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Place: Towards a Geophilosophy of Photography

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--Chapter 1--

The Photographer: A Corporal Place in the Phenomenal World

Phenomenology is ... a philosophy for which the world is always 'already there' before reflection begins—as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status.

Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*

To begin my analysis of the notion of place in relation to photography, I will look at the usually unheeded partaker of a photographic act: the photographer's body. Through deploying a phenomenological scheme that pays significant attention to human lived experiences, perceptions and understandings of the world, this chapter will look at photographers as both affecting and affected beings. As philosopher Vilém Flusser contends, a photographer is "a person who attempts to place, within the image, information that is not predicted within the program of the camera."¹² By actively engaging in the world through their bodies, photographers are constantly in search of information that is not provided by their cameras. Otherwise, they are reduced to some "functionaries" whose existences are restricted to their apparatus.¹³ By discussing the bodily engagement of landscape photographs, this chapter aims to foreground the significance of the photographer's body as a place instilled with lived experiences. Paying attention to the lived experiences of humans can, as geographer John Wylie suggests, allow us "to move away from a description of subjectivity in terms of rational, distant observation, towards an alternate understanding of human beings," which is based on "expressive engagement and involvement in the world."¹⁴ To foreground how our lived experiences affect our engagement in, and perception of, the world, this chapter focuses on the photographer's body as a place: a corporal place that is continually perfused with lived experiences.

¹² Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Mathews (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 84. (Originally published in German as *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie*, 1983).

¹³ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴ John Wylie, "Landscape and Phenomenology," in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, ed. Peter Howard, Ian Thompson, and Emma Watterton (New York: Routledge, 2013), 56.

However, it is true that the spectators of a photograph cannot access the lived experiences of the photographer at the moment the photograph was taken. Instead, they can only observe the outcome of a photographic encounter, the photograph. That is why for philosopher Hubert Damisch a phenomenological reading of photography is fundamentally problematic. The hesitancy we have when a series of phenomena results in what we consider to be photographs, Damisch notes, “is a revealing indication of the difficulty of reflecting phenomenologically... on a *cultural* object.”¹⁵ Cognizant of this difficulty, this chapter does not aim to elicit the interpersonal experiences of photographers, nor to speculate their first lived-contacts with the world. Instead, it aims to highlight that photography begins when the phenomenological body of a photographer experiences the world, when the body as a place deals with its surrounding space, aspiring to reflect the given experiences in the photograph. By focusing on the photographer’s body as a place, I want to underline that photography is a medium of dynamic places, the first of which is the lived body of the photographer, a place that usually goes unnoticed. As art historian Hans Belting contends, in the triad of picture, medium, and body, it is the body which is often overlooked.¹⁶ As he puts it:

Photography although it remained confined to a framed visual field, fed on its opposition to the concept of painting. It was not a medium of the gaze, for it replaced the gaze with the camera, but rather a medium of the body, which itself produced its own shadow. This shadow was arrested, held still at the moment of exposure, and so soon as it took shape in the print, the *body* was lost.¹⁷

By looking at the way in which a lived body experiences the world, in my first approach towards reading photography vis-à-vis the concept of place, I ask: How can the photographer’s body be seen as a place and how does such a place interfere with space? To this end, this chapter will first discuss how the human body can be considered a place with bilateral features, that is, as being both physical and lived. Then, by deploying the work of two American landscape photographers, Ansel Adams and Gary Metz, this chapter exemplifies how such a place inhabits spaces in the phenomenal world. While both of these visual artists were working as landscape photographers, due to their different approaches towards their subject matter, their

¹⁵ Hubert Damisch, “Five Notes for Phenomenology of the Photographic Image,” in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (New York: Routledge, 2003), 87. (Italics in original).

¹⁶ Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of images*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (New Jersey: Princeton University, 2011), 15.

¹⁷ Ibid., 28. (My italics).

work reflect different methods of engaging with their surrounding space. Eventually, having foregrounded the characteristics of the photographer's body as a bilateral place, through engaging with philosopher Jacques Rancière's notion of aesthetics, this chapter suggests how such a place deals with space while retaining its duplicitous characteristics. In the following section, I begin my study by explaining how the photographer's body can be seen as a place that continually deals with its surrounding space, through discussing the act of walking as practiced by landscape photographers.

1.1. Going for a Walk with a Lived Body

One knew of places in ancient Greece where they led down into the underworld. Our walking existence likewise is a land which, at certain hidden points, leads down into the underworld.

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcade Project*

According to Tim Cresswell, spaces transform into places when they are invested with "human meaning," that is, when humans impart meanings to a portion of space, it becomes what they consider to be a place.¹⁸ However, not only do humans create places out of infinite space, humans themselves can be considered places in which meanings and images transpire. The provenance of images, Belting argues, is not to be found in the natural world but in the body of individuals.¹⁹ As he puts it, "the body is a place in the world, a locus in which images are generated and identified."²⁰ For Belting, it is through human bodies and the corporal activates thereof that their perceptual system makes sense of the world and, in turn, constitute images. Consequently, perception should be considered as "an operation by which we (our bodies) take in visual data and stimuli and analyse it. But the final outcome is not an analysis but a synthesis."²¹ As this statement suggests, in the process of taking in visual data from the world the human body is not merely a passive recipient. Instead, the human body is a place that

¹⁸ Tim Cresswell. "Place," *Royal Holloway*, University of London, Egham, UK (2009): 4.

¹⁹ I should mention that for Belting the distinction between images and pictures is a crucial one. Images, he proposes, "may live in the work of art, but does not necessarily coincide with the work of art", and pictures are where images "may reside." Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 2.

²⁰ Ibid., 37.

²¹ Here the word "synthesis" implies that human body is not a passive container where images are shaped, but it is an active partaker in the act of perception. Ibid., 38.

actively constructs and reconstructs the sensory data received from its surroundings. As Casey notes, “we must realize that the perceiver’s body is not a mere mechanism for registering but an active participant in the scene of perception.”²² By having direct contact with the world, the human body is, thus, not only an active participant in the process of perception, but also in charge of its unification.

According to philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, “we have to admit that the body is the organism whose states regulate our cognisance of the world. The unity of the perceptual field therefore must be a unity of bodily experience.”²³ For Whitehead, humans’ corporal activities are not only the primary source of perception, but also the means of their unification. As he states, “you are in a certain place perceiving things. Your perception takes place where you are, and is entirely dependent on how your body is functioning.”²⁴ One of the constructive instances whereby bodily functionality can become palpable is the way in which a human body orients itself in the world, thereby determining objects’ locations by means of its direction with respect to them. Although we usually think of orientation as a purely mental activity, disregarding our bodily intervention in this process, it is the human body mainly determines our very sense of direction. As Casey contends, “things are not oriented in and by themselves; they require our intervention to *become* oriented. Nor are they oriented by a purely mental operation: the *a priori* of orientation belongs to the body, not to the mind.”²⁵ For instance, a photographer can project orientation onto its surroundings by his/her mere bodily presence, because the human body is a living organism that can hold an upright position. As human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan underlines, one of the unique features of the lived body of humans is that it can stand up, allowing space to be constructed in its surroundings.²⁶ In an upright position, he writes,

man is ready to act. Space opens out before him and is immediately differentiable into front-back and right-left axes in conformity with the structure of his body... In deep sleep man continues to be influenced by his environments but loses his world; he is a body occupying space. Awake and upright he regains his world, and space is articulated in accordance with his corporeal schema.²⁷

²² Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 213.

²³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1953), 91.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁵ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 205. (Italics in original).

²⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 35.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

According to Tuan, the lived body that can hold an upright position immediately “imposes a schema on space,” which determines orientation according to the position of the body, and the person only notices this spatial coordination when he/she is lost.²⁸ Hence, by simply moving into an upright position, the photographer’s body instantaneously projects the coordinating schema of space onto its surroundings, thereby engaging in the perceptual world with, and through, a corporal activity.

Nevertheless, as Casey reminds us, a person’s body is not only a lived body (*Leib*) that can move and determine orientations, but it is also a physical body (*Körper*) that appears to be still and inert.²⁹ Seeing it as a physical body (*Körper*), the human body has its own interior mechanisms by which it senses itself, which are premised on the body’s kinaesthetic experiences. While we can habitually see the spatial movements of a lived body, we cannot observe kinaesthetic experiences and the way in which receptors in smaller body parts (e.g. muscles, tendons and joints) constitute our perceptions. As Casey defines it, kinaesthesia is “the inner experience of the moving or resting body as it feels itself moving or pausing at a given moment.”³⁰ That is to say, kinaesthetic experiences are the internal corporal movements of the human body whereby it constitutes itself, which are not visible in the way that spatial movements are. Although we can observe the exterior spatial movements of our body parts when they move, such as a moving leg, according to philosopher Edmund Husserl, the “holding sway” of our physical bodies is only felt indirectly in bodily movements.³¹ The imperceptible holding sway of the body is a clear instance of kinaesthetic experiences. As Husserl explains this point:

All such holding-sway occurs in modes of ‘movement,’ but the ‘I move’ in holding-sway is not in itself the spatial movement of a physical body, which as such could be perceived by everyone. My body—in particular, say the bodily part ‘hand’—moves in space; the activity of holding sway, ‘kinesthesia,’ which is embodied together with the body’s movement, is not itself in space as a spatial movement but is only *indirectly co-localized in that movement*.³²

²⁸ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 36.

²⁹ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 226.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

³¹ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. D. Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 217.

³² *Ibid.* (My italics).

Despite being a place that can actively project the coordinating structure of space by its mere presence, Husserl suggests that the human body has its own internally co-localized movements as well, i.e. the indiscernible activities through which a moving or resting body holds sway. Accordingly, when a lived body (*Leib*) moves in space it imposes the schema thereof through orientation, and, as also a physical body (*Körper*), it actively and internally co-localizes itself in that movement. For this reason, Casey puts forwards that the human body, being both a lived body that externally moves and a physical body that internally holds sway, “resists direct localization”; that is, the human body cannot be ever viewed as a location fixed in space.³³ The term location “refers to an absolute point in space with a specific set of coordinates and measurable distances from other locations. Location refers to ‘where’ of place,” states Cresswell.³⁴ The human body, which moves spatially as a lived body and kinaesthetically as a physical body, cannot be reduced to an absolute point in space. In other words, calling the human body a location is to announce its death, turning it into a null point in space, therefore disregarding both its spatial and kinaesthetic activities. Given that the body of a photographer is at the same time a lived and a physical body, it cannot be reduced to a location in space. Instead, a photographer’s body represents what Casey calls a “lived place.”³⁵ As he sets forth, lived places are

regarded not as the mere subdivision of an absolute space or as a function of relationships between coexistents but as loci of intimacy and particularity, endowed with *porous boundaries* and *open orientations*. They are experienced and known through customary bodily actions.³⁶

The human body, seen as a “lived place,” is not delimited to the spatial movements that can be perceived by the naked eye (such as a moving hand), nor to the interior kinaesthetic experiences of our body parts. Casey’s notion of lived place, instead, refers to the conflation of the lived body, which spatially moves in and through space, *and* the physical body, which is constantly co-localizing itself amongst other objects in that space. As Husserl suggests, the coalescence of the physical and the lived body in one place—or as Casey calls it, a lived

³³ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 223-223.

³⁴ Cresswell. “Place,” 1.

³⁵ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 233.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, (my italics)

place—can be best exemplified by the banal act of walking. In walking, Husserl points out, “my organism constitutes itself: by means of its relation to itself ... the kinaesthetic activities (of the physical body) and the spatial movement (of the lived body) stay in union by means of association.”³⁷ In walking, the physical body (*Körper*), which is in charge of inter-bodily experiences, and the lived body (*Leib*), which is in charge of bodily spatial movements, forge one coherent organism. That is why for Husserl walking becomes an oscillation between “keeping still” as the physical body and “keeping-in-operation” as the lived body.³⁸ By simply walking in the landscape, therefore, the photographer’s body is not just in it as a fixed location, but is actively constituting itself as a physical body and reconstituting itself as a lived body, thereby inhabiting its environment as a lived place.

As phenomenological philosopher Merleau-Ponty puts it, “our body is not primarily *in* space: it is of it,” referring to the fact that our body, or rather the body as a lived place, is not a fixed location in space.³⁹ As he further writes, “we must therefore avoid saying that our body is *in* space, or *in* time. It inhabits space and time... I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them.”⁴⁰ That is to say, for Merleau-Ponty inhabiting a space is not merely being present in it as a location, but being a part of that space as a lived place, marked by “porous boundaries and open orientations.” For photographers, the act of walking becomes, to a certain extent, a way of phenomenologically inhabiting the world through internal kinaesthetic and external spatial dynamism, not as locations, but as *lived places*. As anthropologist Tim Ingold notes: “It is through being inhabited, rather than through its assimilation to a formal design specification, that the world becomes a meaningful environment for people.”⁴¹ However, as Merleau-Ponty has underlined, inhabitation is not merely being *in* space and time, but includes and combines them with our bodies, just as humans inhabit their houses. Yet, even to be in a house is not to be fixed in it as a location, but, as Casey succinctly states, it is

to feel oneself to be in the centre of things without, however, necessarily being literally at the centre. The difference is that between a strictly geometric

³⁷ Edmund Husserl, “The World of the Living Present and the Constitution of the Surrounding World External to the Organism,” trans. F. A. Elliston and L. Langsdorf, in *Husserl: Shorter Works* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 248.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 250.

³⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 250.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 139-140. (Italics in original).

⁴¹ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skills* (London: Routledge, 2000), 173.

centeredness (being a location) and an inhabitational being-centred-in (a lived place) that is as thick as it is porous.⁴²

Through the practice of walking, photographers not only resist being reduced to a simple location, which has specific geometrical boundaries, but are also being inhabited as lived places in the world. Because, as I have discussed with regards to walking, the photographer's body when viewed as a lived place is continually in the active process of integration (as a lived body) and reintegration (as a physical body) into its surrounding space, thereby inhabiting the space with and through a body-place. In other words, being capable of spatially moving through and kinaesthetically co-localizing itself in the phenomenal world, the photographer's body is not in but *of* the space. Although it is true that having access to the inhabitational experiences of the body of a photographer is inconceivable, the way photographers choose to embody their lived experiences in photographs can be suggestive. Therefore, having argued that the photographer's body can be seen as a lived place, which oscillates between keeping still as a physical body *and* keeping-in-operation as a lived body, I will next look the work of two landscape photographers to examine the extent to which their work reflects the conflicting aspects of this lived place.

1.2 Inhabiting the World as a “Lived Place”

Landscape, in short, is not a totality that you or anyone else can look *at*, it is rather the world *in which* we stand.

Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*

Taken in 1942, *The Tetons and the Snake River* (fig.1) is one of the most widely acknowledged photographs of American landscape photographer Ansel Adams (1902-1984). Adams' fascination with the American landscape prompted him to walk to the remotest areas of the US to visualize the splendour of American nature. Describing Adams's landscape work, photography theorist John Szarkowski once wrote, “for Adams the natural landscape is not a fixed and solid sculpture but an insubstantial image, as transient as the light that continually

⁴² Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 293.

redefines it.”⁴³ Figure 2, however, shows a photograph from a less known landscape photographer, Gary Metz (1941-2010). This photograph is included in a landscape series entitled *Quaking Aspen: A Lyric Complaint*, which was published posthumously.⁴⁴ While Adams’s photograph presents a spectacular view of the landscape where all the visual elements are in a heavenly arrangement, Metz’s photograph foregrounds a more commonplace facet of the landscape.⁴⁵ Irrespective of their approaches towards the landscape, both images aim to convey the lived experiences of the photographers in their surrounding space. Referring to his work, Gary Metz notes that the concept of landscape is habitually conceived as a “pictorial one”, and that is why most of the American landscapes are “visited but not lived in.”⁴⁶ It is true that photographs cannot make tangible the lived experiences of landscape photographers, but to some extent, they can put the spectator in relation to those experiences. As sociologist Rob Shields rightly states, “photographic ‘shooting’ kills not the body but the life of things, leaving only representational carcasses.”⁴⁷ Evidently, photographs do not contain the phenomenological experiences of a lived body, and are merely “representational carcasses.” However, through looking at them, it appears possible that we can comprehend how photographers *choose* to convey their bodily and inhabitational experiences of being in the phenomenal world.

As I have already discussed, the human body as a lived place inhabits space not merely by being in it, but through the constant integration and reintegration of the body with its environs, which does not necessarily originate from a fixed standpoint that can be localized. This is because the human body as a lived place constantly oscillates between keeping still and keeping-in-operation, and therefore it resists becoming a fixed location. In Adams’ landscape,

⁴³ John Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Graphic Society, 1976), 144.

⁴⁴ Since this photograph does not have a title, henceforth I will refer to it as Metz’s photograph throughout the paper. *Quaking Aspen: A Lyric Complaint*, ed. Salvatore Mancini and Aalen Matenick (New York: Shadow Imaging, 2012), np.

⁴⁵ Ansel Adams is putatively associated with the so-called West Coast School, along with Wynn Bullock, Minor White, and Paul Caponigro. But Gary Metz’s works, although not being officially acknowledged, fall under the aesthetics of New Topographics photographers, including Robert Adams, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, etc. The main difference between these two schools in landscape photography is the transition from “the sublime” to “the banal” landscape. Toby Jurvoics, “Same as it Ever Was: Re-reading New Topographics”, in *Reframing the New Topographics*, ed. G. Foster-Rice (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2013), 1.

⁴⁶ Gary Metz, “The Landscape as a Photograph,” In *Quaking Aspen: A Lyric Complaint*, ed. Salvatore Mancini and Aalen Matenick (New York: Shadow Imaging, 2012), 114.

⁴⁷ Rob Shields, “A Guide to Urban Representation and What to Do About It: Alternative Traditions of Urban Theory,” in *Re-Presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the Twenty-First Century Metropolis*, ed King, A.D. (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 230.

the photograph's central perspective features a dazzling river, a lush forest, and a majestic mountain in the background, a scenery wherein all the visual components are in divine congruency with each other. By positing the spectator at a bird's eye vantage point, Adams offers a localized landscape where the spectator is obliged to look at the landscape in its totality. However, in a landscape phenomenology, Wylie points out, "the landscape ceases to define a way of seeing, an epistemological standpoint, and instead becomes potentially expressive of being-in-the-world itself," which is "a milieu of engagement and involvement."⁴⁸ That is, from a phenomenological perspective one cannot look *at* the landscape from a fixed stance, since a lived body is never fixed as a location in the landscape, but inhabits it through constant corporal involvements. In other words, in Adams's photograph we can anticipate that the photographer is in the centre of things in the landscape, whereas Casey suggests that inhabitation is not enacted through a "strictly geometric centeredness," but in an "inhabitational being-centred-in" which is "as thick as it is porous."⁴⁹

Contrary to Adams' landscape, Metz's photograph indicates a landscape in which everything is out of place, as if it has just been wreaked to ruins by a thunderstorm. In the foreground, the photograph features scattered rubble and debris lying on the ground below a damaged wooden façade and a single tree. Behind the wooden façade lies a residence on the left-hand side, and in the background one can observe the flattened piece of the mountain constituting a small part within the frame. In short, in Metz's landscape nothing seems to be *in situ* within the photographic frame. However, the damaged wooden figure resembles the façade of a house that has been cut into two pieces, propped up by a wooden stick placed in the middle of the frame. As philosopher Gaston Bachelard puts forward, the house is the quintessential example of bodily inhabitation; it is "one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind."⁵⁰ Through the lived experiences of human bodies with the houses they are born in, Bachelard suggests, the first houses of humans are somewhat embedded in their bodies as "a group of organic habits."⁵¹ As he puts it:

The house we were born in has engraved within us the hierarchy of the various functions of inhabiting. We are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that

⁴⁸ John Wylie, *Landscape: Key Ideas in Geography* (London: Routledge, 2007), 149.

⁴⁹ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 293.

⁵⁰ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press Book, 1994), 6. (Originally published in French in 1958).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

particular house, and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme.⁵²

For Bachelard, the first house of every human being is always the primary source of inhabitation, because it is where the lived experiences of the human body are enacted in space for the first time. Introducing his landscape photographs, Gary Metz writes, “I want the work to be a metaphor of all inhabited places,” the first of which, according to Bachelard, is the house we are born in.⁵³ Even though there cannot be any access to the inhabitational experiences of the photographer when the photo was taken, such experiences can be metaphorically conveyed through photographs. Figuratively, the broken wooden façade in the photo reflects the formation of a house, the very place where humans’ inhabitational experiences of being in the world originate. Similar to the inhabitation of a lived place, which is as thick as it is porous, the broken wooden house can serve as a visual metaphor of bodily inhabitations, since they are both as unfinished as they are porous in their surrounding space. Inhabitation, Bachelard proposes, is not a matter of the size of a dwelling, nor is it necessarily to be in a house guarded from the outside world, but it is to feel “an intensity of being, the intensity of a being evolving in a vast perspective of intimate immensity,” that is, it is to feel inhabited *from within* the body through its “intimate immensity.”⁵⁴ In other words, for Bachelard, to inhabit a place is not to be limited to its physical boundaries nor to be located in it, but rather, inhabitation is marked by the degree of intimacy and familiarity that human beings feel towards places within their bodies; towards places that are not necessarily constructed fully, since our lived bodies are never finished per se, but are in a constant process of integration and reintegration with their surrounding space. As Ingold notes, in a phenomenological understanding the landscape “is never complete: neither ‘built’ nor ‘unbuilt’, it is perpetually under construction.”⁵⁵ Accordingly, from a phenomenological perspective, one cannot inhabit the landscape by simply being *in* it, but, to use Merleau-Ponty’s terms, one should be *of* the landscape in order to inhabit it.

As Casey explains, for Bachelard “the ‘in’ ingredient in inhabitation is a fluid focus, one that is in constant communication with the ‘out’: for instance, by means of doors and windows,

⁵² Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 15.

⁵³ Gary Metz, “Quaking Space: Populous Tremuloides,” in *Quaking Aspen: A Lyric Complaint* (New York: Fordham University Art collections, 2014), 15.

⁵⁴ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 193.

⁵⁵ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 199.

whereby the outside world becomes part of the being of within.”⁵⁶ In the same vein, Metz’s wrecked house makes manifest the fact that one cannot simply be in it without being a part of the outside world. It shows a house that only offers inhabitation through porosity and inclusion, mirroring the inhabitation of the lived place that is continually under construction and reconstruction in its surrounding space. In other words, while Metz’s house suggests the possibility of a landscape that resonates with the phenomenological operations of the human body, Adams’ transcendental view embodies a landscape that is finished in and of itself. This is mainly because Adams was a photographer who would pre-visualize the final landscape he wanted to appear in his photographs, and therefore always had an expectation regarding the final work. As media theorist Sean Cubitt remarks, Ansel Adams

is working not only with a memory (of the landscape) but with an expectation concerning what the final project should look like... his field work is undertaken in the expectation of finding the landscape that is *already there in imagination*. His darkroom practice is not only a revision of the exception he brought to the landscape but also a prevision of the prints that as yet do not exist.⁵⁷

As Adams famously said, “you don’t take a photograph, you make it”, since for him a landscape photograph results from the pre-visualization thereof, a prevision that is always before him in the imagination.⁵⁸ Thus, instead of reflecting the inhabitational experiences of the photographer’s body as a lived place, Adams’ photograph foregrounds a previsioned and thus *uninhabited landscape* conjured up from Adams’ transcendental imagination. Nevertheless, as Belting argues, “imagination is a corporal activity” as well, but in the manner of “leaving the body” and not through the body.⁵⁹ For instance, by means of imagination Chinese poets could construct utopic and “imaginary places” in their literature, “places to which one could journey, but not places one could live.”⁶⁰ Similarly, Adams’ transcendental

⁵⁶ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 293.

⁵⁷ Sean Cubitt, *The Practice of Light: A Genealogy of Visual Technologies from Prints to Pixels* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2014), 85-86.

⁵⁸ As Adams famously said, while reaching a landscape “simply look with perceptive eyes at the world around you, and trust to your own reactions and convictions. Ask yourself: Does this subject move me to feel, think and dream? Can I *visualize* a print - my own personal statement of what I feel and want to convey - from *the subject before me*”. As this statement suggests, for Adams the landscape is always in front of him as a picture and in his imagination as a finalized print, not as something that can be perceived phenomenologically through the body. Cited in, Harvey V. Fondiller, *The Best of Popular Photography* (New York :Watson-Guptill, 1980), 280.

⁵⁹ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 60.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

view of nature indicates a landscape whose divine dispositions only allow an imaginary inhabitation, i.e. a journey in the mind, and not a landscape that reflects the inhabitational experiences of a phenomenological body. As Belting further writes, Chinese poets “went in search of uninhabited nature ... they contemplated nature from a distance as ‘landscape’, that is, as an image,” and by doing so, they superimposed a cultural image of the landscape onto a real geographical site.⁶¹ Adams’ landscape photograph, too, reflects the cultural image of the landscape, a view of an uninhabited countryside, resulting from the projection of an image of the landscape onto a real geographical site.

As cultural geographer David Crouch puts forward, although landscape is usually regarded as the countryside, it also includes “the assemblage of landforms, concrete shapes, fields, gutters, designed spaces and serendipitous collection of things.”⁶² In other words, Crouch suggests that the landscape should not be viewed as a way of seeing, as a cultural image, or as a perspective projected onto the world. Rather, it is an encounter with the materiality of the world as an assemblage of things. As Tuan comments, the main “curiosity about places is part of a general curiosity about *things*, part of the need to label experiences so that they have a greater degree of permanence and fit into some conceptual scheme.”⁶³ By identifying a view, scenery, or countryside as landscape, humans make intelligible and thus conceptualise their confrontational experiences with the world, disregarding that their lived body is also a thing in the phenomenal world. As Merleau-Ponty points out, within a phenomenological scheme the “body is a thing among things; it is caught up in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing.”⁶⁴ Although humans’ spatial movements suggest that their bodies are always fluid in space, thereby dominating it, as physical bodies humans also need to be located along with other objects in the world; however, not necessarily in an anthropocentric location. According to Tuan, “we more readily assume a god-like position, looking at the earth from above, than from the perspective of another mortal living on the same level as ourselves.”⁶⁵ Commenting on humans’ inclination to think of themselves in a superior position when seeing the world,

⁶¹ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 47.

⁶² David Crouch, “Landscape, Performance, and Performativity,” in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, ed. Peter Howard, Ian Thompson, and Emma Waterton (London & New York: Routledge, 2013), 123.

⁶³ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 29.

⁶⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie et al., trans. William Cobb (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 163.

⁶⁵ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 28.

Merleau-Ponty proposes that all spatial propositions in human language are essentially anthropocentric. He writes:

When I say that an object is *on* a table, I always mentally put myself either in the table or in the object, and I apply to them a category which theoretically fits the relationship of my body to external objects. Stripped of this anthropological association, the world *on* is indistinguishable from the world ‘under’ or the world ‘beside’.⁶⁶

That is to say, assured of their anthropocentric ascendancy, humans utilize spatial propositions in relation to the ways their bodies are situated or could be mentally situated towards objects. For instance, people tend to say that the book is *on* the table and not the table is *under* the book, since the former corresponds better to their bodily and mental situations. On the one hand, by choosing a ground level view, Gary Metz has abstained from positing his body in a god-like vantage point, thus implying an elevated location for the photographer’s body from which a cultural image of the landscape can be projected. On the other hand, through paying non-hierarchical attention to the material world, Metz has, to a certain extent, undermined spatial propositions that can be used to describe a traditional landscape photograph.⁶⁷ Strictly speaking, due to the visual equilibrium and the absence of an elevated perspective, the constitutive materials in the photograph do not gain any superiority in relation to one another, nor are they situated according to the anthropocentric location of the photographer’s body. Instead, they are an encountered collection of things, and not a previsioned idea of the landscape projected onto the world. As critic Leo Stein once put it, “things are what we *encounter*, ideas are what we *project*.”⁶⁸ While Adams’ photograph features a cultural idea of the landscape projected onto an uninhabited countryside, Metz’ photograph offers a landscape constituted of the body’s encounter with an assemblage of things, reflecting that the body is, too, a thing among things. As theorist Bill Brown describes,

⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 116. (Italics in original).

⁶⁷ Contrary to Adams’ photograph that, due to the central and elevated perspective, one can say that the mountain is *on* the earth, in Metz’ photograph, due to the equal attention to the natural and man-made materiality of the world, none of the photographed objects gain superiority over the other ones. For instance, due to the flattened and democratic view in the photo, one could even say that the tree in the center is *on* the mountain in the background.

⁶⁸ Leo Stein, *The A-B-C of Aesthetics* (New York: 1927), 44 .Cited in Bill Brown, “Thing Theory”, *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1, Things (2001): 3.

the word things tend to “index a certain limit or liminality, to hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable.”⁶⁹ Being a thing among things, or a physical place in the world, for the photographer’s body the landscape cannot be a predefined image, idea or a way of seeing, but an unnameable encounter with the materiality of the world. According to Crouch, “the materiality of our surroundings and the way in and through which we relate to them [and] with them, can be active in our ‘holding on’ and ‘going further.’”⁷⁰ In light of this, he asserts that “landscape resonates a capacity of belonging, disorientation and disruption. Landscape is not perspective and horizon.”⁷¹ Therefore, for the photographer’s body seen as a lived place, which needs to hold on as a physical body (*Körper*) and go further as a lived body (*Leib*), landscape is not something to project, but to encounter as a conglomerate of things in the phenomenal world.

At this point, having discussed how a lived place inhabits space not by simply being in it but by being *of* the space, and not by being in the centre of things but by being a *thing* among things in the phenomenal world, I will next look further into the bilateral aspects of this concept. As I have already discussed, Casey’s understanding of a lived place refers to the conflation of the lived body, which actively meanders through space, with the physical body, which appears to be passively located among other objects in the world. While by moving through space the lived body appears to be active in it, by constantly co-localizing itself as a physical body, it appears to be spatially passive in its environs. In the following section, in order to shed more light on the conflicting aspects of a lived place, both as an active lived and seemingly passive physical body in space, I will deploy philosopher Jacques Rancière’s concept of aesthetics. In so doing, I will discuss how the encounter of a lived place in the world can be both active and passive, akin to the ways in which the bilateral body operates in space through a concurrent integration and reintegration, construction and reconstruction, belonging and disruption.

1.3 Confrontational Aesthetics of a “Lived Place”

The sentence-image reins in the power of
the great parataxis and stands in the way of

⁶⁹ Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1, Things (2001): 5.

⁷⁰ Crouch, “Landscape, Performance,” 122.

⁷¹ Ibid., 123.

its vanishing into schizophrenia and consensus.

Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*

As Rancière has proposed, “photography is exemplarily an art of aesthetic ideas,” since it can provide a way to merge the two incongruent elements of arts. That is, it combines “the intentional production of art,” which implies the active participation of the photographer, with “the sensible experience of beauty,” which implies the passivity of the photographer in a photographic act.⁷² For him, the greatest achievement of the photographic medium is that it provided a way with which “artistic purity” and “aesthetic impurity” could link together.⁷³ While “artistic purity” suggests the photographer merely functions as a vehicle of communicating the experience of beauty from the world, as if directly and unaffectedly, “aesthetic impurity” suggests that the intentionality of the photographer always alters and influences the content of this communication. For Rancière, the medium of photography has the capacity of merging these two seemingly incompatible elements. In other words, he argues that photography has offered us a means whereby the intentionality of an artist, or “aesthetic impurity”, can be aligned with the direct experience of beauty in the world, or “artistic purity”. According to him, the key to this troublesome alignment can be found in the “inactivity” of photographers towards the subject matter, that is, “the suspension of the opposition between activity and passivity.”⁷⁴ A photographer who adopts an inactive approach is neither actively constituting the subject matter with a set of predefined ideas thereof, nor is completely passive in a photographic experience. Instead, an inactive approach towards the subject matter results in “a pure instance of suspension,” established in “the aesthetic regime” that liberates the arts from the hierarchy of the subject matter.⁷⁵

According to Rancière, the aesthetic regime departs from the mimetic barrier that “distinguished ways of doing and making,” which had caused the hierarchical order of the subject matter. Because, by means of classifying different tiers and ranking them accordingly, the mimetic principle “defines *proper* ways of doing and making as well as means of assessing imitations.”⁷⁶ To elaborate, within the aesthetic regime there cannot be a proper image of the

⁷² Jacques Rancière, “Notes on the Photographic Image,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. N. Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge, 2013), 95.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 94.

⁷⁵ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2011), 23-24.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 22-23. (My italics)

landscape based on which other landscape images can be forged and evaluated; that is, the landscape photograph cannot be a copy assessed with regard to its model. Having departed from the mimetic principle, in the aesthetic regime the landscape cannot be an image that can be sublimated and refined in order to resemble its original model. Alternatively, the aesthetic regime “simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself,” sates Rancière.⁷⁷ In other words, within the aesthetic regime there cannot be a predetermined form, image, or conception with which the subject matter—e.g. the landscape—can be constituted, classified and eventually evaluated. As Rancière explains, it is because

in the aesthetic regime, artistic phenomena are identified by their adherence to a specific regime of the sensible, which is extricated from its ordinary connection and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of *a form of thought that has become foreign to itself*: a product identical with something not produced.⁷⁸

That is to say, instead of utilizing a set of pre-defined forms to constitute the subject matter, the aesthetic regime alienates the conventional relations between forms, and creates a subject matter that is “foreign to itself”—e.g. it creates a landscape that does not correspond to the common conceptions of the landscape. Consequently, within the framework of the aesthetic regime, writes Rancière, “the ordinary becomes beautiful as a trace of the true. And the ordinary becomes a trace of the true if it is torn from its obviousness.”⁷⁹ Strictly speaking, the aesthetic regime does not aim at making the unknown known for the spectator, as in the case of Adams’ photograph. Instead, by alienating the subject matter, the aesthetic regime renders the familiar world uncanny and foreign to itself. In the aesthetic regime, as Rancière succinctly puts it: “the anonymous became the subject matter of art that the act of recording such a subject matter can be an art.”⁸⁰ Thus, within the framework of the aesthetic regime, there cannot be a landscape that can be copied or envisaged prior to a photographic experience or refined and sublimated after a photographic shooting. Instead, the landscape can only be confronted as an assemblage of things that are foreign to themselves. To put it differently, under the light of the aesthetic regime, a photographer confronts his/her subject matter, when it is torn away from its

⁷⁷ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 23.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 22. (My italics)

⁷⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 32.

obviousness, when it is stripped of its conventions, when it has become the anonymous. Consequently, in this situation the photographer neither actively creates an imitation of the landscape from imagination, nor passively passes by it. Instead, as Rancière would say, the photographer *inactively* confronts the landscape as “a product identical with something not produced,” invented out of the suspension between activity and passivity. According to philosopher Jacques Derrida, the uncertainty about the active or passive intervention of the photographer in the subject matter is rooted in the bifurcated denotations of the word “invention.” As he explains:

The photographic experience is situated right at the internal edge of a division that divides the two senses of the concept of invention: *on the one hand*, invention as a *discovery* or a revelation of what is already there... *on the other hand*, invention as a technical intervention, as the *production* of a new technical apparatus that constitutes the other instead of simply receiving him.⁸¹

Nevertheless, for Derrida, a photographic experience cannot be reduced to simply discovering what is already there, nor to the constitution of the subject matter from a productive imagination. Taking landscape as the subject matter, a photographic experience cannot be limited to confronting the landscape and capturing it as it is (a discovery), nor can it be the creation of a landscape that does not exist in front of the camera (a production). Instead, as Derrida notes, in a photographic experience “the two senses of invention constantly parasite off one another.”⁸² That is to say, a photographic experience vacillates between a complete passivity towards the subject matter (a discovery) and an active intervention in establishing the subject matter from imagination (a production). It takes place at the suspension of both. For Rancière, likewise, this situation refers to the inactive confrontation of the anonymous in the aesthetic state. To illustrate this point, while Adams’ photograph is susceptible to becoming a production shaped from imagination, Metz’s photograph, by confronting a collection of things as the landscape, has confronted the subject matter as the anonymous. In other words, Metz has not produced a landscape nor discovered one, but rather montaged a landscape that is foreign

⁸¹ Jacques Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature: A Conversation on Photography*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 43. (Italics in original, except for the words “production” and “discovery”). (Originally published in German in 2000 under the title “*Die Photographie als Kopie, Archiv und Signatur*” in *Theorie der Fotografie IV*, 1980-1995).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 44.

to itself. As Rancière defines it, montage is “a measure of that which is measureless or as the disciplining of chaos.”⁸³ That is, montage is the very juxtaposition of the chaotic world into a new order.

In Rancière’s understanding of aesthetics, montage, as a means of remaining at the boundary of activity and passivity, manifests itself best in the idea of the “sentence-image.” According to him, the “sentence-image” is not only the conflation of “a verbal sequence and a visual form,” but can also be expressed in terms of “the relationship between the said and unsaid in a photograph.”⁸⁴ For Rancière, the sentence-image addresses the very link by which the “disruptive” power of art can be sustained without falling into “schizophrenia or consensus.”⁸⁵ That is to say, the sentence-image is the suspension through which a work of art retains its disruptive forces while remaining passive; it is as if the sentence-image stitches passivity onto the explosive forces of art, thereby sustaining activity in a passive mode. Rancière epitomises the suspension of passivity and activity in the sentence-image by describing Harpo, the mute character from one of Marx Brothers movies. As he explains:

At the beginning of *A Night in Casablanca*, a policeman looks with a suspicious air at the strange behaviour of Harpo, who is motionless with his hand against a wall. He asks him to move on. With a shake of the head, Harpo indicates that he cannot. The policeman then observes ironically that perhaps Harpo wants him to think that he is holding up the wall. With a nod, Harpo indicates that that is indeed the case. Furious that the mute should make fun of him in this way, the policeman drags Harpo away from his post. And sure enough, the wall collapses with a great crash. This gag of the dumb man propping up the wall is an utterly apt parable for making us feel the power of the sentence image, which separates the *everything hangs together* of art from *everything merges* of explosive madness or consensual idiocy.⁸⁶

By holding up the wall, the character of Harpo represents the passive but active force of the sentence-image, highlighting its inactive intervention in the act. Although he seems to be passive in the scene, the entire construction of the wall is premised upon his inconspicuous

⁸³Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. G. Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 48.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 47. (Italics in original).

activity. Returning to Metz's photograph, by looking closely at the centre of the photograph, one can see that the entire uniformity of the frame is hinged upon the wooden stick that is propping up the wooden façade. At this point, one can say that the wooden stick in Metz's photograph resembles Harpo's function in the movie: by holding up the walls, they both sustain the disruptive forces through their inactivity, manifesting how activity can be retained within passivity. This suspension, which is visually reflected in Metz's photograph, resonates with the concurrent passive and active operations of a lived place. In that, as I have shown before, the photographer's body as a lived place is comprised of porous boundaries and open orientations, constantly oscillating between keeping still and keeping-in-operation. It is simultaneously a lived body that can dominate its surrounding space through orientation *and* a physical body that is dominated by the space that it is a part. While the former suggests that it can determine the coordinating scheme of space in an activity, the latter suggests that it also needs to co-localize itself in space in a passivity. Given its bilateral facets, therefore, the photographer's body features a corporal place held in abeyance between active and passive intervention in its circumambient space: a lived place that is unremittingly stitching passivity to its active spatial presence. In other words, being simultaneously a physical body (*Körper*) that needs to hold together kinaesthetically and a lived body (*Leib*) that can go further spatially, a lived place is both orientative and disruptive, still and moving, static and dynamic, passive and active: it is *inactive*.

Having argued that the photographer's body is a lived place comprised of imperceptible internal and perceptible spatial experiences that operate together in an inactive mode, I will next shift my focus to another place in the act of photography. After all, the photographer's body is not a seismograph that directly receives waves from the world, but it sees the world indirectly through the camera, which has its own way of dealing with space. As Cubitt notes, "the seismograph describes the way the world points at an instrument, the photograph at the way we point an instrument at the world. Both rely on the distance between subject and object, but with different weighing and a different direction."⁸⁷ In other words, the photographic experience cannot be reduced to what Derrida calls a "discovery" of the other by simply receiving it, but is always on the verge of becoming a "production."⁸⁸ That is why Flusser describes photographers as "functionaries" whose existences are restricted to their apparatuses.⁸⁹ In the following section, therefore, I will zoom out from the position of the

⁸⁷ Cubitt, *The Practice of Light*, 94.

⁸⁸ Derrida, *Copy Archive, Signature*, 43.

⁸⁹ Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy*, 27.

photographer as a lived place to the second partaker of the photographic encounter, the camera, in order to examine how this mechanical place deals with space.