Place: Towards a Geophilosophy of Photography

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—Chapter 2—

The Camera: A Place That Spatializes Time and Temporalizes Space

> Photography is a monster with two subjects, with a double body (human) and a single, cavernous head whose one eye blinks on and off.
> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*

In the previous chapter, I looked at how the body of a photographer can be considered a lived place replete with internal and external dynamisms, and how such a corporal place inactively deals with space. But, as Derrida has reminded us, the act of photography cannot be simply reduced to a mere discovery of what is out there, as if unaffected, since it also implies the intervention of the camera in the act. Although there are photographs that are produced in the absence of the camera, such as "cameraless photographs", photographic production is habitually undertaken with a mechanical apparatus, which brings it close to becoming a production.[90] In debates centred around the history of photography, Damisch notes that even the medium's conception is usually referred to as a discovery, whereas the photographic image that the early photographers were seeking to attain was "in no sense naturally given."[91] Here, Damisch highlights the fact that the camera should not be regarded as a neutral element in a photographic act, since photographic images are never naturally given, but mechanically constructed. In this chapter, in order to show that the camera is not neutral in a photographic act, I will discuss how it interferes with the space at which it is pointed, thereby affecting the possible result of a photographic encounter, i.e. the photograph.

As I have previously shown, the photographer's body can interfere in space by its mere corporal presence, by projecting its spatial schema and thus becoming a part of its surrounding space. The camera, too, engages with space, but through a different mode of involvement. That is, it neutralizes the space in between itself and the photographed subject, and in turn, forever preserves that space in photographs. As leading geographer Nigel Thrift points out, seemingly

[90] The so-called "cameraless photography" refers to the practice of manipulating light-sensitive photographic papers with only chemical materials and without using a camera, thus producing photographic images without the use of a camera. Therefore, it is not always true that the camera is a necessary element in the process of image production, but it is undoubtedly the camera that proclaims the photographic image is never discovered in the world, in the same way an archaeologist discovers an artefact from the past.
[91] Damisch, "Notes for Phenomenology," 88.

all the theorists of place seem to agree that the idea of "place consists of particular rhythms of being that confirms and naturalizes the existence of certain spaces."[92] In a photographic act, the camera can be deemed as a place that, by aiming at and capturing a subject in the world, neutralizes the space to which it is exposed, thereby eternalizing this in-between space in the photograph. However, in a photographic shooting the camera does not only aim at space, but deals with time as well.

As cultural critic Susan Sontag pointed out in her work, *On Photography*, the photographic camera is a "predatory weapon," which is as "automated as possible, ready to spring."[93] For Sontag, the predatory function of the camera would not result in the literal death of the photographed subject, but in the spatiotemporal transgression of the subject's territory, indicating how the camera deals with space and time. That is why she states, "to take a photograph is to participate in another person's mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by *slicing out* this moment and freezing it."[94] For Sontag, the photographic camera influences the outcome of a photographic encounter precisely by slicing out a segment of space and a moment in time, i.e. by its spatial and temporal interventions in the act. In this chapter, given the importance of the way in which the camera deals with space and time, I will shift my focus from the role of the photographer to that of the camera to examine the spatiotemporal aspects of this mechanical place. To do this, in this chapter I will firstly foreground how the camera deals with space and time by discussing how different theorists have reflected upon this matter. Then, by examining a photograph that magnifies the intervention of the camera, I will discuss how the optical device confers a temporal dimension to the space in front of its lens. Lastly, by deploying Roland Barthes' and Jacques Derrida's conception of time in photography, I will argue how the camera grants a spatial dimension to the time at which the photograph is taken.

After all photographers do not perceive the world directly through their bodies, but they see the world with the aid of the camera, which has its own obscurities, complexities, and contingencies. According to Flusser, "the world is purely a pretext for the realization of camera possibilities" and "no photographer, not even the totality of all photographs, can entirely get to the bottom of what a correctly programmed camera is up to. It is a black box."[95] In the following section, I will begin my analysis of the camera by explaining the active role it plays in engaging

[92] Nigel Thrift, "Space: The Fundamental Stuff of Geography," in *Key concepts in Geography*, ed. Nicholas J. Clifford, et al, 2nd edition (Trowbridge: Sage, 2009), 102.
[93] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Book, 1977), 15. (My italics).
[94] Ibid.,15.
[95] Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy,* 26-27.

with space and time, not with an aim to get to the bottom of it, but to indicate the extent to which a photographic act is hinged upon this black box of photography.

2.1 Seeing through the Camera

> With the help of a new optical device one could finally see sight, one could not only view the natural landscape, the city, the bridge and the abyss, but could view viewing.
> Jacques Derrida, *The Principle of Reason*

In his now classic essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image", published in *What is Cinema* between 1965 and 1985, film theorist André Bazin acknowledged the agency of the camera in a photographic act.[96] For him, the authenticity of photography in comparison with painting lies in its "objective character," referring to the way in which a camera can apparently mechanically reproduce reality in an accurate way.[97] As he argued, the advent of photography shows that "between the originating object and its reproduction, there intervenes only the instrumentality of a *nonliving agent*. For the first time the image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man."[98] In this essay, Bazin celebrated the exactitude of mechanical reproduction in photography, arguing that it not only granted a credibility to the camera that was absent in the other media, but it also manifested the camera's agency: the fact that photography's realism was fundamentally hinged upon the mechanical functionality and existence of the camera in a photographic act.

Moreover, Bazin proposed that the automaticity of photographic production compelled the viewer to accept that the photographed subject assuredly existed in time and space. In Bazin's terms, by some kind of "embalmment" or "mummification" of time and space, the camera could immortalize them in photographs as if by moulding them, keeping them

[96] André Bazin, "Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967). (Originally published in French under the title *Qu'est-ce que le cinema ?*, in four volumes between 1958-1965).
[97] Ibid.,13. Bazin's translator mentions that in this phrase Bazin referred to both meanings of "objective" as the lens of a camera and the mechanical character of photography, a nuance that is lost in English translation.
[98] Ibid.

unaffected from future alterations.[99] Reforming the mould argument, philosopher Stanley Cavell notes, the camera cannot function literally as a physical mould, instead it is a "mould-machine, not the mould itself. Photographs are not hand-made: they are manufactured."[100] By naming the camera a "mould-machine," Cavell underlines that photography, unlike painting, does not require the direct engagement nor the presence of the photographer; because, it is a machine that can manufacture photographs even in the absence of a human agent. As Bazin famously argued, "while all arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence."[101] For Bazin, the automaticity of the camera's engagement with time and space fashioned a new way of seeing, which not only differed from the old media, but also conferred an advantage to photography. Accordingly, he claimed that "photography contributes *something* to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for it."[102] That is to say, through its optical and mechanical contributions to the arts, Bazin proposed that the photographic camera could unveil a new way of seeing the world that the other arts, such as painting, were only trying to imitate.

However, philosopher Walter Benjamin had given particular attention to the optical contribution of photography long before Bazin, by coining the term the optical unconscious in 1931. Aligning the optical advancement of photography with the discovery of the unconscious in psychoanalysis, Benjamin argued that the camera through "stop motion" and "enlargement" could display spaces that were hitherto impossible to see with the naked eye. He exemplified the optical unconscious of the camera with an example of a person's walking as follows:

> It is another nature that speaks to the camera than to the eye: other in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious. Whereas it is a commonplace that, for example, we have some idea what is involved in the act of walking, if only in general terms, we have no idea at all what happens during the fraction of a second when a person steps out.[103]

[99] Bazin, "the Photographic Image," 14-15.
[100] Cavell, Stanley. *The world viewed: Reflections on the ontology of film* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), 20.
[101] Bazin, "the Photographic Image," 7. (My italics)
[102] Ibid., 9.
[103] Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography," in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, Trans. Jephoctt E. and Shorter K. (London: Lowe and Brydone, 1979), 243. (Originally published in German in 1931under the title *Kleine Geschichte der Photographie*).

As Benjamin notes, by means of slow motion the mechanical eye of the camera enabled humans to see the spatial distance between one's footsteps for the first time, the spatial arrangement that was not previously observable to the naked eye. Benjamin's instance of the optical unconscious could substantiate Bazin's claim that photography liberated painting "from its obsession with realism," by featuring what the naked eye could not see.[104] Because, having the aid of a mechanical device at its disposal, photography could offer new ways of embodying reality, which fundamentally altered the old realism of painting. The main reason for this shift in the perception of reality stems from the fact that painters and photographers have essentially different methods of engagement with space. Benjamin exemplifies this difference in his seminal article "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction," by drawing an interesting comparison between the cameraman as a surgeon and the painter as a magician. He contends that while the painter (as magician) maintains a natural distance from reality, "the cameraman (as surgeon) penetrates deeply into its web."[105] In Benjamin's example, it is as if the photographer—like a surgeon who dissects a patient—utilizes the camera as a knife to cut through space and time in order to preserve a piece of them in photographs.

Similar to Benjamin's example, film critic Christian Metz elaborates on the tool-like function of cameras by stating that cameras can "striptease the space" at which they are pointed, referring to the way cameras can reveal a reality that cannot be seen with the naked eye.[106] For Metz, whereas film induces a "stream of temporality where nothing can be *kept*," the power of photography lies precisely in its "silence and immobility" through which it can preserve time and space.[107] In other words, thanks to the mechanical aid of cameras, photography can preserve time and space by, in a sense, slicing up a piece of them in photographs. In all photographs, Metz states, "we have this same act of *cutting off* a piece of space and time, of keeping it unchanged while the world around continues to change."[108] Even though the metaphor of cutting off a piece of space or, as Sontag put it, slicing out a moment in time seems to account for how cameras function, it is undeniable that cameras are neither knives nor surgical razors that can physically interfere with space and time. That means, although cameras

[104] Bazin, "the Photographic image." 12.
[105] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 233. (Originally published in German in 1935 under the title *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner Technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*).
[106] Christain Metz, "Photography and Fetish," in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (New York: Routledge, 2003), 143.
[107] Ibid., 140-141. (Italics in original).
[108] Ibid., 141. (My italics).

seem to fall under the category of tools, the way they engage with space and time is more intricate than that of tools.

As Flusser contends, cameras should not be reduced to the category of tools (e.g. a needle or a knife that can change the form of an object), nor are they to be regarded as machines, which result from the addition of technical advancements to the empirical functions of tools. Instead, cameras should be subsumed under the category of apparatus.[109] Here, the crucial point is that cameras do not literally slice away or cut off a piece of what they are exposed to, but they alter the signification process of the world by the way they engage with time and space. As Flusser puts it, "tools and machines work by tearing objects from the natural world and informing them, i.e. changing the world. But apparatuses do not work in that sense. Their intention is not to change the world but to change the meaning of the world."[110] Flusser not only grants agency to the camera, as Bazin did by calling it a non-living agent, but more notably, he argues that the "automaticity" of the camera can exceed the intention of humans.[111] Thus, for Flusser the camera becomes capable of altering the meaning of the world according to its own intentionality, resulting from its pure automaticity as an apparatus. That is why he argues that photographers should fight against the automaticity of the camera, because it is a "plaything," otherwise they become like "functionaries" who "control a game over which they have no competence."[112] That is, regardless of the photographer's intention, Flusser proposes that the automation of an apparatus may lead to unforeseen conditions that may not be entirely anticipated by the photographer.

Furthermore, Flusser draws attention to the etymology of the word apparatus. As he notes, alongside the Latin verb *apparare*, which the noun apparatus is derived from, exists the verb *praeparare*, which means to prepare. Consequently, he submits that an apparatus "would be a thing that *lies in wait* or in readiness for something, and 'preparatus' would be a thing that waits patiently for something."[113] As Flusser's etymological analogy suggests, the automaticity of the camera, or its very force to supersede the photographer's intention, is in part intertwined with its capability to wait in readiness. In other words, considering the camera as an apparatus means that taking a photograph not only refers to when the camera cuts a piece of space and time, but also to when its automaticity interferes with the photographed subject through

[109] Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy*, 23.
[110] Ibid., 25.
[111] Ibid., 73.
[112] Ibid., 28.
[113] Ibid., 21.

waiting. Because, as Flusser has suggested, the camera is not a tool nor a machine, but an apparatus that patiently lies in wait, preparing to override the photographer's intention through its mechanical automation.

Although after the shift from analogue to digital photography the optical device has undergone substantial changes, leaving us in what media theorist William J. Mitchell referred to as the "post-photographic era," the camera still functions as a mechanical agent that severs a segment of time and space through its sheer mechanical automaticity.[114] At this point, having discussed the potency of the camera in cutting off or slicing out a piece of space and time *and* the possibility of interfering in that process through passively waiting, I will next examine a seascape photograph to foreground the camera's agency in a photographic act. That is to say, in the following section I will exemplify how the camera can become what Flusser calls an apparatus: that which lies in wait to take over photographers' intention through its mechanical intervention with time and space.

2.2 An Apparatus that Lies in Wait

> Photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention.
> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

> Photograph … has no before or after: it represents only the moment of its own making.
> Graham Clarke, *The Photograph*

Between March and October 2008, British photographer Susan Collins exhibited a series of photographic prints alongside their real-time images, which were recorded from five different locations on the South-East coast of England, Margate, Folkstone, Bexhill, Pagham and Stokes

[114] As William J. Mitchell put forward in his book "The Reconfigured Eye," the shift from analogue to digital photography was a transition from a photographic era to a "post-photographic era," which according to him, challenges our "ontological distinction between the imaginary and the real". Although the photographic image has undergone a significant change after its digitization, the way in which digital cameras interfere with space and time has remained similar to that of the analogue cameras. That is, they both cut off the space to which they are exposed and preserve the time at which they photo is being taken. Sean Cubitt offers an extensive study of the historical evolution of digital cameras, noting that although their technology has been evolving through the ages, what has remained the same in cameras is their rigid automaticity and mechanical structure in dealing with space and time. *The Practice of Light: A Genealogy of Visual Technologies from Prints to Pixels* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2014). William J. Mitchell, "The Shadows on the Wall," in *The Reconfigured Eye* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 225.

Bay. These images were captured by five high-resolution cameras each recording one pixel at a time, a meticulous process that allowed for a one-to-one relation between the cameras and their pictorial output. Eventually, by capturing one pixel approximately every 0.25 second, each of these cameras was able to build an image after a period of seven hours. The result was called *Seascape*, an assortment of images that magnified how the camera deals with space and time in a conspicuous way.[115] If Collins' real-time images showed how the camera could instigate a stream of temporality, the photographic prints revealed how the camera could encapsulate time into the immutable moment of the photograph. Figure 3 features one of the photographic prints, called *Pagham*, referring to the name of the location where it was taken. The photograph displays a distorted and pixelated view constructed of several horizontal lines with different shades of colours, which in their totality can be conceived as a seascape scenery. By extending the time exposure and leaving the camera to record the seaside, Collins has captured a photographic seascape that, above all, forefronts the mechanical intervention of the camera in the production process. As Flusser remarks, the best photographs are those in which photographers "subordinate the camera to human intention," that is, when a photographer's intention takes over the automaticity of the camera.[116] If that is the case, Collins' photograph has clearly achieved the contrary, since it is an attempt to diminish the photographer's intention as much as possible in order to present the mechanical nature of the camera. That is, by means of removing the photographer from the inscription process and underscoring the camera's automaticity, the photograph can feature the *passive intervention* of the camera in the photographic production.

As Flusser notes, one the one hand, the camera is "a prototype of apparatuses" that can lie in wait and preparation, suggesting the passivity of the camera in a photographic act.[117] On the other hand, due to the automaticity of the camera that cannot be entirely anticipated by the photographer, the camera is also a "plaything" that changes the meaning of the world, implying the active intervention of the camera with the photographed subject.[118] As I have already discussed, the camera cannot literally cut off a piece of space and time, which would mean it is an active tool that can literally interfere with the physical world. Nor is the camera utterly passive, since it can change the signification of the world through its automaticity and agency. Instead, as Derrida points out, the very moment technics enters into the photographic act it

[115] Susan Collins, "Unfolding Time: Landscape, Seascape and the Aesthetics of Transmission," in *Spatialities*, ed. Judith Rug and Craig Martin (Chicago: The university of Chicago Press, 2012).
[116] Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy*, 47.
[117] Ibid., 21.
[118] Ibid., 25.

becomes a question of "an auto-affection, at once passive and active."[119] Derrida essentially refrains from defining the camera as either a passive or an active agent in the photographic act, and instead, he proposes that the photographic apparatuses function through a different structure. As he puts it:

> If technics intervenes from the moment a view or shot is taken, and beginning with time of exposure, there is no longer any pure passivity, certainly, but this does not simply mean that activity effaces passivity. It is a question of another structure, another sort of *acti/passivity*, ... Even when technics intervenes in a more and more complicated and differentiating way, it continues to treat passivity in a certain way; it continues to *deal with* it, to negotiate with it.[120]

For Derrida, the intervention of a photographic apparatus lies within an "acti/passivity," because, irrespective of the active or passive role of the camera, the photographed subject in front of the lens cannot be "reduced to a given substance" that is inertly waiting for the camera's intervention.[121] Therefore, according to him, the camera can only "deal with" the photographed subject in an active/passive way, since the "photographed thing" is never passively waiting to be intruded upon by the camera's or the photographer's intention.[122] In fact, as Flusser argues, an apt criticism of apparatuses should not "call up on the last vestiges of human intention behind apparatuses," but should manifest the "unintentional, rigid and uncontrollable functionality of apparatuses."[123] That is to say, regardless of the photographer's intention, the mechanical functionality of the camera overrides the intention of humans by passively recording everything that is exposed to its lens. For Derrida, this is precisely the moment when photography goes beyond art, since it passively and unintentionally records the photographed subject, turning it into an indivisible present time in the photograph.[124] As Derrida explains:

> However artful the photographer may be, whatever his or her intention or style, there is point where the photographic act is not an artistic act, a point where it

[119] Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, 12.
[120] Ibid., (Italics in original).
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy*, 74.
[124] Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, 9.

> *passively records* … it captures a reality that is there, that will have been there, in an undecomposable now.[125]

This passive recording of the camera, which can surpass the photographer's intention, does not only reveal the unintentionality of the camera in capturing the exposed reality, but it is also an instance in which the camera is both active and passive. For, as Derrida reminds us, even though the camera "passively records" the photographed subject, the subject is never simply passive and inert in front of the lens. Returning to Collins' photograph, looking on the lower part of the sea, the viewer can observe some rather unidentifiable pixels inscribed on the photograph, which are distinct from the sea in terms of their colour and lack of continuity.[126] These unidentifiable pixels, Collins notes, could represent "a busy waterway of passing ships, yachts, people and windsurfers," or a "violent lightening" appearing as an incongruity of pixels on the surface of the sea.[127] In any case, due to the "pastness" of the medium of photography, the real identity of these pixels cannot be known by the viewer. Although these pixels might not have much significance at first sight, they can indicate the unintentional functionality of the apparatus, foregrounded by the passive recording of the seaside over seven hours. In other words, the existence of these pixels signifies that the photographed subject is not passively waiting to be hunted by the camera, but it is the camera that unintentionally lies in wait, recording the exposed reality heedless of the photographer's intention. Despite all the possible conjectures that can be made about these pixels, their real identity remains inescapably unknown, since there is no way to go back in time and ascertain what these pixels actually depict. Therefore, they simply remain as a few continent pixels on the surface of the photo that can attest to "an undecomposable now," manifesting the acti/passive intervention of the camera in a photographic act.

According to media scholar Tom Gunning, what characterizes the realism of photography is its very "resistance to significance … as well as its uniqueness and contingency."[128] Despite the prevalent tendency for increasing the exactitude and accuracy of photographs through technological advancement, Gunning argues that the very realism of photography is still

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[125] Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, 9. (My italics).

[126] While some of these unidentifiable pixels suggests a stray of pixels connected to each other by their similarity of colour (e.g. the white lines on the sea surface), others simply show an individual pixel differentiated from the others around it, such as the black dot-like pixels.

[127] Collins, "Unfolding Time," 22-24.

[128] Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs," *Nordicom Review* 25, no. 1-2 (2004): 47.

marked by its contingency and resistance to meaning. For him, it is the "inexhaustible visual richness" and "excessive quality" attached to a photograph that makes it surpass the function of a sign.[129] As he argues, even for Bazin the photograph was not a sign of something, "but a presence of something, or perhaps we could say a means for putting us into the presence of something."[130] The existence of the unidentifiable pixels in Collins' photograph may underpin Gunning's claim by the very fact that they cannot be deciphered as a sign, but only defined as contingent pixels that resist signification. That is to say, although these pixels can take on a countless number of identities, such as passing ships, yachts, people and windsurfers, their real identity remains conjectural and indefinitely indecipherable for the viewer. These pixels, without signifying what they are, merely bear witness to the presence of the reality that they conceal, thereby situating the spectator in relation to, or in the presence of, something that is not in the photograph. In other words, instead of presenting the world to the spectator, the contingent pixels in Collins' photograph–to use Gunning's terms—"put us into the presence of" the world.

According to Cavell, what painting was aiming to achieve before the conception of photography "was a sense of *presentness*," but "not exactly a conviction of the world's presence to us, but our presence to it."[131] By constructing a new world in their pictures, he argues that painters presented humans to the world, whereas photography presents the world to humans by embedding a sense of pastness in each photograph. Strictly speaking, Cavell argues that while painting preserves humans' presence towards the world, since it constructs a timeless world to which they have access to on demand, photography does precisely the opposite, by confronting us with the past. As he puts is:

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[129] In the history of photography, there has been an ongoing debate about whether the photographic image can be deemed a sign for the reality it represents, particularly whether it is an iconic or indexical sign. If the indexical sign implies that the photo has a causal relationship to its referent (e.g. smoke being an index of fire), the iconic sign suggests that the photograph conveys what it represents only by means of imitation and likeness, (e.g. a painting of fire being an icon of real fire). However, as Gunning argues, indexicality and iconicity of photographs have always been intertwined, since our evaluation of a photograph as accurate did not only depend on its indexical basis, but also "on our recognition of it as looking like its subject." Therefore, he contends the "the photograph exceeds the function of a sign" precisely because its "truth value" always depends on its "visual accuracy" (indexicality) to the same extent as it does on its "recognisability" (iconicity). Gunning, "Point of an Index?": 41-48. Literary theorist Walter Benn Michaels in his article "Photographs and Fossils" offers a similar critique of seeing the photograph merely as a sign, by arguing that the indexicality of photographs is not a one-to-one relation with the reality they represent, but it is rather "the bypassing of the artist's intentionality." Walter Benn Michaels, "Photography and Fossils," in *Photography Theory: The Art Seminar*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 441.

[130] Gunning, "Point of an Index," 46.

[131] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 22. (Italics in original).

> Photography maintains the *presentness of the world* by accepting our absence from it. The reality in a photograph is present to me while I am not present to it; and a world I know, and see, but to which I am nevertheless not present (through no fault of my subjectivity), is a world past.[132]

The contingent pixels in Collins' photograph not only brings to the fore the idea that the camera passively records the exposed reality into an indecomposable now, but they also feature the "presentness of the world" by reminding the viewer that they belong to an irreversible past. In other words, these pixels retain the presentness of the world through persistently reassuring us of our absence from the moment of their making, and by informing the spectator that they are too late in time to identify what these pixels are. Although it is true that these pixels cannot embody the reality that is concealed behind them, they can testify that what they hide existed at one time in the space in between the camera and the seaside. Therefore, rather than representing the visual appearances of the moving objects they mask, these pixels give evidence to their once existence in time and space in front of the camera. In other words, the contingent pixels are irrefutable testimonies to the *spatial existence* of the moving objects they perpetually burry in the past, without ever revealing what these objects actually are.

For cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer, the singular spatial existence of the photographed subject in front of the camera was the defining marker of photography. In his essay, written in 1927, Kracauer suggested that "photography does not *preserve* the transparent features of an object or a person but *records* it from whatever position as a spatial continuum."[133] For Kracauer, photography does not aim to imitate or maintain the appearances of the subject; instead, it merely records the space in between the camera and the photographed subject as a spatial continuum. He elucidates this point by contrasting painting with photography. As he argues, while in painting "the meaning of the subject becomes a spatial appearance," in photography "it is the spatial appearance of a subject that is its meaning."[134] That is to say, while painters, by deducing the meaning of the subject, visualise its spatial appearance in paintings, in a photograph the mere spatial existence of the photographed subject in front of

[132] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 22. (My italics).
[133] Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," in *The Past's Threshold: Essays on Photography,* ed. Despox, P. and Zinfert, M. trans. Joyce, C. (Zurich, Germany: Diaphanes, 2014), 34. (Originally published in German in 1927 as an essay in *Frankurter Zeitung*).
[134] Ibid., 33.

the camera becomes its meaning. For Kracauer, photography does not necessarily cut off the spatial appearances of a subject, but its significance lies in its eternalization of the space continuum once confronted by the camera. He explains this point in a revealing passage, where he describes the experience of looking at the photograph of his grandmother in her youth:

> We are held in nothing, and photography gathers fragments around a nothing. When the grandmother stood before the lens, she was for a second present in a space continuum that offered itself to the lens. But what was made eternal was just this aspect, instead of the grandmother. The viewer of old photographs feels a shiver. For they make present not the knowledge of the original sitter but the *spatial configuration of a moment*; it is not the human being that emerges from the photograph but rather the sum of everything that can be subtracted from that being.[135]

In Kracauer's reading, the ghostly character of photographs does not literally summon or present the being of the photographed subject, nor can it necessarily embody the spatial appearances thereof. Instead, it refers to the fact that photographs can, above all, attest to the very space continuum in between the camera and the photographed subject, i.e. the very "spatial configuration of a moment" when a photograph is taken. Therefore, according to Kracauer, what is immortalized in photographs is precisely this spatial aspect, the very existence of the photographed subject in front of the camera, and not so much the appearances of the photographed subject in the world.

Returning to Collins' photograph, although the contingent pixels cannot present the appearances of the moving subjects they hide, they can undoubtedly testify to their existence in the spatial continuum of the camera. That is, rather than presenting what they are, these pixels tenaciously refer to the spatial configuration of the moment when the photograph was captured by the camera. As Gunning notes, the photograph does not necessarily present its subject, but it "opens up a passageway to its subject … the photograph does make us imagine something else, something behind it, before it, somewhere in relation to it."[136] Here Gunning echoes Kracauer in saying that the significance of the photograph is not that it can preserve the appearances of the photographed subject, but that it situates the spectator somewhere in relation

[135] Kracauer, "Photography," 37. (My italics)
[136] Gunning, "Point of an Index," 46.

to the moment it was taken. Although the contingent pixels in Collins' photograph do not present what they obscure, they can put us in relation to, or in the presence of, *the spatial configuration of the moment of their making*. That is to say, these pixels indicate how the camera forever eternalizes this spatial aspect, thereby conferring a temporal dimension to the spatial presence of the photographed subject in front of the lens. Therefore, the existence of the contingent pixels in Collins' photograph foregrounds two inherent features of the camera. On the one hand, these pixels make evident that the camera is a *preparatus* that unintentionally lies in wait and acti/passively records the exposed reality, resulting in unexpected details in the photograph that override the photographer's intention. On the other hand, although the definite identity of the pixels cannot be known to the spectator, they can give evidence to the temporalization of the space continuum, a spatial dimension that was once confronted and forever eternalized by the camera.

Having discussed these two aspects of the camera, in the following section, by retaining my focus on the contingent pixels, I will further expound on how the camera obscures a photographic relation through discussing the problem of the referent in photography. Echoing Kracauer's claim, later theorist Roland Barthes put forward that the very essence of photography derives from the mere spatial existence of the photographed subject in front of the lens, that is, in the spatial continuum of the camera.

2.3 The Black Box of Contingency

> The essence of the image is to be altogether outside ... without signification, yet summoning up the depth of any possible meaning: unravelled yet manifest, having that absence-as-presence.
> Maurice Blanchot, cited in *Camera Lucida*
>
> The photographic apparatus reminds us of this irreducible referential.
> Jacques Derrida, *Deaths of Roland Barthes*

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes' last book that was first published in 1980, he made a contentious claim about the nature of photographs by calling them "the literal emanation of the

referent," as if to say that every photograph carries within it a part of that which it represents.[137] While in language studies the term referent addresses the thing in the physical world that a word denotes or stands for, in photography this term refers to that which a photograph is of, e.g. in a portrait photograph, the referent is the person who once posed for the camera (in the world). However, as Barthes suggests, the term "referent" in photography is fundamentally distinct from the other systems of representation. As he writes, "I call 'photographic referent' not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens."[138] For Barthes, when seeing a photograph the undeniable fact is that the photographed subject, "the real thing," has necessarily been confronted by the camera once in time In light of this, he argues that while looking at a photograph it cannot be denied that "the thing has been there" in front of the camera.[139]

He further proposes that the very essence of photography, calling it the "noeme" of photography, is therefore "that-has-been," referring to the once existence of the photographed subject in front of the camera.[140] In other words, what Barthes calls that-has-been underlines the idea that the photographed subject once existed in the Kracauerian spatial continuum of the camera's perspective. A conspicuous fact that, as Barthes notes, "goes without saying," since otherwise there would not have been a photograph.[141] As theorist John Lechte has argued, the Barthesian that-has-been or the noeme of photography stems from Husserlian terminology of "noema." As he points out, "the purpose of the *noema* is to make it possible to avoid meaning becoming ensnared in the natural attitude of the contingent world."[142] Conseqently, Barthes's noeme is "nonperceivable because it is essentially to do with meaning. The meaning of 'it has been' would be time."[143] As Lechte has suggested, the Barthesian that-has-been of a photograph is the method with which Barthes has maintained the contingency of time; it is a means whereby Barthes attempts to address a temporal dimension that is imperceptible. That is why, for Barthes, the clear manifestation of that-has-been is formulated in the notion of the "punctum" of time i.e. "its pure presentation", which is not perceivable but felt by the viewer.[144]

While discussing Alexander Gardner's portrait of Lewis Payne, as he is waiting to be executed in his cell, Barthes introduced the punctum of time as its indeterminate but immediate

[137] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* trans. Richard Howard (London:Vintage Books, 2000), 80. (Originally published in French in 1980 under the title *La Chambre Claire*).
[138] Ibid., 76. (Italics in original).
[139] Ibid., (Italics in original).
[140] Ibid., 77.
[141] Ibid.
[142] John Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 128.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.

impact on the viewer: the very tension that arises when reading Payne's portrait as "this will be" and "this has been."[145] The photograph of Lewis Payne, which features him sitting and waiting hopelessly for his imminent execution, embodies the impossibility of choosing between the past and future tense in reference to a photograph. That is to say, while Payne's portrait suggests that "he is going to die," at the same time, being a photograph that was taken in the past, it testifies to the fact that he is already dead.[146] As historian of photography Geoffrey Batchen has proposed, by flickering back and forth from "that-has-been" to "that-will-be," Barthes seeks to formulate the representation of time in photography as a temporal oscillation, which he seeks to encapsulate in the anterior future tense that he imputes to photographs.[147] Barthes addresses this oscillation between different times by referring to Lewis Payne's photograph as a "death in the future," indicating the elusiveness of the punctum of time.[148] That is why philosopher Bernard Stiegler submits that the punctum of time "is indescribable; it is only inscriptible, its description is indefinitely deferred."[149] That is to say, for Barthes, the punctum of time is not the perceivable or describable aspect of time that can be seen in photographs; instead, it refers to the immediacy of the impact of time, arising from the incongruity between recognizing a photograph as a past event and as what is going to happen. As Lechte succinctly puts it: "the punctum is not a feature in itself, but the impact of that feature," that is, the impact of time.[150] Nonetheless, while the second half of *Camera Lucida* is devoted to the temporal aspect of the punctum, i.e. the immediate impact of that-has-been, the first half of the book is interspersed with another aspect of this notion: its accidental character.

According to Barthes, in every photograph there co-exist two discontinuous and heterogeneous elements that do not "belong to the same world."[151] The first of which he calls the "stadium", which is a matter of the cultural reading of photographs, resulting in an "average affect" that is experienced by the viewer. As he explains, "to recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intention, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove them, but always to understand them."[152] That is, for Barthes the field of the studium signals the cultural, informative and thus the utilitarian capacity of photographs, which

[145] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Geoffrey Batchen, *Photography Degree Zero. Reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida.* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 266.
[148] Barthes, *Camera* Lucida, 96.
[149] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation,* trans. Stephan Barker (Stanford: Stanford university Press, 2009), 19.
[150] Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology*, 127.
[151] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 23.
[152] Ibid., 27-28. (My italics).

always aims to bring to light the photographer's intention. In other words, by endowing photographs with functions, the studium makes evident what the photographer intended to represent in the photograph, thereby producing what Barthes calls a "docile interest" for the viewer.[153] However, as Barthes proposes, the utilitarian property of the studium is unsettled by the existence of a second element that surpasses the photographer's intention, which he terms the punctum of detail.[154]

The punctum of detail, Barthes writes, "is that accident which pricks me, but also bruises me, (it) is poignant to me."[155] The accidental character of the punctum not only supersedes the photographer's intention, but also imbues the punctum with a wound-like and pointed character, as if it could punctuate the surface of the photograph "like an arrow."[156] The imperative facet of the punctum of detail is that, despite being located in the photograph, it always remains as a disparate element within the frame. For instance, observing the photograph of two handicapped children taken by Lewis H. Hine, Barthes identifies the boy's Danton Collar and the girl's finger bandage as the "off-centre" part of the frame, and thus as the punctum of detail.[157] That is because, regardless of Hine's intention, the Danton collar and the finger bandage remain off-centre and incompatible with the rest of the photograph. For Barthes, the punctum of detail refers to the unintentional visual elements that are captured in the photograph, marked by an incongruity that makes them heterogeneous parts of the frame. To be concise, while these accidental details constitute and inhabit the photograph, they remain *other* within the frame. [158]

In "Deaths of Roland Barthes," a posthumous tribute to Roland Barthes, Derrida points out that the punctum of detail is "a point of singularity that punctures the surface of

[153] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 40.
[154] Ibid., 43.
[155] Ibid., 27.
[156] Ibid., 26.
[157] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51.
[158] As art critic Michael Fried has argued, the punctum of detail cannot be perceived by the photographer at the moment the photograph is taken, because it belongs to the domain of the photographed thing; thus it can only be recognised as the punctum of detail by the viewer. Here it should be mention, whereas Fried notes that digitization undermines the punctum of detail, since it reduces the unnoticed details captured in photos, historian James Elkins argues that even completely digitally constructed photographs can still bear some accidental features within their frame. Therefore, irrespective of its analogue or digital origin, the punctum of detail is that which remains accidental, incompatible, and disparate in the domain of the photographed thing, and can only be recognised by the viewer as that which remains other in the frame. Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 104. James Elkins, "Critical Response: What Do We Want Photography to Be? A Response to Michael Fried," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 31, no. 4 (Summer 2015): 947.

reproduction" in order to address the spectator, all the while remaining "other" in the photograph.[159] The punctum of detail, Derrida writes,

> seems to concern only me. Its very definition is that it addresses itself to me. The *absolute singularity of the other* addresses itself to me, the Referent that, in its very image, I can no longer suspend, even though its 'presence' forever escapes me, having already receded into the past.[160]

Cognizant of the fact that that-has-been always belongs to the past, Derrida suggests that the punctum of detail—i.e. the incompatible detail in the photograph—addresses itself to him without actually being present. That is, it only manifests itself as "the absolute singularity of the other," other in that the punctum of detail remains infinitely indissoluble within the studium. According to Barthes, while the studium marks the functional and "always coded" part of the photograph that induces meanings, the punctum is a "subtle beyond" that cannot be assimilated into any cultural code.[161] Remarking on the composition of the punctum and the studium in a photograph, Derrida states, "it [*punctum*] belongs to it [*studium*] without belonging to it and is *unlocatable within* it; it is never inscribed in the homogenous objectivity of the framed space but instead inhabits or, rather haunts it."[162] As Derrida proposes, although the punctum is a constitutive part of the photograph, it haunts the studium in order to manifest its non-belonging and discordancy in the frame. In other words, the punctum, despite its inhabitance in the photograph, remains invariably incompatible and therefore other within the frame.

Returning to Collins' photograph once more, on the one hand, the totality of the picture indicates the functional and informative side of the photograph, which allows the viewer to read it as a seascape, thereby reflecting the domain of the stadium that makes us understand the photograph. As Barthes reminds us, to recognize the studium of photographs is "always to understand them."[163] On the other hand, the mere presence of the contingent pixels, as the accidental details that override the photographer's intention, makes them fall under the domain of the punctum: they are the "unlocatable within" that haunts the frame through non-belonging

[159]Jacques Derrida, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes," in *work of Mourning,* ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 39.
[160] Ibid., 39.
[161] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51&59.
[162] Jacques Derrida, "The Deaths," 41.
[163] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* 27-28.

and otherness. While inhering in the photograph, these pixels remain as the off-center details that inexorably withhold any determinate signification; they are the "subtle beyond" that relentlessly resists falling into any cultural assimilation. Although the contingent pixels can attest to the existence of their referent in the spatial continuum, or to the Barthesian that-has-been, their real identities never come into presence due to their pastness. Strictly speaking, their true identity remains perpetually speculative since they could be passing ships, yachts, people, or windsurfers, or better to say, any number of possible conjectures. The identifiable pixels in Collins' photo, therefore, remain as incongruent points—to use Barthes' terms for referring to the punctum—that only bear witness to the absolute singularity of the other. In other words, these pixels stand for the indissoluble and inscrutable other that is both *present* and *absent* in the photograph, contingent through and through.

Nevertheless, as Derrida points out, the otherness of the punctum in the field of studium, the very link between the two concepts, "is neither tautological nor oppositional, neither dialectical nor in any sense symmetrical; it is supplementary and musical."[164] For Derrida, the composition of the two concepts of the punctum and the studium is not something that can be exhausted through philosophical signification, i.e. by reducing them into meanings. Instead, he argues, the two concepts complement each other as if in a musical composition. For him, the relationship between the two concepts is not that of an exclusion, as if the otherness of the punctum could eliminate it from the field of studium, but as he writes, "the *punctum* gives rhythm to the *studium.*"[165] Derrida uses the term "contrapuntal" to address the way in which the two concepts combine with each other to form a whole, in the same way as musical melodies merge together while maintaining their independence.[166] Therefore, for Derrida, the two concepts do not have any privileges over one other, but they manifest the way in which photographic images are able to simultaneously yield and thwart meanings.

Drawing on a similar point, Rancière notes that while studium demonstrates that the photographic image is "a vehicle for a silent discourse," punctum informs us that the photographic "image speaks to us precisely when it is silent, when it no longer transmits any message to us."[167] For Rancière, the juxtaposition of punctum and studium, above all, manifests

[164] Jacques Derrida, "The Deaths," 58.
[165] Ibid., 42.
[166] In music theory the term "contrapuntal motion" refers to the movement of two melodic lines parallel to each while they maintain their independence. Derrida suggest that the two notions of S/P, too, should be conceived as two independent melodies that, although remain independent from each other, coalesce into a one whole. Derrida, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes," 42.
[167] Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 11.

that photographic images have the capacity to show the relationship between the visible and the invisible within them. The fact that photographs are silent, but can speak precisely through their silence. Rancière calls this capacity of photographic images their "double poetics," which is "simultaneously or separately, two things: the *legible testimony of history* written on faces or objects and *pure blocs of visibility*, impervious to any narrativization, any intersection of meaning."[168] Here, Rancière draws attention to the conflicting issue that lies at the heart of the photographic image, which is the conflation of the reference and the referent in photographs. While Rancière's former category refers to the capacity of photographs to function as the *reference* of that which they represent, which makes them the "legible testimony of history," the latter category addresses the ability of photographs to perpetually evade meaning by leaving their *referent* in the past. For, the referent in a photograph is the actual photographed thing in the world, which after a photographic encounter remains infinitely absent from the photograph. Commenting on the relationship between the reference and the referent in a photographic relation, Derrida states:

> but should we say reference or referent? … in the photograph, *the referent* is noticeably "absent, suspendable, vanished into the unique past time of its event, but *the reference* to this referent…implies just as irreducibly the having-been of a unique and invariable referent.[169]

To exemplify, while in Collins' photograph the referent is the actual seaside and things and people whose identities are concealed forever in the past, the photographic reference implies the very existence or the having-been of these referents in front of the lens. In Kracauer's reading, the reference marks the unique existence of the photographed things in the spatial continuum of the camera, and the referent is the actual photographed thing that is eternally held in the past. As Barthes famously claimed, photographs are "laminated objects" in which the referent stubbornly adheres; "it is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself."[170] Derrida, however, eschews choosing between the referent and the reference by addressing the photographic relation by suggesting a new term. He proposes the term "the unicity of referential…not to have to choose between reference and referent: what adheres in the photograph is perhaps less the referent itself…than the implication in the reference of its

[168] Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 11. (My italic).
[169] Derrida, "The Deaths," 53.
[170] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 5-6.

having-been-unique."[171] As this statement suggests, for Derrida, what remains in the photograph is not so much the actual, physical or perceptible referent that was once confronted by the camera—i.e. the actual thing in the world—but rather the testimony to the unique existence of that physical referent: its "having-been-unique."

Consequently, by proposing the term "the unicity of referential," Derrida signals the capacity of photography to provide a new relation towards the photographed subject that is not hinged upon the reference/referent distinction. That is to say, this term, without claiming that the physical referent adheres in photographs, underscores that the unique existence of the referent is perpetually suspended in them. As Derrida contends, what has been often overlooked in discourse on photography "is a matter of at once acknowledging the possibility of *suspending the Referent* [not the reference]."[172] For Derrida, precisely this aspect of photography—i.e. the suspension of the referent—problematizes the photographic relation; in that, photography by suspending the referent, establishes a relation towards that which will remain ceaselessly in the past. He outlines this point in *Right of Inspection* (1998), a photo-novel in which Derrida ruminates on the photographs of the Belgian photographer Marie-Françoise Plissart. As he puts it:

> If there is an art of photography (beyond that of determined genres, and thus in an almost transcendental space), it is found here. Not that it suspends reference, but that it indefinitely defers a certain type of reality, that of the *perceptible referent*. It gives the prerogative to the other, opens the infinite uncertainty of a relation to the completely other, *a relation without relation*.[173]

According to Derrida, photography precisely by suspending the "perceptible referent," which once existed in front of the camera, affirms the status of the referent as the other, thereby constituting an uncertain relation towards the referent in the photograph. That is, the photographic relation is to be understood as a "relation without relation," because, through infinitely deferring the perceptible reality, photography concurrently gives evidence to the existence of the referent *and* assures that it belongs to an irrevocable past.[174] In doing so, photography thwarts the possibility of constituting a determinate relation towards the referent.

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[171] Derrida, "The Deaths," 57.
[172] Ibid., 49. (My italics).
[173] Jacques Derrida, *Right of Inspection*, trans. David Wills (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998), np. (My italics).
[174] Ibid., np.

Returning to Collins' photograph, the existence of the contingent pixels evidently displays how Collins' camera suspends the perceptible referent, thus retaining it as the absolute singularity of the other in the photographic frame. In other words, due to the eternal suspension of their referent, the contingent pixels have constituted an indeterminate relation towards that which they represent, making it both present and absent in the frame. They manifest that their referents remain other and endlessly inaccessible, magnifying the way in which the photographic camera suspends the perceptible reality. Therefore, on the one hand, Collins' photograph reveals that the camera is an apparatus that active/passively records the spatial continuum exposed to its lens, resulting in unintended details that may override the intention of the photographer. By doing so, it eternalizes the spatial arrangement of a photographic encounter, thereby granting a *temporal dimension* to this spatial configuration in the photograph. On the other hand, Collins' photograph shows that although the camera can bear witness to the that-has-been of the referent, seeding the photograph with the possibility of its immediate impact as punctum, it perpetually suspends the perceptible referent into an irreversible past. In doing so, the camera confers a *spatial dimension* to the unique existence of the referent in time by inexorably deferring it. As such, in a photographic act the camera not only functions as a non-living agent that cuts off or slice out a piece of space and time; but as I have shown, it also functions as a place wherein the spatial continuum is temporalized and that-has-been is spatialized: it is a *contingent place* that constitutes a relation without relation towards the perceptible reality exposed to its lens.

At this point, having discussed the ways in which the camera can be considered as a place in which time is spatialized and space is temporalized, I will zoom out from the camera's role to that of the other partaker of a photographic act: the photograph. However, as Batchen has remarked, a photograph has never had permanent physical features by which it could be identified as such, because "as a system of representation dependent on reproduction, the photograph is capable of having many distinct physical manifestations."[175] For instance, while a photograph can be produced in the material form of print with a multitude of forms and shapes, it can also be found in the immaterial form of information circulating in cyberspace. Irrespective of the forms in which the photograph is found, Batchen reminds us that the photograph is always infused with the potentiality of being reproduced, and that is what makes the photograph a pliable concept. In the following chapter, by focusing on the possibility of

[175] Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Massachusetts: MIT press, 2000), 106.

reproduction inherent to every photograph, I will next investigate how the examination of the photograph as a place can shed light on the spatial properties of this partaker of photography.