .Wileman's works is a marker for how perceptions that surround mental health, changed in how society chose to view individuals who suffer from mental health. Michael Foucault referenced 'the medical gaze' the modern age is arguably a time of 'vulnerability' for society but only because the medical professionals have deemed us to require to talk about our demons with them rather than receiving treatment ,so they once again control the narrative in this concept. When you view the works of Willemans and compare it with the earlier case studies ,when you view each of these images side by side, they arguably all represent society's narrative at the time .However each reveal a similar concept surrounding mental health and that is our lack of understanding about it as individuals, we all seek to make our own representations of mental health that are poetic or literal but in the path of doing this become lost in culture's control of the visual.

As A.Mcauley explored, often we have a desire to pry behind the lens and images such as Willemans invite this practice as does the genre of mental health itself. Leading us to question the context or why that representation was chosen. Rather as a society now due to the open interpretation that are available from modern forms of representation of mental health it leaves us to interpret the image, but it is not free from the 'democratic' lens as media as seen in daily life, they have an impact on our perceptions. (McCauley ,2007)

Each one of these case studies demonstrates as a society we have not necessarily moved in a 'straight line' regarding progress, rather at times we have taken a step back in how we view mental health. It could be inferred that thinking in relation to mental health changed in line with the power structure and the 'capitalist gaze' (Mc Gowen , 2013)This medicalised view arguably forces us to view mental health through their lens once again referencing the control that society has on the viewers perception. Through these case studies, it may suggests that artists choose to capture mental health that has a direct impact on the viewers perception. Capturing the children as seen in fig. 4 or leave open to interpretation such as in fig. 5 each of these representations leaves a doorway for interpretation but that interpretation will remain culturally appropriate due to our compulsion/ conditioning to conform to society.

Chapter 3: Moving beyond the conformities of mental health representations.

When I consider 'mental health' often it is assumed as a disorder, or something that can be treated . It may simply mean I lack 'love' for myself, but my belief is , that part of my identity/my being has been taken up by this significant grip on my life and that you cannot have one without the other. Rather society must begin to move beyond the cliches and stereotypes we attach to depression and anxiety and mental health , as a society we have a ritual of attaching labels and contexts to individuals who struggle with these problems rather looking at

it through their lens and begin to understand the inner struggle. This chapter will explore the indexical nature of mental health and how we can begin to move beyond the current ideas and representations that society has created ,regarding mental health.

When I consider mental health ,often when a photographer seeks to capture this topic, they use a stereotype to create a certain aesthetic ,we consider the ‘bed’ the’ tablets ‘etc and they have certain connotations. Often however, there is no emotion in these images, without context there is no feeling .It is completely void of any attachment to the actual mental health problem and gets lost in a ‘sea of representations’ and in turn the message is lost. Through my own practice I desired to break free of this stereotype and look to how we as photographers can begin to add feeling back into the photographs. To demonstrate the struggle that I feel by finding a method to represent that struggle with being Influenced by social conformities. In the image below I desired to capture my ‘view’ of the world each day through my tablets. I did this through creating my own filter to add this layer to the image I am taking. The photographic concept was simple but the effect it has on the viewer is crafted in a way to promote a feeling, not something relatable like most mental health photography seeks to; rather I wanted to move away from the conformities of mental health photography and create an abstract image so it better aligns with my state of mind.

The picture below is one of my images from my project ‘I matter’ it is an abstract representation of my viewpoint of the world as I see it each day using my sertraline to alter the viewing of the image.



Fig.7 : My own image Taken apart of this year's project

One theorist we can consider when we consider how we interpret image is Jaques Ranciere through his book the *'Emancipated Spectator'* (2009) we consider that we are required to "To emancipate the spectator is not to give them a specific method of interpretation, but to give them the capacity to think for themselves. "(Raciere, 2009) Rather this poses a key relevance to my exploration of mental health, when attempting to represent mental health through photography, when you capture the 'image' you have no direct meaning or correlation to cultural norm's. Conversely , you leave the 'spectators' to decipher the meaning by giving them the openness free of the 'capitalist lens' to think for themselves. The role of my photography is to not introduce 'another' interpretation of mental health .Rather ,it is to present a way to feel, my struggle ;through this image and Raciere touches upon this as "Art's role is not to reveal the hidden truth of the world, but to disorganize the common sense by disrupting the usual relations of sense and meaning." (Rancière ,2009). Similarly to how my work is meant to act as a disruptive force to the conformities of mental health photography. The intent of my work to introduce new abstract techniques like Rancière references 'disrupting the usual relations' that mental health's forms of representations and cultural normalities. (Raciere, 2009)

When we consider alternate , more abstract forms of representation: an artist who perfected this concept is Alfredo Jarr. Through his works called “the silence of Nduweyuzu” (1978) he captured the eyes of a victim of Genocide. This lady who had witnessed her entire village being exterminated due to alternate beliefs. Jarr chose to capture these eyes rather than capturing the images, that confirmative society often chooses , bodies, bullets and destroyed buildings. Here Jarr has chosen to capture the eyes of the victims and create this ‘pile’ of eyes that imitates the loss captured in this event but far more impactfully due to its connotations(Jaar , 2025) *The eyes of Gutete Emerita*). Jarr’s alternative methods of capturing this conflict have a direct correlation with my own works as I desire to move past the aesthetic stereotypes of mental health photography . Attempting to move past the cliché; similarly to Jarr, there is something authentic about the physical nature of Jarr’s images that leads a far more impactful and everlasting outcome than your stereotypical war photography.

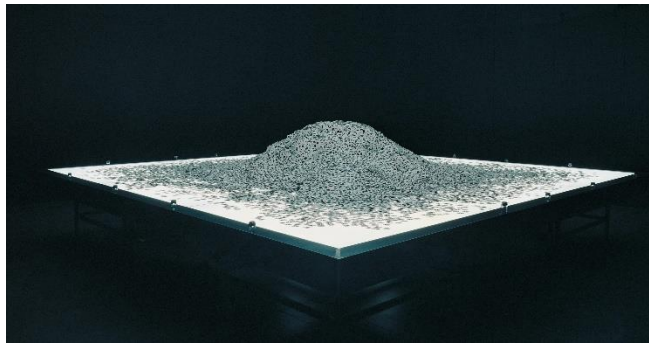


Fig.8 :*The eyes of Gutete Emerita*

Returning to Hall's theory of representation, we can look further into his views regarding Anti-Essentialism. He argues that identity is 'fluid' due to the context that is formed, our identity is always in flux due to the political and social constructs at the time and this has a direct relationship with mental health and how institutions choose to represent it. Hall explores "It is a mistake to think that the identities we have are simply given by the past, a single, fixed, and timeless essence." (Hall, 1997) Rather, society as culture changes so do our identities as well. As in my case studies, the perceptions that surrounded mental health in history moved forward as did our perception and identity with mental health. Hall also argues the power behind the image lies in how representation dictates that image should be viewed rather "The question of identity is always a question of power: it is never purely a question of representation." (Hall, 1997). Hall's arguments lie in that fact that our identity is decided by society when we are captured not by ourselves and this is similar to mental health identity in the media and my own practice: the abstract image, I capture moves away from the cliché therefore enabling me to move beyond stereotypes attached to mental health and take the question of 'identity' away from the power structures.

Conclusion

Considering the topic of representation as an umbrella term and exploring it as I have in this thesis there is a clear link to how society impacts us as (the viewer's) perception. As explored through chapter 1 when we view a photograph that is ideological malleability it is influenced by the social and political influences present in those time periods. Berger states "images could outlast that context they represented" (Berger, 1972) which can be seen in all the images I have explored in these essays, the perceptions are formed by what is viewed as 'socially acceptable' in that moment in time. What can be learnt through the studies of the theorists I have explored is each one although different in voice ultimately alludes to society's control on our perceptions. Moving through to chapter two, the case studies I conducted in relation to mental health, collective perceptions around mental health were markedly swayed by public opinion regardless of the true contexts that surrounded the individuals it represented, rather the 'medical gaze' chose how mental health would be viewed. The change in attitudes to mental health is a direct symptom of society to "hyper normalise" anything that the capitalist states insist we must accept as individuals. Moving through to the final chapter and the study of my own work this semester,

my work poses an anthesis to the study I have conducted through this thesis this semester, my work is supposed to break free of mental health conventions that are present in chapter 2 of my essay, rather than allowing 'the medical gaze' to control how I represent my own mental health rather I have made my own abstract interpretations of mental health breaking free of the capitalist gaze previously referenced. To conclude this study the examination of Halls concept of 'Anti-Essentialism' was crucial to all that has been examine throughout the thesis, he argues that identity is 'fluid' and there is no fixed identity for any individual rather our identities in the photographic world are always in flux as the our identity will always be determined by the political influence that is present. Front he researches and studies conducted through this essay although the idea of the viewers perception is an one question even through the concepts introduced through this essay However, what can be stated is social and cultural influences will always impact a viewer's perception of an image align with time itself, an images representation are ideologically malleable regardless of the indiviudals voice or opinions and the only way in which you can overcome this is to break free of the conventions of what society wants you to create.

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