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Place: Towards a Geophilosophy of Photography

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English Summary

Throughout this research, I demonstrate, exemplify, and argue how a close reading of the medium of photography, through the lens of geography and philosophy, can shed light on the spatiotemporal account of the concept of place. To do this, this research breaks down the participatory elements of photography into six tropes: the photographer, the camera, the photograph, the photographic image, the spectator, and the photographic genre. Subsequently, it examines each of the aforementioned tropes through the concept of place. In the first chapter, this dissertation argues that the photographer's body can be seen as what Casey terms a "lived place": both a lived body (Leib) and a physical body (Körper). This concept not only views the body as something that can actively interact in its spatial surroundings, but also suggests that as a physical object, the body needs to be passively co-localized among other objects in space. Accordingly, the photographer's body as a "lived place" continually stitches passivity to its active spatial presence, becoming simultaneously static and dynamic, still and moving, and thus inactive in space. Therefore, in the first chapter, I argue that the photographer's body seen as a lived place is never reduced to a fixed location in space, but is always in the constant process of entanglement and disentanglement, belonging and disruption, and inactive operation with the space of which it is a part. In the second chapter, I contend that the photographic camera not only slices out a piece of time and space, but also intervenes in the photographic act through passively waiting. In order to exemplify this passive intervention, this chapter examines Susan Collins' pixilated photograph, showing that, despite the camera's passivity in recording the exposed reality, the photographed subject never remains completely passive. On the one hand, the indecipherable pixels in Collins' photograph give evidence to the temporalization of the "space continuum": a spatial dimension that was once confronted and forever eternalized by the camera. On the other hand, these pixels bear witness to the spatialization of the Barthesian "that-has-been": the unique existence of the perceptible referent in time. Consequently, in the second chapter, I propose that the photographic camera is a contingent place wherein the "spatial continuum" is temporalized and "that-has-been" is spatialized: a place in which the possibility of an indeterminate relation towards the perceptible reality is born.

In the third chapter, this research focuses on the pliability of the photograph as a thing that has been continually altering and transforming through different modes of reproduction and channels of distribution. By doing so, I argue that photographs as things are like loose

leaves, which can be continually exchanged among people and moved from one place to another: the fact that a photograph is just as much domiciled in the place at which it is situated as it is transferable to other locations. By drawing on the Foucauldian concept of heterotopic places and the Deleuzian concept of smooth space, this chapter further suggests that in the internet space photographs are un-localizable places with multidirectional, uncountable, and nomadic movements. Finally, in this chapter, I propose that in the smooth cybernetic space the photograph is a placeless place whose distributary directions and originating locations remain radically untraceable. In the fourth chapter, this dissertation shifts its focus from the body of the photo to its surface, in order to look at the spatial features of the photographic place: a visual place that is embedded in the photograph as an image. To do this, it considers the photographic frame as an edge that can possess a blind field: what could have been included but has been discarded from the photograph. To foreground the importance of the blind field for the photographic image, this chapter examines a photographic place with a maximised blind field and another with a minimized blind field. Firstly, this chapter suggests that the maximization of the blind field can destabilize the spatial reading of the photographic image, thus creating a defamiliarized photographic place. Secondly, this chapter shows that the minimization of the blind field can allow us to visualise the spatial fabric of an infinite universe, thus creating a familiarized photographic place. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I propose that, regardless of its minimized or maximised manifestation, the mere existence of the blind field can transmute the photographic place into a liminal place, capable of both supporting and collapsing, familiarizing and defamiliarizing what is enclosed within the frame.

In the fifth chapter, this dissertation investigates how the inclusion of the spectator in a photographic act can account for the concept of place as that which remains outside of all times and locations. Through discussing the confrontational aspects of the concept of place, this chapter first argues that a place can be viewed as the moment of encounter that shortly makes an appearance in a process. Subsequently, by delving into Azoulay's formulation of "the event of photography" as a potential encounter and the "universal spectator" as a person who belongs to the future, this chapter suggests that the encounter between the spectator and the photograph accounts for place as something that eludes a permanent existence in time and space. Therefore, in this chapter I put forward that the very transitory but perpetual encounter between the photograph and the spectator manifests an event-place, always processual in time, unconfined to any location, and transient regarding its appearance. In the sixth chapter, this dissertation focuses on how a particular photographic genre, i.e. aftermath photography, translates physical places into photographed places in order to communicate a content. Firstly, by examining the

relationship between landscape and place, this chapter argues that a particular locality in the world can interact with people, calling it the agency of place: the relational effect that drives the photographer to a particular locality with associated histories and not to others. Then, by shifting from physical places in the world to the world of photography, this chapter argues that aftermath photography employs the landscape genre in order to sustain the act of looking at the image. By inviting the viewers to extend the act of looking and reassuring them that there is nothing to see in the photograph, this genre creates a ghostly effect caused by the temporal irreversibility of photography. This chapter, however, claims that the ghostly effect of aftermath photography not only originates from the image, but also from the caption, which projects the invisible event onto the photograph. Finally, this chapter suggests that if aftermath photography entangles the viewer in-between the caption and the photo, it is to manifest the exigency of place: the urgent demand of remembrance of, and judgment about, what remains unexpressed yet unforgettable within the photograph. Therefore, in the sixth chapter, I propose that the conversion of a physical place into a photographed place within aftermath photography manifests how the agency of place is turned into the exigency of place in the photograph.

As such, taking all the aforementioned approaches together, this research aspires to conduct a geophilosophical reading of photography that considers the concept of place to be equally abstract, imperceptible, intangible, and intractable as space. In other words, by triangulating the fields of photography, geography, and philosophy, this research aims to corroborate Casey's maxim that "place cannot be the content of a definite representation."