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The Production of Place: A Photographic Topoanalysis

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Introduction

When going through an old box of photographs, chances are that there are writings on the back of some of them, indicating when and where they were taken. A date and a place, '1982, Paris' for instance, are valuable information that determine how one looks at a photograph. The date allows a person to know how many years ago the photograph was made, how old they were at that moment in time, what phase of their life they were in. But we also want to remember *where* the photograph was made, so we can prove to other people that we have been to certain places, for example. As Helen Westgeest and Hilde Van Gelder put it: "The locus of a photograph's genesis, the specific site where the shutter clicked (…) tends to be of great importance to us."[1] Why is it then that only time has become a central concept in photography theory? From Henri Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment' to Roland Barthes' '*ça-a-été,*' the concept of time has become inevitable in any photographic discussion. Place, in contrast, hardly receives any attention. Could the complexity of the term and its confusion with the concept of space be the reason for its absence in these theoretical debates on photography?

According to philosopher Jeff Malpas, this complexity is partly due to the fact that we use the term so often that we take it for granted: "The term may well be thought so common, and so much part of our everyday discourse, that its transfer to more theoretical contexts is likely to present an immediate problem."[2]

Another reason could be the general crisis the term of 'place' underwent during modernity. In *The Fate of Place* (1998), Edward Casey argues that, whereas Aristotle and Plato endowed place with a certain immanent power, the term loses this power to space at the wake of modernity. Thinkers like René Descartes and Isaac Newton pushed place to the background in favour of space, reducing the former to a mere aspect of the latter.[3]

However, at the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of place gained renewed attention. In philosophy, through philosophers like Martin Heidegger and Gaston Bachelard for example, but later also in geography. Despite its resurgence in these fields, the concept of place does not seem to have reached the domain of photography theory just yet. Nevertheless, there are some more recent publications like *Picturing place* (2003), ed. Joan Schwartz and

[1] Westgeest, Van Gelder, *Photography Theory,* 112.
[2] Malpas, *Place and Experience,* 24.
[3] Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 133-193.

James Ryan, *Take Place: Photography and Place from Multiple Perspectives* (2009) ed. Helen Westgeest and *Luigi Ghirri and the Photography of Place* (2017) ed. Marina Spunta and Jacopo Benci, all of which show the theoretical potential of the concept of place within the field of photography theory, by using it to analyse specific photographic practices. This is the context within which this thesis could be situated. Its aim is in the first place to present the concept of place and its distinction from space as a theoretical tool that, much like the concept of time, can be of great use in the analysis of particular photographic works.

One of the biggest challenges in this endeavour, is to render place operational as a theoretical concept, without reducing its complexity. I will therefor depart from two seperate case-studies, both of which can be related to different definitions of place. As a consequence, they demand two seperate frameworks.

The first chapter of this thesis will consist of an analysis of Belgian photoconceptualist Jacques Lizène's 'Travaux sur le cadre' within the context of a modern conception of space and place. I will show that Lizène's approach to the photographic frame is anchored in a geometrical conception as theorized by Descartes and Newton. In the second chapter, I will explore the exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape*, curated by William Jenkins at George Eastman House in 1975. In contrast to the first case-study, the *New Topographics* exhibition will be analysed from a social perspective, that considers place and space as social products. For this second chapter I will resort to the writings of French theorist Henri Lefebvre. The third chapter will re-evaluate both case-studies from yet another perspective on place, which is the perspective of experience. Philosophers as Gaston Bachelard and Yi-Fu Tuan, who consider place as a meaningful portion of space, will allow me to present the work of Lizène and certain photographers from the *New Topographics* exhibition as place-making practices.

These three frameworks roughly correspond to the three approaches to place named by Tim Cresswell in *Place: an Introduction.*[4] The first approach is a "descriptive approach to place," which is the approach of the regional geographer (chapter 1). The second approach is a 'social constructionist' approach, which considers place as a social product, often from a Marxist perspective (chapter 2). The third approach is more philosophical in nature, in the sense that it is not so much concerned with particular places, but rather with the nature of place as such and how it is created in relation to experience (chapter 3).

[4] Cresswel, *Place: an Introduction, 54.*

I am by no means claiming that this thesis is exhaustive in exploring all the different aspects of place in relation to photography. I am simply trying to show by means of two different photographic practices how the concept of place can provide insight into these works.

Chapter 1 Jacques Lizène and the Modern Conception of Space and Place

We see a grid of twenty photographs *(fig. 1)*. The camera gradually zooms in, getting closer and closer to its subject: a man making himself smaller in each photograph in order to stay within the limits of the frame. The man is Jacques Lizène, a Belgian photoconceptual artist. *Contraindre le corps à s'inscrire dans le cadre de la photo* (1971) fits into a larger series of artworks exploring the photographic frame. The artist's approach is the same in all of these 'Travaux sur le cadre': he photographs himself performing an action, after which he adds a caption to the photograph describing this action. What all of these works have in common is that the actions they portray are all performed in relation to the rectangular shape of the photographic frame. Accordingly, the accompanying captions always specify this relationship to the frame. Other examples include: *Petit maître liégeois s'introduisant dans le cadre d'une photo* (1971) and *Petit maître liégeois ayant accroché sa cravate au cadre de la photo* (1971). These 'Travaux sur le cadre' can be seen as an artistic enquiry into the photographic medium or as he calls it: *'*Art spécifique photographique'.[5]

In this chapter, I will try to shed light on Lizène's visual enquiry by analysing his work within the context of photographic theories on the frame (section 1.1). Subsequently, I will resort to René Descartes and Isaac Newton, whose conceptions on space and place will provide a conceptual framework to further develop this analysis (section 1.2).

1.1 Lizène and the out-of-frame: a medium specific enquiry

1.1.1 Photography vs. film: negating the out-of-frame

In *Contraindre le corps,* the frame forces Lizène to take up a certain posture as it gradually gets smaller and smaller. In this specific power relationship between the frame and the body, the former is clearly disciplining the latter. Lizène adapts his body in such a way that no part of it touches the frame. There is a second version of *Contraindre le corps (fig. 2),* however, where Lizène adds another larger image in the middle, surrounded by smaller images that are similar to the ones in the first version. In the larger image, Lizène is standing upright with his

[5] *J. Lizène: Petit Maître liégeois de la seconde moitié du Xxème Siècle,* 186.

head cut off by the frame. In this section I will explore the specific conception of the photographic frame that underlies these two works.

In *The Movement-Image,* Gilles Deleuze claims that the filmic frame always creates an out-of-field [hors-champs], which he defines as "what is neither seen nor understood, but is nevertheless perfectly present."[6] Returning to André Bazin, Deleuze distinguishes two types of out-of-field, corresponding to two types of framing. On the one hand there is what Bazin calls the 'mask,' which is a type of framing that allows space and action to go on beyond the frame. When the frame functions as mask, a character can still be part of the action without being heard or seen. Deleuze associates this type of framing with Jean Renoir.

In other movies, like Alfred Hitchcock's for instance, the frame simply works as a frame. In the case of the latter, all of the elements are confined within the space of the frame, without leaving it. Nevertheless, Deleuze adds, even in the case of the frame as frame, there is still some kind of out-of-field.

However, a closer reading of the passage by Bazin referenced by Deleuze, shows that Bazin in fact employs the difference between the frame as mask and the frame as frame to distinguish between theatre and cinema. In cinema the frame always acts like a mask. Things that are off-frame are never completely cut off from the action, they are simply invisible for a certain amount of time: "The [filmic] screen is not a frame like that of a picture but a mask which allows only a part of the action to be seen. When a character moves off-screen, we accept the fact that he is out of sight, but they continues to exist in their own capacity at some other place in the décor which is hidden from us."[7] This is how Bazin defines the filmic frame, contrasting it to the frame of a painting.

The other type of framing, the frame as frame, is specific to theatre. Theatre has a 'dramatic place,' a 'privileged spot' that is marked by the three walls of the décor: "The décor of the theatre is thus an area materially enclosed, limited, circumscribed." Whereas Bazin used the distinction between frame and mask to distinguish theatre from cinema, Deleuze interprets and reappropriates this dichotomy and turns it into a distinction between two types of filmic framing. This allows him to state that both types of framing produce an out-of-field, but if we read Bazin, this does not seem to be the case for the frame as frame in theatre. Bazin clearly mentions the physical demarcation of the décor as frame, which comes close to how the frame functions in Lizène's work. In *Contraindre le corps,* the frame does not work as a mask, only

[6] Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, 16.
[7] Bazin, *What is Cinema: vol. 1,* 43.

hiding that which is out of the frame. It is more of a radicalization of Bazin's description of the décor in theatre, in the sense that it articulates a frame that negates the out-of-field. We do not expect Lizène's head to come back, neither does it communicate with that which is inside the frame. In this sense, it could be argued that *Contraindre le corps*, with regard to its framing, is closer to theatre and painting than to cinema.

The difference between the photographic frame of *Contraindre le corps* and the filmic frame as mask described by Bazin and Deleuze becomes evident when comparing *Contraindre le corps* to another work by Lizène called *Tentative à contraindre le corps à s'inscrire dans l'image* (1971) in which he applies the same concept to moving images. Much like in the photographic version, he adapts his posture to the frame as it gradually becomes smaller. Contrary to the still images, however, the moving images do not produce the same dramatic effect. Whenever a part of Lizènes body comes closer to the frame or even disappears for a short period of time, the viewer knows that these body parts will eventually reappear. With the photographic frame, however, this is not the case. If a body part is out of the frame, it is irrevocably lost.

Whereas the frame of the moving images allows Lizène to carelessly cross the frame and come back whenever he likes, the still images set clear limits that trap him inside the photographic image. He is unable to leave the space of the photograph. Interestingly, unlike the title of the photographic work, the title of the video has the word *'tentative'* in it, which is French for 'attempt.' It seems like, in the case of the moving images, Lizène fails to stay within the limits of the frame because the limits are not as clear cut. Instead, parts of his body leave the frame and reappear several times, which shows the porousness of the filmic frame.

In *Camera Lucida,* Roland Barthes distinguishes in a similar way between moving and still images. With moving images, there is a constant flux that allows the gaze to linger. It is not fixed on one thing, but constantly in motion. Photography, on the other hand, fixes the gaze and pins it down. "I cannot let my gaze drift," says Barthes, "The circle is closed, there is no escape."[8] According to Barthes, this is due to the fact that the photograph is motionless, concentrated in one moment. Whereas Barthes designates time, or the lack thereof, as the cause for the fixation or the imprisonment of the gaze, the same could be said of space. The gaze is not only trapped within the limits of the moment that is photographed, but also within the limits of the frame. The frame prevents both Lizène from escaping and the gaze from going beyond its spatial limits.

[8] Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* 90.

In *Looking at Photographs,* Victor Burgin makes a similar remark on how the frame restricts the look. "The eye/(I)," he writes, "cannot move within the depicted space, it can only move across it to the points where it encounters the frame." This is what Burgin calls "the rule of the frame," which is the idea that the photograph is limited by the perspective of the camera and that the spectator is forced to subject their look to the look of the camera. When we look at the same photograph for a certain amount of time, we lose the "imaginary command of the look" to the authority of an 'other', which is the camera.[9] This realisation comes as soon as our gaze hits the frame, which is the moment we realize that the camera has authority over our gaze and restricts it.

The way in which Burgin presents the frame as a set of limits or boundaries that entrap the look is in accordance with how the frame is presented by Lizène in *Contraindre le corps,* namely as four walls that prevent Lizène from escaping the photographic space.

1.1.2 The photographic blind field

So far, we have established that *Contraindre le corps* tends to conceive of the photographic frame, in contrast to the filmic frame, as a negation of the off-frame space. It is a closed off system, cut off from the rest of the world, that does not communicate with the outside and prevents what is inside from escaping. However, there are other works in the series by Lizène in which the frame seems to operate in a slightly different way. In *Petit maître liégeois s'introduisant joyeusement dans le cadre d'une photo* (1971) *(fig. 3),* for example, the limits of the frame are not as rigid. The photograph captures Lizène in the act of entering the frame, suggesting that he is leaving another space to enter the space of the frame. *Contraindre le corps* did not allow Lizène to leave the space of the frame, thereby suggesting that there was no out-of-field and that everything was contained within the space of the frame. *S'introduisant joyeusement* seems to go against this reductive position. The frame allows Lizène to cross its borders and to move between spaces. When reading the title of this work, the viewer cannot but imagine two spaces, one visible and the other invisible.

In *Camera Lucida,* Roland Barthes coins the idea of a 'blind field' [*champ aveugle*] and defines it in similar terms as Deleuze's out-of-field, namely as something that allows the action to go on beyond the frame. Photography, in contrast, has no such blind field. "Confronting millions of photographs, including those which have a good *studium*, I sense no

[9] Burgin, "Looking at photographs," 152.

blind field: everything which happens within the frame dies absolutely once this frame is passed beyond."[10] This is because the photograph is motionless. Contrary to moving images, it does not allow for things to '*emerge'* nor to '*leave.'* "They are Anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies."[11] In *Contraindre le corps* there is indeed no such blind field, as Lizène is stuck within the frame, fastened down like a butterfly, to use Barthes' metaphor. In *S'introduisant joyeusement*, however, Lizène does seem to '*emerge,'* a potential Barthes only ascribes to cinema.

Barthes seems to admit that there are exceptions to the general rule that photographs have no blind field, as in some photographs the punctum creates a blind field. Although it is subtle, the punctum generates a '*beyond.'* To illustrate his point, Barthes gives the example of the erotic photograph which, in contrast to the pornographic photograph, does not show everything. It guides the desire of the viewer towards that which is not revealed. In Robert Mapplethorpe's self-portrait *(fig. 4)*, for instance, we only see half of his body. The viewer's desire is guided to that which is not visible and lies beyond the frame. Although *S'introduisant joyeusement* is hardly an erotic photograph in the conventional sense, it does have some aspects that correspond to Barthes' description. We only see part of Lizène's body. His foot and part of his leg are out of the frame, which guides the desire of the viewer to this particular part of his body. They imagine this foot, thus creating another space, a beyond. In contrast to *Contraindre le corps,* Lizène has not lost his foot. The viewer knows that it is still there, only in another space, namely the off-frame space or the blind field. The photographic frame performs a cut, yet allows for the part that is cut off to persist in the space of the blind field.

Christian Metz seems to take up a similar position as Barthes. In "Photography and Fetish," he ascribes to the photographic frame the ability to cut off body parts, while at the same time maintaining the idea of an off-frame. According to Metz, the 'click' of the shutter performs a violent 'cutting off' and excludes that which is not inside the frame. Nevertheless, the 'click' also produces an off-frame: "It marks the place of an irreversible absence, a place from which the look has been averted forever."[12] The photographic off-frame might not be as full or as substantial as the filmic off-frame, in the sense that it is a place characterized by absence, but it is precisely trough this absence that the off-frame communicates with that which is inside the frame.

[10] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 57.
[11] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 57.
[12] Metz, "Photography and Fetish," 130.

Metz' idea of the photographic frame as a cut is inspired by Philippe Dubois' book *l'Acte Photographique,* in which Dubois characterises the photograph as a *'coupe spatiale.'* According to Dubois, the photograph always implies a residue, a rest, another, which is the blind field. This blind field is as much part of the frame as that which is visible: *"Ce qu'une photographie ne montre pas est aussi important que cela même qu'elle donne à voir."*[13] Between the frame and the blind field there is always a relation of contiguity. The viewer presupposes this off-frame space when looking at *S'introduisant joyeusement.* They imagine an invisible space that is contiguous to the visible space. Only by doing so will the viewer be able to grasp the title's statement according to which Lizène is entering the frame.

Lizène's preoccupation with the off-frame space is made tangible in *Petit maître liégeois s'introduisant dans le cadre d'une photo depuis une autre photo (Fig. 5),* in which he makes the blind field, or at least a part of it, visible to the viewer. It follows the same basic principle as *S'introduisant joyeusement*: we see Lizène stepping into the photographic frame. The crucial difference is that the work consists of two photographs or at least parts of two different photographs, thus showing the viewer the space Lizène is leaving to step inside the frame. The space the viewer had to imagine in the *S'introduisant joyeusement,* the suggested space, is now made explicit by the artist himself. Certainly the viewer suspects that these photographs were not made at the same time and therefor knows that Lizène is not actually moving from one frame to another, but the way in which the photographs are arranged suggests the co-presence of two juxtaposed spaces, the space within the frame and the space of the blind field, since Lizène is leaving the latter for the former. If we relate it back to Mapplethorpe's self-portrait mentioned by Barthes, it is as if Mapplethorpe would have photographed the other part of his body as well and put both pictures next to each other. One could argue, therefore, that according to Barthes' conception of the frame, *Depuis une autre photo* no longer has a blind field. There is nothing left that could be an object of desire for the viewer's gaze, certainly not a punctum that generates a beyond. Everything is revealed and the photograph therefore has lost its erotic aspect.

Another variation on this work is *Petit maître liégeois hesitant à entrer dans le cadre d'une ou l'autre photo* (1973) *(fig. 6).* It shows two photographs, each of them cutting Lizènes body in half through their framing. By juxtaposing them, Lizène reconstructs his body as a whole. As his body is on the verge of two photographs, it looks like he is hesitating which photograph he should enter. It is not clear anymore which photograph is the frame and which

[13] Dubois, *l'Acte Photographique,* 171.

one represents the off-frame. Due to this confusion they are both at the same time. Depending on the point of view they are the in-frame space in relation to themselves or the off-frame space in relation to each other. They are both presence, and absence made present.

The frame posited by Lizène in most of these examples, with the exception of *Contraindre le corps*, is neither a frame that irrevocably negates the possibility of an off-frame space, nor is it a filmic frame that distinguishes between actuality and virtuality. Lizène pushes forward an interpretation of the photographic frame as a border between two spaces. Whether this border was introduced while taking the picture or in the dark room, in the final image it marks a separation between inside, the other outside, visibility and invisibility. These two spaces keep informing each other and are co-dependent. What follows is an attempt to reveal the modern foundation of this description of the frame with regard to the relationship between space and place. From this point on, I will no longer carelessly use the word space to designate both the in-frame and the off-frame space. I will show that the space within the frame can actually be called a place in relation to the rest of space.

1.2 The modern conception of space and place

1.2.1 Place as location and locale

17th-century philosopher Pierre Gassendi was one of the firsts to define place in quantitative terms, thereby inaugurating three centuries of modern thinking on space and place. In *The reality of the Infinite Void according to Aristotle* he writes: "Place is a quantity, or some sort of extension, namely, the space or interval made up of the three dimensions: length, breadth and depth, in which it is possible to hold a body or through which a body may travel."[14] Whereas Aristotle defined place in a corporeal manner, as space occupied by a body, Gassendi proposes a quantitative conception of place as measurable and extensive. According to Gassendi, place is a part of space that has been geometrically demarcated and within which bodies can move around. Gassendi's quantitative conception was further developed by Newton, who defined place as "a part of space."[15] In other words, Newton considered place as a physical delineation in space that creates an 'in' and an 'out.' Jeff Malpas names this conception 'locale,' in the sense of 'that within which' something or someone resides. Locale

[14] Gassendi as cited by Casey in *The Fate of Place*, 141.
[15] Casey, *The Fate of Place,* 154.

requires "a certain openness, a certain dimensionality, a certain 'room.'"[16] The idea of place as locale, Malpas writes, is also in accordance with the etymological origin of the word 'place.' It is derived from the Latin *Platea* and the Greek *Plateia*, both of which can be translated as 'bounded space.'[17]

Place as locale can be visualised as a football field. The game has to stay within the physical boundaries of the field. Once the ball crosses one of the side-lines, the game stops, as it has gone 'out of play.' A player, then, has to throw it back 'in play,' in order for the game to continue. In other words, the white side-lines designate the place of the field, the portion of space within which objects or persons can move around.

This definition allows us to rearticulate the photographic frame as it was put forward by Lizène and theorized by writers like Deleuze, Barthes and Metz. The photographic frame delineates a part of space. It delimits an 'interval,' to use Gassendi's words, within which a body can move around; in this case Lizène himself. This interval is quantitative, in the sense that it can be measured. It can also become larger or smaller, as is the case in *Forcing the Body,* where the frame gradually gets smaller in relation to the size of Lizène's body.

Besides Gassendi and Newton's reduction of place to locale*,* there is another modern tendency, which is to define place in terms of situation or location. The idea of place as location can be traced back to René Descartes and his definition of place and space.[18] In *Principles of Philosophy* he writes: "'Place' and 'space' differ, because 'place' designates situation more specifically than extension or shape, and, on the other hand, we think more specifically of the latter when we speak of space."[19] In other words: "When we say that a thing is in a certain place, we understand only that it is in a certain situation in relation to other things."[20] For Descartes, the place of an object is equal to its position in space.

Malpas summarizes the modern conception of place as a combination of Newtonian locale and Cartesian location: "Place is to be understood simply in terms of a particular region of physical space or a location within it, designating a region or location that, in its more precise

[16] Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 25.
[17] Malpas, *Place and Experience,* 26.
[18] Descartes' position with regard to the relationship between space and place is more ambiguous then this paper makes it appear. Descartes occasionally conceptualizes place as extension or dimension, which is what he calls internal place. In this paper, however, I will focus on his definition of external place as situation or location, while presenting Newton's thinking as paradigmatic for place as locale. For more on Descartes account on external and internal place cf. Casey, *The Fate of Place,* 157.
[19] Newton, *Mathematical Principles,,* 45-46.
[20] Newton, *Mathematical Principles,* 45.

usage, can be specified within a relativized spatial framework by means of a set of spatial coordinates."[21]

Lizène clearly operates within the conceptual framework of this modern conception of place as both locale and location. Through his art, he presents the photographic frame as a portion of space that can be situated within it. It is a region one can locate, walk towards, step into and even attach one's tie to.

According to Liesbeth Decan, Lizène's *'Travaux sur le cadre'* can be seen as a medium-specific enquiry into the medium of photography. She relates this enquiry to some of Lizène's earlier investigations into painting. During the 1960's Lizène created the series *Toiles et Châssis* in which he dissected the medium of painting by separately showing the stretchers of a canvas or by painting a fragment of a stretcher on the canvas itself.[22] Much like his investigation on painting, Lizène's photographic work is a search for the essential properties of photography, the frame being one of the most fundamental ones. But not just any frame. Lizène conceptualizes the photographic frame in a very specific way, namely as a portion of space, a place, that can be located. This is confirmed by a work like *Art spécifique photographique: Promenade autour du cadre* (1973) *(fig. 7),* in which he positions a series of photographs of himself in such a way that he appears to walk around the frame. In this work, Lizène is quite literally delineating the frame. Through the act of walking, he marks the borders of the frame that isolate the photographic place from the rest of space. By walking in a geometrical rectangular shape, Lizène mimics the mechanism of the camera. He performs a 'click,' to use Metz's term, that creates an empty place.

However, what becomes clear in *Art spécifique photographique: Promenade autour du cadre*, is the the nature of the place that is created by the frame. It is defined by the dimensions of the frame and as such it is an inherently geometrical place that, in nature, does not differ from the space it is made of, except for the fact that it is bounded.

The demarcation itself is sufficient for the creation of this place. As a consequence, the frame itself appears to be more important than what is within the frame. The viewer's attention is directed to the frame itself, which is presented as specific to photography and maybe even, as suggested by the title, as its most essential characteristic. In the following section I will explore the limitations of considering the photographic frame from a geometrical perspective.

[21] Malpas, *Place and Experience,* 29.
[22] Decan, *Conceptual, Surrealist, Pictorial,* 107-108.

1.2.2 Spatialization of place (and the photograph)

The modern conception of place received a lot of critique during the 1960's. Philosophers like Bachelard and Lefebvre would denounce Newton and Descartes' position as a geometrization or 'spatialization of place.' Instead, they propose a different conception that anchors place in experience or in the social. By doing so, they gave rise to what would come to be known as the 'spatial turn' in social sciences.

One of the most common points of critique, is that, in contrast to pre-modern conceptions of space, place is dissolved into space during modernity. Whereas Plato and Aristotle granted place with a certain potential to affect and structure the world, Newton and Descartes reduce it to a geometrical, homogenous region or point within space. By doing so, they spatialize place. About Gassendi's conception of place, Casey writes that it is "a merely quantified portion of an equiform and empty space: place has become a reduced residuum with no inherent capacity to alter the course of things in the natural world. All that remains of place is its very name — and an empty name, a mere *flatus vocis*, at that."[23] Place is subsumed under space in the sense that there is no qualitative difference between both. Place is a mere tool for measuring space. "As such," Casey continues, "place has no being or identity apart from that of space itself, and is determined, indeed predetermined, by whatever attributes are ascribed properly to absolute space."[24] In modernity, place becomes a mere aspect of space and thereby loses its qualitative specificity.

For Lizène, there is no qualitative difference between the place within the frame and the space outside the frame. Both obey the laws of Newtonian physics. Only the first one is visible, and the second one invisible. The camera isolated a part of space by demarcating it by ways of a geometrical figure, but in doing so, it did not affect it. The fact that a portion of space has become a place did not change the structure of that place. This continuity is presupposed by Lizène when he walks from the off frame *space* into the photographic *place*, both of which have the same structure and are made of the same spatial tissue. What separates them is an abstract frame, a mere delineation. As such, one could call Lizènes photography spatialized.
In the following chapter I will present a case-study that allows for a different conception of space and place; one that does acknowledge the qualitative difference between both.

[23] Casey, *The Fate of Place,* 60.
[24] Casey, *The Fate of Place,* 60.

Chapter 2 *New Topographics* and the Social Production of Place

According to Kim Sichel, what united the photographers in the exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape,* was their use of the medium of photography to "investigate built and populated landscapes and human relations to *place.*"[25] Sichel's use of the term 'place' stands in sharp contrast to how the term was used in the first chapter of this thesis. From Sichel's perspective, place is something that is related to society, something that can be populated and built by humans; in other words: something social. In this chapter I will investigate the above mentioned exhibition, curated by William Jenkins, in relation to a social articulation of space and place. I will argue that only by doing so can one grasp what is at stake in the photography of the *New Topographics* exhibition.

The exhibition gathered the work of eight American and two German photographers who documented human interventions in the landscape of the American West. Each photographer presented ten prints, all of which, with the exception of Stephen Shore's photographs, were in black and white. These prints were all framed in the same way, and had about the same dimensions *(fig. 8)*. The subject matter of almost all of the selected photographs are the landscapes of the American West and how they are altered by human interventions.

Since its opening in 1975, the social dimension of the *New Topographics* exhibition has been subject to debate. Whereas Jenkins provides a predominantly apolitical view of the exhibition, claiming that the common denominator of the participating photographers was a matter of style, other critics like Britt Salvesen laud the participating photographers for their ability to not only capture the social relations that determine a particular place, but also to provide a social commentary on these relations. An analysis of several photographs within the framework of a social conception of space and place will allow me to determine what this social commentary consists of. I will analyse photographs by Joe Deal, Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz, as they could be considered to be representative of a more general tendency within the *New Topographics* exhibition.

This investigation demands a radical shift with regard to the theoretical framework. I will operate within the theoretical field of 'radical' or 'social' geography. This movement, represented by thinkers like Edward W. Soja, David Harvey and Andrew Merrifield, centres

[25] Sichel, "Deadpan Geometries," 87.

around the political implications of the social production of space.[26] The roots of radical geography can be traced back to French critical thinker Henri Lefebvre, whose *magnum opus The Production of Space* will provide the theoretical framework for this chapter.

2.1 *New Topographics* as apolitical document

In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Jenkins explains the meaning of the title of the exhibition by quoting Webster's Dictionary's definition of the term 'topography': "The detailed and accurate description of a particular place, city, town, district, state, parish of tract of land." He continues by emphasizing the term 'description': "The important word is *description* for although photography is thought to do many things to and for its subjects, what it does first and best is describe them."[27]

This definition suggests that Jenkins' view is in line with how regional geographers relate to place, that is to say, by visually describing a portion of land. The data resulting from this survey are then compared to data of other regions. Regional geography, Tim Cresswell writes, is devoted to "specifying and describing the differences between areas of the earth's surface."[28] This comparative approach rarely leads to political conclusions; neither are these regions considered as the result of socio-political factors. Regions of land are simply described in their particularity and no attention is given to what constitutes them as such.

A similar passivity towards place underlies Jenkins' description of the photographers that are selected for the exhibition. What unites them, he argues, is their objective and neutral position towards the places they photograph: "As individuals the photographers take great pains to prevent the slightest trace of judgment or opinion from entering their work." He further compares the photographers to Ed Ruscha, in the way they adopt a 'passive frame.' "Rather than the picture having been created by the frame, there is a sense of the frame having been laid on an existing scene without interpreting it very much."[29] In this sense, Jenkins adheres to what could be considered to be the etymological meaning of 'topography.' Helen Westgeest and Hilde Van Gelder explain how the term is derived from the Greek word *topographein,* which is "a combination of *topos,* which means place, and *graphein,* which means drawing, writing, or describing."[30] Westgeest and Van Gelder use the term 'topographic photography'

[26] Cresswell, *Place*: an introduction, 41.
[27] Jenkins, *New Topographics,* 5.
[28] Cresswell, *Place: an introduction*, 31.
[29] Jenkins, *New Topographics,* 5.
[30] Westgeest, Van Gelder, *Photography Theory,* 121.

to designate a "truthful recording of existing places,"[31] which is what Jenkins reduces the *New Topographics* to.

Refraining from situating the photographs within a socio-political context, Jenkins presents a mainly apolitical view of the exhibition, suggesting that the photographs are nothing but an objective, almost scientific survey of man-altered portions of the surface of the earth. The photographs are simply documents that are "anthropological rather than critical, scientific rather than artistic."[32] As we will see, this apolitical view is the result of how Jenkins' view is based on a modern conception of place as it was laid out in the first chapter of this thesis.

Together with Jenkins, one could argue that it is not the ambition of the *New Topographics* exhibition to have any social impact whatsoever. But how then, should one understand certain remarks that were made by some of the participants of the show like the following one by Frank Gohlke: "All of us were and are primarily concerned with understanding the things we photograph in their largest relationship to land and culture, and the particularities of social existence."[33] In accordance with this quote by Gohlke, I will argue in the rest of this chapter that the *New Topographics* exhibition *can* be seen from a social perspective and that the social critique provided by some of the *New Topographics* photographers is conditioned by a social conception of space and place. In order for me to do so, we first need to understand how exactly space and place would be socially produced. I will do this by referring to Lefebvre's *The Production of Space.*

2.2 The social production of space and place

A first difficulty that must be noted when engaging with Lefebvre and his followers in the context of a research written in English are the, sometimes unresolvable, difference between the French and the English language. The French word '*espace,'* for example, has slightly different connotations than the English word 'space' and is often used to designate 'place.' The same goes for '*lieu,'* which has a much stronger sense of locality to it then the English 'place.'[34] One has to keep these issues in mind when using Lefebvre's vocabulary. This means that the conceptual distinction made in Anglophone academic research between space and place cannot

[31] Westgeest, Van Gelder, *Photography Theory,* 120.
[32] Jenkins, *New Topographics,* 7.
[33] Gohlke, as quoted by Britt Salvesen in *New Topographics,* 40
[34] For a more detailed account on the difference between place and space in French and English cf. Malpas, *Place and experience,* 24-25.

be literally applied to French thought. The lack of a French equivalent for the English word 'place' makes Tim Cresswell conflate Lefebvre's '*espace social'* with the English 'place'.[35] We will see that this is too simplistic and reduces a lot of the complexity of Lefebvre's thinking. My account on Lefebvre's terminology and thinking will for a large part be informed by Donald Nicholson-Smith's translation of *La Production de L'espace,* as well as by Andy Merrifield's insightful essay "Place and space: a Lefebvrian reconciliation." In this essay, Merrifield renders explicit the distinction between space and place that is only latently present in Lefebvre's book. By doing so, Merrifield provides a valuable tool for bridging the gap between Lefebvre's writing and Anglophone thinkers on place and space like Soja and Harvey.

Lefebvre's starting point for *The Production of Space,* is the need for a radical paradigm shift:

> Not so many years ago, the word 'space' had a strictly geometrical meaning: the idea it evoked was simply that of an empty area. In scholarly use it was generally accompanied by some such epithet as 'Euclidean', 'isotropic', or 'infinite', and the general feeling was that the concept of space was ultimately a mathematical one. To speak of 'social space' therefore, would have sounded strange.[36]

Lefebvre clearly opposes the Cartesian/Newtonian conception of modern space, which is the paradigm that was used in the first chapter of this thesis to analyse Lizène's work and within which both the regional geographer and Jenkins seem to operate. According to Lefebvre, this modern conception of space is an abstraction that results from the way in which we conceive space. It is reduced to a *res extensa* in relation to a *res cogitans* and as such to homogenous geometrical space. Real space, however, is a social product, the result of socio-historical processes.[37] Space is not an empty area or region that is able to accommodate culture and society, it is rather social from the beginning. Every society produces a space that is particular to it, structured according to its history and to the social relations that exist within it.

The *New Topographics* photographers also seem to adopt the above mentioned premise that space is socially determined. Britt Salvesen mentions the notion of the "cultural landscape," popularized by J.B Jackson in the 1950's, as one of the most important influences

[35] Cresswell, *Place: an introduction*, 17.
[36] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1.
[37] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 14.

of the *New Topographics.*[38] Central to Jackson's thinking was the idea that "all landscapes are cultural landscapes." He claims that landscape emerges from "specific geographical, social and cultural circumstances" and that these are the forces that should be investigated by geographers, but also by architects and urban planners.[39] The subtitle to the exhibition, can be seen as a reference to this idea. Moreover, the adjective 'new' in *New Topographics* is most likely a reference to this idea of the social landscape, in contrast the the sublime, natural landscapes photographed of photographers like Ansel Adams.

But what is the nature of this social space? Here also, Lefebvre explicitly positions himself against Cartesianism. In contrast to the homogeneity of Cartesian space, Lefebvrian social space is a constant flux, a dynamic process that results from social activity. Instead of fragmenting space and cutting it into pieces by the use of physical boundaries, Lefebvre considers space as streams of energy that interfere with each other: "Social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another. They are not things, which have mutually limiting boundaries and which collide because of their contours or as a result of inertia."[40] Lefebvre uses the analogy of hydrodynamics, comparing social space to the flows of waves and water.[41] But where does this description of general space leave us with regard to place?

There are points in space where the general flow of social interaction is slowed down, and almost comes to a standstill. The chaotic flux of space is *formed* in these clusters of energy as places. The dynamic whole is imbued with meaning through these centres of concentrated space. Merrifield writes: "The material landscape is produced, of necessity, as a thing in place and becomes imbued with meaning in everyday place-bound social practice."[42]

According to Lefebvre, we are in need of a critique that investigates this general flux of social space as well as how this flux becomes formed in particular places. Such a critique of space and place should not deny the fact that they are social products. He insists on "an approach which would analyse not things in space but space itself, with a view of uncovering the social relationships embedded within it."[43] *The Production of Space* is an attempt to develop the necessary tools for such a critique. Could photography maybe play a role in this Lefebvrian project of uncovering social relationships?

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[38] Salvesen, *New Topographics,* 20.
[39] Blankenship, "Reading *Landscape,"* 181.
[40] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 87.
[41] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 88.
[42] Merrifield, "Place and Space," 520.
[43] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 89.

One could suggest that the photographers from the *New Topographics* exhibition were documenting these socially constructed places. As such, they could be said to adopt the position of critical geographers, analysing the social dynamics that determine a place as such. However, as we will see, Lefebvre considers the nature of photography to be incompatible with the dialectical relationship between space and place.

In adopting a dialectical perspective on space and place, Lefebvre positions himself against a mechanistic or atomistic approach to reality.[44] In a Cartesian/Newtonian conception of the world, the whole of reality is simply the sum of its parts. From a dialectical perspective, however, reality consists of the relationship between the whole and its parts. The parts only receive meaning in relation to other parts and as parts of a totality. The global manifests itself, takes form and meaning through the local and vice versa. Merrifield writes: "The space of the whole thus takes on meaning through place and each part (i.e. each place) in its interconnection with other parts (places) engenders the whole."[45] The global and the local condition each other mutually.[46]

According to Lefebvre, geographers, architects, and engineers (and as we will see, this list also includes photographers), are all unable to grasp this dialectical logic of reality because they think of it in a Cartesian way as a set of empty containers. They fragment space into different parts, ignoring the different relationships between these parts that are formative of social space. They thereby reduce its social complexity to homogenous geometrical space. Since reality is organized in accordance with the logic of dialectics, it needs to be studied as such.

2.3 The inability of photography to capture social space and place

From the few passages in *The Production of Space* that are devoted to photography, one can conclude that Lefebvre did not deem it possible that photography could play a role in his critique of space. The reason for Lefebvre's disbelief in the potential of photography can be found in the nature of the photographic medium itself.

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[44] Merrifield, "Place and Space," 517.
[45] Merrifield, "Place and Space," 520.
[46] The interdependent relationship between space and place is most apparent in the difference between circulating and fixed capital. David Harvey transposes Marx' account of this discussion to the difference between space and place by presenting place as circulating capital which becomes at certain points localized in place as fixed capital.

Lefebvre associates photography with the Cartesian approach, in the sense that it fragments space: "Cutting things up and rearranging them, *découpage* and *montage* – these are the alpha and omega of the art of image-making." He classifies the photographer in the same category as the architect, the geographer or the engineer. They all fail to see the social dynamic that constitutes space and place, forcing the flux to fit into their abstract conceptual framework. To illustrate this dominant tendency that ignores space as a social product, Lefebvre uses the example of a house. Even though the house appears to be the epitome of immovability, a critical analysis will reveal that it is "permeated from every direction by streams of energy which run in and out of it by every imaginable route: water, gas, electricity, telephone lines, radio and television signals, and so on. Wat appears to be an immovable entity, is in reality the result of a combination of different forces that converge in a particular place."[47] Lefebvre continues to argue that these forces can never be captured by a painting or a photograph. A critical analysis of the house that takes into account the currents and waves that constitute a place is "much more accurate than any drawing or photograph"[48] In order to explain Lefebvrian social space, Merrifield uses the analogy of quantum theory, which states that all matter is at the same time a particle and a wave.[49] In the context of Lefebvre's critique of photography this analogy would imply that a photograph only captures places as particles and fails to see that it is at the same time a wave. Because an image isolates a portion of space and reduces it to geometrical homogenous space, a photograph is unable to represent the social experience that constitutes a place. Photography denies lived experience, or to use Lefebvre's own words: "the image kills."[50]

Lefebvre's account of photography echoes how I presented Jenkins' vision in the first section of this thesis, as he includes the photographer in the list of professions that fragment space. At best, the photographer can visually describe a place, which is exactly what Jenkins expected from the *New Topographics* participants. In both cases, photography fails to relate to place and space as social products. Only, to Jenkins, it is not the ambition of the *New Topographics* to do so, whereas to Lefebvre, even if it was their ambition, they would not be able to do so because of the reductive nature of photography in general.

However, Lefebvre adds that there are some exceptions that seem to transcend this reductive tendency: "Occasionally, however, an artist's tenderness or cruelty transgresses the

[47] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* 93.
[48] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* 93.
[49] Merrifield, "Place and Space," 521.
[50] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 97.

limits of the image. Something else altogether may then emerge, a truth and a reality answering to criteria quite different from those of exactitude, clarity, readability and plasticity."[51] In a footnote to this comment, Lefebvre mentions a photographic feature by Henri Cartier-Bresson in *Politique-Hebdo* on June 29th 1972. Since Cartier-Bresson was visiting the Soviet Union during this period, Lefebvre is probably referring to the photographic reportage he made there in 1972.[52] What is it that made these photographs so uncommon, that they could be seen as an exception to Lefebvre's rule that photography fragments reality? Certainly not their "exactitude, clarity, readability and plasticity," as these are all characteristics of the fragmenting tendency of photography in Lefebvre's view. It is most probably the way they relate to the daily lives of the people that are portrayed and the fact that the images can be seen as a social commentary on the social conditions of people living in the Soviet Union in the 1970's. Furthermore, the photographs from 1972 were shown in *Politique-Hebdo* next to earlier photographs of the Soviet Union, made by Cartier-Bresson in 1954, thus showing how the social conditions of these people changed over the course of 20 years. They portray reality as a process and thereby respect it in its dynamic nature.

In what follows I will argue that, much like the reportage by Cartier-Bresson, the *New Topographics* seem to resist Lefebvre's judgment about photography. This, because, contrary to Jenkins' claims, they provide a critical view on social space under capitalism, as they respect the dialectical relationship between space and place when representing this space.

2.4 *New Topographics* as a critique of space

2.4.1 *New Topographics* and dialectics

In his essay 'Systems Everywhere' Greg Foster-Rice argues that the *New Topographics* exhibition should be situated in the context of the emergence of systems theory in the early 1970's. First proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy during the first half of the twentieth century and popularized by his 1968 book, *General System Theory,* systems theory reacted against Greenbergian Aesthetic formalism. Central is the idea that "complex phenomena cannot be reduced to the discrete properties of their various parts, but must be understood according to

[51] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,*97.
[52] https://pro.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&STID=2S5RYD1RWTNP

the arrangement of and relations between the parts that create the whole."[53] In this sense, systems theory has a relational conception of reality which, much like Lefebvre's conception, presupposes a dialectical relationship between the parts and the whole.

Foster-Rice contrasts this relational approach to the idea of the decisive moment that was central to the work of photographers like Cartier-Bresson but also Gary Winogrand. What these photographers have in common is that they privilege the parts over the whole. They are hunting for moments which they can isolate from the flux of time, in order to present them in themselves. They are cutting off these moments from their context. The *New Topographics,* in contrast, privileged *arrangement* over *composition,* which "implied the fixed nature of the parts *within the system,* and thus it emphasized the creation of a *representative* of the whole rather than a *representation* from the parts."[54] The places that were photographed by photographers like Joe Deal and Lewis Baltz are considered to be part of a dynamic system that shines through them. Their meaning results from their relationship to the whole rather than from their isolation from it. They have a holistic approach to the landscapes they photographed, in the sense that they considered them in relation to a larger whole of which these landscapes were an expression.

An example of how the the photographs of the *New Topographics* are shot through with systems theory and a dialectical approach to reality, is a photograph by Robert Adams: *Subdivision street, South Denver, Colorado, 1973 (fig. 9)* We could consider this photo from Jenkins' perspective as a document that objectively represents a particular street in South Denver. As such it avoids any attempt at interpreting it. It is clear, however, that Adams is not adopting a 'passive frame', to use Jenkins' expression. On the contrary, the photo is made from the vantage point of a pedestrian. Because of the low angle, the road dominates the photograph. This can be interpreted as an attempt to visualise how cars invade our landscape. Furthermore, if we look at it from a Lefebvrian perspective, according to which places are the expression of a larger social reality, we can argue that through this image, Adams is addressing car industry in general. This is confirmed by Finis Dunaway, as she writes: "The image, (…), makes automobile environments appear as places where it is difficult to imagine people congregating and where, with the exception of a few scrawny trees, the cast Western sky and radiant light provide the only visible reminders of nature's continuing presence."[55] The image is not so much showing how this particular street in Denver is dominated by cars, rather, by considering

[53] Foster-Rice, "Systems Everywhere," 47.
[54] Foster-Rice, "Systems Everywhere," 65.
[55] Dunaway, "Beyond Wilderniss," 28.

this street in the context of a larger whole, it represents how the American West in general is being invaded by the automobile industry and how this industry is shaping the landscape. Adams presents this image together with other images with the same subject matter. By doing so, he is providing a critique of car culture in general.

This idea is also present in the way these photographs were shown, namely as series. *(fig. 10)* The juxtaposition of multiple images implies that all images are the expression of the same general situation. Moreover, the fact that they were presented as such, forces the viewer to look for relationships between the images, something that is not encouraged in photography that privileges the decisive moment. Foster-Rice writes: "All the photographs were hung in identical frames, with so many crowded on a wall that it would have been nearly impossible for viewers to concentrate on any single image without considering its relationship to neighbouring images, thus replicating the governing logic of systems theory."[56] Lizène also made use of the grid, only in a slightly different way. Whereas Lizène juxtaposed multiple images to emphasize the frame as geometrical boundary that performs a separation between different spaces, the *New Topographics* used juxtaposition to imply that all these images are representations of the same global situation *(fig. 11)*.

The *New Topographics* are not isolating places from a dynamic whole, they arrange, compose and show their images in such a way that the whole is present in the parts, uncovering the dynamic of social space. In the reportage by Cartier-Bresson that is mentioned by Lefebvre, the photographer presented the social relationships as a dynamic process since he compares images that were made twenty years apart. The *New Topographics* artists are adopting a similar approach in contrasting their images of man altered-landscapes to the images of 19th century landscape photography, but also to Ansel Adam's photographs of natural landscapes. At the time, these photographs were widely known and formed the backdrop for *New Topographics* exhibition. As a consequence, the realisation that capitalism is invading and transforming the landscape emerges from this contrast. As Larissa Dryansky puts it: "What they show is not a moment in or out of time but time itself at work."[57] Despite the fact that they are still photographs of deserted environments, there is a certain durational aspect to them in the sense that the past, the present and the future are all implied as a process.[58]

[56] Foster-Rice, "Systems Everywhere," 66.
[57] Dryansky, "Images of Thought," 118.
[58] Larissa Dryansky compares the photographs of the *New Topographics* echibition to Deleuze's time-image because of this temporal dimension.

In these photographs Adams adopted a dialectical approach to uncover social relations that were hidden behind the veil of capitalism. Other photographers from the *New Topographics* movement, however, used a slightly different strategy, although just as critical, which is to represent the veil itself. In the following section I will discuss this second strategy.

2.4.2 *New Topographics* and abstract space

Edward W. Soja reads in Lefebvre a two-fold interpretation of capitalist production of space. On the one hand there is the production of a dynamic social space that becomes localised in clusters. This is the reality addressed by Adams. There is a second tendency, however, that we have touched upon several times, which is related to the way in which architects, engineers etc., fragment space. This second tendency is not limited to the vision of these individual people. Capitalism as a whole tries to hide the dynamic of social relationships by producing abstract space. Soja writes: "At the same time, there is also a persistent tendency towards increasing homogenisation and the reduction of these geographical differences."[59] The dynamic flux that constitutes the dialectics between space and place is covered by homogeneous space. This 'veil' is necessary for the survival of capitalism as it allows the 'reproduction of space' in accordance with the ideology of capitalism itself.[60] This abstract space expresses itself through architecture and urban planning.

The countless photographs of suburban neighbourhoods that are among the photographs of the *New Topographics* exhibition can be seen in the light of capitalist production of abstract space. Parts of land are traversed by fences and walls that divide space into different parts. The result is a fragmented and disconnected space, that represses lived experience. The photographs of Joe Deal are an expression of these rigid structures. Parking lots, industrial terrains, or storage spaces form geometrical grids that are imposed on social space. Although these are not actually aerial photographs, they do possess some of the ideas that are central to aerial photography, writes Sichel. These ideas include: 'lack of horizon,' 'abstraction,' 'geometry,' 'flatness,' but above all: 'dehumanization.'[61] Sichel evokes the example of *Untitled View (Albuquerque)* (1974)*(fig. 12)* by Deal and how it reduces the landscape to a set of lines. The overall effect, she writes, "is of a depopulated grid of

[59] Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, 107.
[60] Lefebvre's analysis of how capitalism produces abstract space to cover actual space is clearly a spatialized version of Marx' theory about commodity fetichism.
[61] Sichel, "Deadpan Geometries," 95.

indistinguishable frame homes in a barren landscape – a deserted world."[62] Dunaway makes a similar observation about how the elevated perspective of Deal's photographs highlights "the fragmenting effect of sprawl."[63] She further mentions the sense of separation that speaks from these photographs.

If we approach these observations of both Sichel and Dunaway from a Lefebvrian perspective, we could argue that the photographs of Joe deal evoke a sense of how architects and urban planners are an extension of a capitalist organization of space. This spatial organization is not so much motivated by the needs of the people that actually live in these houses, but rather by the need for capitalism to reproduce itself. Mark Rawlinson notes a similar tendency in the photographs of Robert Adams. He writes about the tract house, the subject of almost all of Adams' photographs *(fig. 13)*, that they are "a new form of vernacular architecture whose existence owes more to the needs of real estate developers and advertising executives (…) than to the needs of the houses' future inhabitants."[64] The spatial arrangement of tract houses denies the possibility of dwelling, adds Rawlinson. They do not allow for abstract space to become inhabited, which, according to Lefebvre, is a condition for the formation of differentiated places. The way in which capitalist homogeneous space obstructs the formation of place could be considered to be the actual subject of the photographs of both Deal and Adams.

This abstraction is also present in the way these photographs are made. According to Jenkins, the detached or disconnected position of the photographer was a symptom of their neutrality and lack of judgment, which constituted the photograph as a document. Brit Salvesen interprets the detached style of the photographers in a slightly different way. According to her, the photographers deliberately foster a certain ambiguity around the very issue of attachment.[65] The detached relationship between the photographer and the place they photograph mirrors the relationship between people and place in general. Instead of being grounded in social space, abstract capitalist space is detached from lived experience and lacks a sense of place. The seemingly neutral and objective stance of some of the *New Topographics* photographers can thereby be seen as an expression of this lack of a sense of place.

In conversation with Britt Salvesen, Lewis Baltz described this approach as a 'determinist' process, whereby "critical analysis of current conditions led to subject and

[62] Sichel, "Deadpan Geometries," 102
[63] Dunaway, "Beyong Wilderness," 29.
[64] Rawlinson, "Disconsolate and Inconsolable," 123.
[65] Salvesen, *New Topographics*, 17.

attitude, and purged them of sentimentality and subjectivity."[66] In *Foundation Construction, Many Warehouses, 2892, Irvine* (1974) *(fig. 14)* one can see Baltz' 'determinist' approach at work in his own photographs. It shows the foundations of warehouses that are under construction. By showing the first stage of building the foundations, Baltz draws attention to the abstract conception of space of architects and engineers, as it is the stage where the building most closely resembles the architectural plans. The blueprints of the buildings are still visible and it seems as if the architectural plans have just been laid out over the surface of the earth, suppressing actual social space by imposing abstract space. The abstracting tendency of these structures is reflected in the style of the photograph itself. Sichel writes how the photograph's composition "seems visually to parallel the building plans and sections these structures were built from."[67]

Rather than being motivated by documentary objectivity, the detached style of photographers like Deal, Adams and Baltz is grounded in a critique of abstract space. It encourages the viewer to assess their own relationship to place, and this not only in relation to the places in the photograph, but also to place in general. To use Sichel's description of the *New Topographics* photographers: "Their cool tone was far from passive, and instead has produced a powerful social language about landscape and place."[68]

As a conclusion to this chapter, one can state that the only way to view the *New Topographics* exhibition within the context of Lefebvre's project of a critique of space is by moving away from Jenkins' conception. Although this narrow interpretation persisted for decades, there have been recent voices of critics who have been encouraging a more political interpretation of the exhibition. Some of these voices have been referring to statements that were made by the artists themselves. For example, when asked how he felt about being associated with urban topography, Robert Adams replied, "The term is too narrow to encompass all our sins. And it suggests a scientific attitude that, in truth, most of us I suspect don't feel."[69] In response to this statement by Adams, it could be argued that the meaning of the term 'topography,' which according to him is too narrow, could be amplified by the adjective 'new.' The 'new' in *'New Topographics'* is not only a reference to what these photographs were *of*, namely, man-altered or cultural landscapes in contrast to natural

[66] Salvesen, *New Topographics*, 19.
[67] Sichel, "Deadpan Geometries," 91.
[68] Sichel, "Deadpan Geometries," 105.
[69] Dugan, *Photography Between Covers*, 171.

landscapes, but also to what they are *about.* Jenkins famously conflates both terms by reducing the images presented at the exhibition to documents. According to him, these photographs are "primarily *about what is in front of the lens.*"[70] I want to argue against Jenkins that these photographs *of* suburban neighbourhoods, streets and industrial sites are not *about* what is in front of the lens, but rather *about* the whole these places are the expression of. The photographs *of* particular places are *about* the way in which general social space is produced and how this production is determined by a capitalist logic. From this perspective, they are 'new' in the sense that they provide a social commentary on the capitalist production of space. The photographic practice of the *New Topographics* cannot be reduced to the descriptive, scientific surveying of regional geography, which is the kind of photographic topography that Jenkins had in mind. In taking up a political position through their artistic production, uncovering social relationships and indicating the possibility of change, the photographs made by photographers like Deal, Baltz and Adams cannot be reduced to truthful recordings of existing places and as such, they have much more affinity with the radical or critical geography represented by the likes of Lefebvre, Soja and Harvey. Or to use Britt Salvesen's words: "Photography could be considered powerfully revelatory – Providing important access, potentially even protection, to aspects of the world threatened by development, pollution, and poverty. If the medium's objectivity was socially constructed, it was perhaps socially necessary as well."[71]

[70] Jenkins, *New Topographics*, 7.
[71] Salvesen, *Topographics,* 22.

Chapter 3 Experience and the Photographic Place

In the previous chapter, the relationship between space and place was conceived of as a way of structuring (social) reality. Photography, on the other hand, was given the role of revealing and commenting on these structures. As such, it was presented as external to space and place. It seems to be the fate of photography that, whenever it is mentioned in relation to space and place, it is merely to analyse its capacity to adequately represent geographically determined places. Is photography doomed to stay on the side-line, only relating as an external entity to space and place?

One could find in the first chapter of this thesis indications of a slightly different way of relating photography to the theoretical discussion on place and space. In Lizène's work, the photographic frame created a place by delineating a portion of space. Lizène thereby endowed photography with a certain potential, one that was not touched upon in the second chapter. However, due to its geometrical nature, the potential of the frame-as-place was limited to applying physical markings to space.

In this chapter I will further investigate the possibility of a photographic place that is qualitatively differentiated. I will try to determine the nature of this place and how it is produced. To put it in the terminology of philosopher Gaston Bachelard, this chapter will start off with a topoanalysis (section 1) followed by what I will call a topogenesis[72] (section 2) of photographic place. I will subsequently show how the indexical nature of photography as deixis contributes to the creation of a photographic place (section 3). Finally, I will investigate the theoretical consequences of such a place by drawing on the theoretical framework developed in the the first three sections to analyse of the work of *New Topographics* photographers Joe Deal, Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz (section 4).

[72] I borrow the term 'topogenesis' from Edward Casey who uses it in his analysis of Aristotle's theory on how places emerge at the creation of the universe. Cf. Casey, *The Fate of Place,* 40.

3.1 The photograph as a lived portion of space

Let us reconsider Lizène's *Petit maître liégeois s'introduisant dans le cadre d'une photo* (*fig. 3)*. About this image, I wrote that it emphasised the frame as a physical boundary. It merely marked the difference between space and a smaller portion of it, both of which were constituted by the same homogeneous empty space. There is, however, a significant difference between the space within the frame and that which is out of the frame that was mentioned in the first chapter, but not considered in depth, namely the fact that the space within the frame can be visually experienced by the viewer. The difference between the part of Lizène's body that is within the frame, and his leg, which is out of the frame, is that, unlike his leg, the rest of his body is visible. This reveals that the frame is not simply a separation between two equally homogenous parts of space, since there does seem to be a qualitative difference between the inner-frame space and the off-frame space. What is within the frame is knowable, concrete, specific and differentiated because the viewer has a way of visually relating to it. The off-frame space, on the other hand, is only suggested. The modern paradigm seems to be exhausted, as is does not enable us to adequately analyse these qualitative differences.

Gaston Bachelard is among those continental philosophers who reacted against the modern geometrisation of place and space and thereby, according to Edward Casey, saved place from the supremacy of space.[73] In *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard opposes himself to what he calls the 'geometrical cancerization' of space, which is the result of how we project our geometrical conception of space on real space. The conceptual constructs we use to conceive of space are endowed with actual ontological value. As a consequence, the difference between place and space, inside and outside, is reduced to a simple 'yes or no.'[74] From a geometrical perspective, there is a symmetrical relationship between place and space, as they are simply each other's negative. This, according to Bachelard, is unacceptable: "Inside and outside do not receive the same way of qualifying epithets that are the measure of our adherence. Nor can one *live* the qualifying epithets attached to inside and outside in the same way."[75] The important notion here is 'to live.' Place and space are not *lived* the same way. This, according to Bachelard, represents their qualitative difference. What constitutes a portion of space as place is the fact that it becomes lived. Bachelard's thinking allows us to put Lizène's work in a

[73] Casey, *The Fate of Place,* 200.
[74] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* 228.
[75] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* 231.

different perspective. The difference between the frame and the out-of-frame is not a mere geometrical difference, it is also a matter of experience. This difference in how they are lived is what constitutes the conceptual opposition between space and place.

Bachelard uses the example of a house[76] to get a grasp of the difference between inside and outside. He contrasts the intimacy of the house to the vastness of the universe. The house is personal as it contains memories. The universe, on the other hand, is undifferentiated, chaotic and unknown. Bachelard presents the house as 'an instrument of topoanalysis' as it allows him to investigate particular places but also place in general. [77] As such, it might just as well serve as a tool to analyse Lizène's work.

The house, Bachelard continues, "is first and foremost a geometrical object, one which we are tempted to analyze rationally."[78] This rational analysis is what I did in the first chapter of this thesis, as Lizène's photographs also presented themselves as geometrical objects. About the house as a geometrical object Bachelard writes: "Its prime reality is visible and tangible, made of well hewn solids and well fitted framework. It is dominated by straight lines."[79] However, Bachelard proceeds by adding that the geometrical object that is the house is immediately transposed to the human plane as soon as it is inhabited. "The house itself, when it starts to live humanly, does not lose all its 'objectivity.'"[80] Whereas the physical walls of the house constitute a location, which is a set of coordinates on the earth's surface, and a locale, which is an interval in space that is formed by a geometrical shape, the lived experience that turns this house into a home is what constitutes a *sense of place.* In *Place: an Introduction,* Tim Cresswell writes how the political geographer John Agnew's characterises 'sense of place' as "the subjective and emotional attachment people have to place."[81]

In the first chapter I explained that the geometrical frame in Lizène's work represented a location and a locale. With Bachelard in mind, however, we can now add that it also possesses a *sense of place*, in the sense that the frame is lived by the viewer who inhabits the frame, much like the intimate space of a house. Moreover, much like the house, the boundaries of the

[76] Lefebvre was clearly influenced by Bachelard in his choice of the house as an illustration of his argument on the dynamic nature of social space. Moreover, Lefebvre's critique on cartesianism in general is shot through with Bachelrard's thinking . However, whereas Bachelard conceives of space through the prism of subjective experience, Lefebvre narrows down his scope to collective, social experience.
[77] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* 20.
[78] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* 68.
[79] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* 68.
[80] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* 69.
[81] Cresswell, *Place: an Introduction,* 14.

photographic frame are porous, as they can be crossed. There is a two-way flow between inside and outside. The physical walls of the house do not turn it into a fortress, there are doorways that allow to move between space and place. The epitome of this porousness, is the threshold. On the subject of the threshold in Bachelard's thinking Casey writes: "A threshold is something we pass over, and as such it contains a felt difference between being inside and outside."[82] In *Petit maître liegeois s'introduisant joyeusement dans le cadre d'une photo (Fig. 3),* Lizène visualizes this idea of the threshold and the porousness it implies. He leaves general undifferentiated space to step into the photographic place. The frame is a boundary, at the same time, however, it allows to be crossed and to move between homogeneous space and the photographic place.

Furthermore, the frame can also mark a separation between two or more photographs and as such between separate places. *Petit maître liégeois hésitant à entrer dans le cadre d'une ou l'autre photo (Fig. 6)* is an example hereof. Two photographs are juxtaposed and separated by a side of the frame they have in common. Lizène stands exactly in the middle, each photograph showing half of his body. Both photographs are places, as they can both be experienced and lived by the spectator. This shows that the frame is not necessarily a boundary between space and place, but in some cases also between different places. Both photographs are lived, yet, because of the frame, they are lived as two separate entities. Another example of this phenomenon is *Contraindre le corps (Fig. 1)*, which is a grid of multiple photographs. Here also, the frame can be seen, not only as a separation between space and place, but also between multiple adjoined photographic places. The difference with *hesitant à entrer dans le cadre,* however, is that the emphasis lies not so much on the porousness of the frame, but rather on how the frame performs a cut that, in this case, separates between two or more places.

These two examples can be related to the metaphor of the house as used by Bachelard. The grid operates in a similar way as the rooms of a house. There is a felt difference between the house as a whole and the universe in general, but within the boundaries of the house, each room also possesses a qualitative difference, as it is lived differently.

But how exactly does this qualitative difference emerge? After the above topoanalysis, we are in need of a topogenesis in order to determine how the photographic frame becomes lived or inhabited. Bachelard's topogenesis is directed at the spatial properties of mental images. As such, it would lead us too far away from the photographic image. We therefor need to draw on additional sources to theorize the emergence of a photographic place.

[82] Casey, *The Fate of Place,* 293.

3.2 Producing a meaningful portion of space

"What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value."[83] This is how geographer and philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan describes the process of transforming space into place. Much Like Bachelard, he conceives of place in relation to experience. Geographer Edward Relph describes the emergence of place in similar terms: "Through particular encounters and experiences perceptual space is richly differentiated into places, or centres of special personal significance."[84]

According to these thinkers, places are moments in space of concentrated experience. We saw in the second chapter that Lefebvre, in a similar way, thought of place as differentiated concentrations of energy. However, whereas for Lefebvre, places are constituted by an intensification of collective, social energy, thinkers like Bachelard, Tuan and Relph push individual experience to the foreground. Relph cites Allan Gussow to illustrate his argument: "The catalyst that converts any physical location —any environment if you will— into a place, is the process of experiencing deeply. A place is a piece of the whole environment that has been claimed by feelings."[85] Places are certain parts of space where the flux of experience becomes concentrated and intensified.

Tuan describes architecture as a practise that engenders such clusters of experience by drawing attention to a certain part of space. "Without architecture, feelings about space must remain diffuse and fleeting," he writes. Interestingly, he uses the image of the house to provide a foundation for his theory. The construction of a house is a place-making activity, as it creates an inside and an outside that are qualitatively different: "Constructed form has the power to heighten awareness and accentuate, as it were, the difference in emotional temperature between 'inside' and 'outside.'"[86] Unlike Bachelard, Tuan stresses the process of building a house as a place-producing activity. The act of demarcating a portion of space, creating a location and a locale, is the presage for a sense of place as it guides subjective awareness towards a particular portion of space.

One cannot but notice the photographic mechanism at work in these theories on the production of place. By pressing the shutter, the photographer creates a locale and a location. By doing so, they draw attention to a particular portion of space, thus creating a sense of place.

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[83] Tuan, *Space and Place,* 6.
[84] Relph, *Place and Placelessness,* 11.
[85] Gussow, cited by Relph in *Place and Placelessness,* 140.
[86] Tuan, *Space and Place,* 107.

Much like the architect, they invest a portion of space with meaning. The frame marks a qualitatively differentiated place that is 'humanized,' as both Bachelard and Tuan would put it.

Together with architects, Tuan also names writers, sculptors, poets and scientists as professions that have the capacity to create places. What these professions all have in common is that they draw attention to a located locale. About literature he writes: "Literary art draws attention to areas of experience that we may otherwise fail to notice." With regard to science, Tuan gives the example of how it was the scientific identification of a particular spring as the source of the Mississipi river that turned this body of water into a place: "Once a particular body of water was marked as the Mississipi's source and the area around it designates a park, it became a place to which people would want to visit and have their pictures taken." Interestingly, the source was only worth taking pictures of once it became a place. However, what is even more interesting is the photographic mechanism that underlies this anecdote. Tuan continues: "Scientists thus appear to have a certain power: they can create a place by pointing their official fingers at one body of water rather than another."[87]

Although the photographer is not counted among the examples of place-making professions named by Tuan, photography clearly has a similar power to draw attention to things by pointing at them. In *Camera Lucida* Barthes writes that "The photograph is never anything but an antiphon of 'look,' 'see,' 'here it is'"; it points a finger at certain vis-à-vis, and cannot escape this pure deictic language."[88] He further adds that, for him, "the photographer's organ is not his eye (which terrifies me) but his finger."[89]

In section below, I will investigate this deictic function of photography and how it makes possible the creation of a photographic place. This will allow me to count the photographer among the place-making professions named by Tuan.

3.3 Index and place

Italian photographer Luigi Ghirri writes about the everyday objects he photographs: "Isolated from the reality which surrounds them and presented in a photograph as part of a different discourse, these images become laden with a new meaning."[90] We are so used to seeing these

[87] Tuan, *Space and Place,* 163.
[88] Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* 4.
[89] Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* 15.
[90] Ghirri, Cardboard Landscapes, 17.

objects that we are only looking at them passively. By photographing them, Ghirri gives them renewed attention. In Barthes words: he says 'look,' 'see,' 'here it is' and points his finger at these objects. This is what Philippe Dubois calls 'the designation principle,' which, according to him, is a consequence of the indexical nature of photography. Dubois argues that the index is what forces us to let our look rest on a certain referent rather than another one. *"L'index nous force littéralement, (...), à porter notre regard et notre attention sur ce référent et rien que sur lui."*[91] By approaching the index in terms of 'pointing' and 'designation,' Dubois adheres to a rather specific view on the index, one that is generally not so much associated with photography as with language.

Mary Ann Doane writes how Charles Sanders Peirce characterised the index by a 'physical' or 'existential' relationship to its object. He applied the term to such diverse examples as a footprint, a weathervane, thunder, the word 'this,' a pointing finger, and photography. Doane distinguishes two separate categories in this list of examples. Signs like the footprint and the photograph belong to the order of the physical trace. The word 'this' and the pointing finger, however, cannot be seen as traces, but fall under the category of *deixis*.[92]

Altough photography is generally considered as an imprint or realist copy of reality and as such as trace, Doane argues that there is also a *deictic* aspect to it. This deictic dimension, Doane argues, has been ignored for too long. With the present crisis of photographic realism, it might be the right moment to "extricate indexicality from the problematic terrain of realism. While realism claims to build a mimetic copy, an illusion of inhabitable world, the index only purports to point, to connect, to touch, to make language and representation adhere to the world as tangent – to reference the real without realism."[93]

In "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America" Rosalind Krauss discerns a specific photographic logic in art from the 1970's. Abstract art from this period, she argues, mimics the indexical nature of photography. Even though Krauss does not explicitly distinguish between the index as trace or as deixis, she clearly puts the conceptual weight of her argument on photography's capacity to point and thereby tends towards a deictic interpretation of the index. Krauss affiliates the pointing dimension of the index with the readymade:

> The readymade's parallel with the photograph is established by its process of production. It is about the physical transposition of an object from the continuum of

[91] Dubois, *l'Acte Photographique, 72.*
[92] Doane, "Indexicality," 1-2.
[93] Doane, "Indexicality," 4.

> reality into the fixed condition of the art-image by a moment of isolation, or selection. And in this process, it also recalls the function of the shifter. It is a sign which is inherently 'empty,' its signification a function of only this one instance, guaranteed by the existential presence of just this object. It is the meaningless meaning that is instituted through the terms of the index.[94]

Much like a readymade, photography isolates its referent from its context, deterritorializes it, in order to subsequently reterritorialize it in a photographic context. If we translate this into terms of space and place as it was theorised by Bachelard, Tuan and Relph, we can state that, the photograph as deixis designates a portion of space, thereby transposes it to a photographic context, thus endowing this portion with meaning, as it allows this portion of space to be lived. The result is a properly photographic place. Philippe Dubois confirms this potential of photography to create a new place through pointing: *"En arrachant au monde un morceau d'espace, l'acte photographique fasse de celui-ci un nouveau monde."*[95]

In the context of time, it is a generally accepted view that, by isolating a moment from what comes before and after, this moment acquires a new meaning, duration and even a certain spatiality that goes beyond the limits of this particular moment. Then why couldn't we argue accordingly with regard to space, that a photographer draws attention to a portion of space, thereby creating a place, the meaning of which transcends the original physical boundaries of the frame?

It is the designating principle of photography that isolates a part of space that allows this part to become *lived*, as Bachelard would put it, since it creates a dialectical relationship between in and out, between the inhabited and the unknown, the house and the universe. Or in the words of Tuan, we could state that the photograph "has the power to heighten awareness and accentuate, as it were, the difference in emotional temperature between 'inside' and 'outside.'"[96]

It is worth noting that all of the above thinkers on the photographic index conceive of the deictic function of photography as an act. According to them, photographic meaning does not reside in the finished photograph isolated from how it was made. It rather emerges from the photographic act itself. Taking into account the process of making the photograph is a necessary condition for understanding the meaning production of a photograph. According to

[94] Krauss, "Notes on the Index," 78.
[95] Dubois, l'Acte Photographique, 194.
[96] Tuan, *Space and Place,* 107.

Joanna Lowry and David Green, photography as deixis is inextricably related to the act of photographing itself. They situate the indexicality of the photograph in "the very act of photography, as a kind of performative gesture which points to an event in the world, as a form of designation that draws reality into the image field."[97] In contrast to the index as trace, the index as deixis does not produce meaning by copying the world, but by acting upon it. Rather than representing the real, the photograph performatively changes it.[98] This performative dimension is clearly present in Lizène's *Art spécifique photographique: Promenade autour du cadre.* The act of selecting a portion of space and pressing the shutter is represented through the act of walking. He delineates a portion of space by actually tracing it with his own body, thereby creating the photographic image as a place.

The same goes for *S'introduisant joyeusement.* It is the act of stepping into the frame that reveals the qualitative difference between inside and outside and as such it is an *'acte photographique'* to use Dubois' term. These reflections allow us to overcome the limitations of the modern paradigm described in the first chapter. Lizène's *'Travaux sur le cadre'* do not reduce the photographic frame to a mere geometrical delineation. On the contrary, they highlight the qualitative differences that result from the deictic nature of photography. As such, they can still be considered as *'art spécifique photographique*,' in the sense of a medium specific enquiry into the medium of photography, only the consequences of this investigation are much more complex.

3.4 *New Topographics,* performativity and the photographic place

The photograph as a place-making gesture allows us to shed a different light not only on Lizène, but also on *New Topographics* photographers like Deal, Adams and Baltz. We established in chapter 2 that their photographs were not simply documents, but that they also succeeded in providing a social critique of capitalist space. The topoanalysis as well the topogenesis developed in the previous sections of this chapter allow us to analyse the nature of this social critique from a different perspective.

According to Jenkins, the photographers in the *New Topographics* exhibition were documenting portions of the surface of the earth, providing a 'detailed and accurate

[97] Lowry and Green, "From presence to the performative," 48.
[98] Lowry and Green, "From presence to the performative," 52.

description.' As such, he adopts a conception of the photographic index as trace. He presents the photographs as realist imprints of reality that are determined by a relation of cause and effect. These photographs receive their meaning from reality and as such they are pure denotation. According to Mary Ann Doane, this realist conception of photography is in fact no longer tenable: "Photography, in particular, has seemingly lost its credibility as a trace of the real," which pushes her to state that the media in general face a certain 'crisis of legitimation.'[99]

Jenkins remains stuck within a conception of the index as trace, while it is the index as pointing that really allows us to grasp the relevance of the *New Topographics* movement. In what follows, I will argue that if one takes into account the place-making capacity of photography that results from its deictic nature, the *New Topographics* can be seen as a differentiating force that subverts the hegemonic role of capitalism in the determination of space.

Let us return to Deal's photographs, about which I wrote that they are a critique on the abstract organization of space by capitalism. They show a dehumanized world in which geometry reigns and dwelling has become impossible. If we take into account the place-making capacity of photography, however, we realize that Deal is not simply documenting, but rather going against this abstracting tendency by the sheer fact of photographing these dehumanized neighbourhoods. He selects a location, delimits a locale, and supplements both with a sense of place by performing the act of taking a photograph. He draws attention to this particular dehumanized portion of land and thereby endows it with meaning as it becomes lived and inhabited.

The same goes for Adams' photographs of tract-houses. Walter Benjamin writes how the 20th century "has put an end to dwelling in the old sense."[100] The tract houses photographed by Adams are the epitome of this impossibility of dwelling. They have a location and a locale, but they lack a sense of place. Much like the photographic frame presented in the first chapter, the tract house is geometrical construction that lacks meaning. (*fig. 15)* In the first chapter I argued that Adams' photographs provide a critique on this impossibility of dwelling through their detached style. However, if we reconsider these photographs in the context of this chapter, it could be argued that by photographing these houses, Adams gives them a sense of place. The act of photographing them draws attention to them. Much like a readymade, these houses are isolated from their dehumanized environment and brought into a different context. They no

[99] Doane, "Indexicality," 1.
[100] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* 220.

longer dissolve into their abstract environment of countless similar houses. Instead, a subjective relationship establishes itself between the viewer and the houses. They "become laden with a new meaning," to use Ghirri's words, since the viewer inhabits them with their look. [101] This renewed attention renders these houses inhabitable again. They become 'lived', as Bachelard would say.

Lowry and Green emphasize the diegetic index as an active force that acts upon the world. They arrive at this characterization through speech act theory. Shifters like 'here,' 'there' and 'now' are performative in the sense that they establish things as things. They point at something in the undifferentiated flux of reality and thereby discern and differentiate a certain referent from this flux. The same goes for naming things, as it creates a subjective relationship with the referent. For instance, one can only become attached to a pet after one has named it. Relph writes how naming a portion of land is the first step towards turning it into a place: "Where there are no names the environment is chaotic, lacking in orientation, even fearful, for it has no humanized and familiar points of reference."[102] The deictic, place-making indexicality of the photograph follows the same logic. Adams, Deal and Baltz are naming the land that is covered by a veil of abstract anonymity. In *Foundation Construction, Many Warehouses, 2892, Irvine,* Baltz photographs space as it was conceived by architects, but by photographing it, he acts upon it and changes it. What remained invisible suddenly becomes visible as Baltz points at it. The foundations of warehouses become subjectively experienced by the viewer. A "subjective and emotional attachment"[103] occurs and what is within the frame becomes qualitatively differentiated from the rest of abstract space.

According to Lefebvre, such differentiation is the only way of providing a counter-force against capitalism. Differentiating space is an act of resistance. One could argue this is what photographers like Adams, Deal and Baltz are doing. Rather than representing existing social space, they are themselves differentiating space by creating meaningful or lived portions of space. The social relevance of the *New Topographics* does not lie in its realism, but rather in its capacity to act upon abstract, homogeneous capitalist space. They structure space in a manner that resists the geometric fragmentation of space by capitalism. By considering lived experience as the criterion for transforming space into place, they provide meaningful places that are inhabitable and allow for dwelling.

[101] Ghirri, "Cardboard Landscapes," 17.
[102] Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 17.
[103] Cresswell, *Place: an Introduction,* 14.

In the previous chapter I pointed out that Lefebvre disregarded photography as fragmenting space. This shows that Lefebvre does believe that photography could at least have a certain impact on social space. The *New Topographics* photographers are using this potential in a different way than Lefebvre envisioned. By being aware of how photography can create places that are qualitatively differentiated, they use photography to oppose the dominant tendency render space abstract. This place-making differentiation does not only occur on a photographic level. The photographic places that emerge from these deictic gestures are, as Lowry and Green put it, "anchored in the specifics of time and place."[104] As trace, the world leaves an imprint on photographic paper, transferring its meaning to the pictorial space. The deictic gesture, however, draws attention to actual portions of space on the surface of the earth and leaves its photographic imprint on them, rather than the other way around. Or as Sichel puts it: "By framing a specific portion of the earth through the viewfinder's rectangular frame, the photographer was creatively marking the land the camera records."[105] It is a way of reaching out from the photographic sphere towards the real.

[104] Lowry and Green, "From presence to the performative," 52.
[105] Sichel, "Deadpan Geometries," 88.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to show the theoretical potential of the concept of place in the analysis of specific photographic practices. An exploration of Lizène's 'Travaux sur le cadre' revealed how a modern conception of place allows to understand Lizène's relationship to the photographic frame as a geometrical figure that either negates the out-of-frame, or on the contrary produces a blind field. After having shown the limitations of such a conception, I introduced the *New Topographics* exhibition and how it asks for a more nuanced definition of place as a social product. Only a social conception of place allows to adequately grasp what is at stake in some of the photographs gathered in this exhibition, namely their potential to provide a social critique. A re-evaluation of Lizène's work subsequently showed that, when considered from the perspective of experience, photography can also be seen as a place-making activity in itself. In the light of this discovery, it becomes clear how some photographers of the *New Topographics* exhibition can be said to create places themselves and thereby are able to provide an alternative way of structuring space, one that favours multiplicity and differentiation over homogeneity.

These conclusions could only be reached by means of an in-depth analysis of both case-studies through the prism of place. Place served to distinguish the *New Topographics* from Lizènes work, while at the same time showing how they are both producing meaningful portions of space. This shows how the notion of place in its multiple meanings can be a powerful tool for analysing, describing and comparing different photographic practices.

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Images

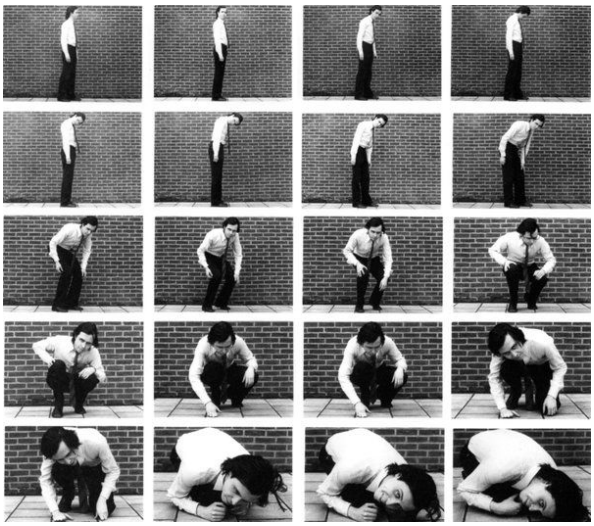

Figure 1: Jacques Lizène, *Contraindre le corps à s'inscrire dans le cadre de la photo 1,* 1971

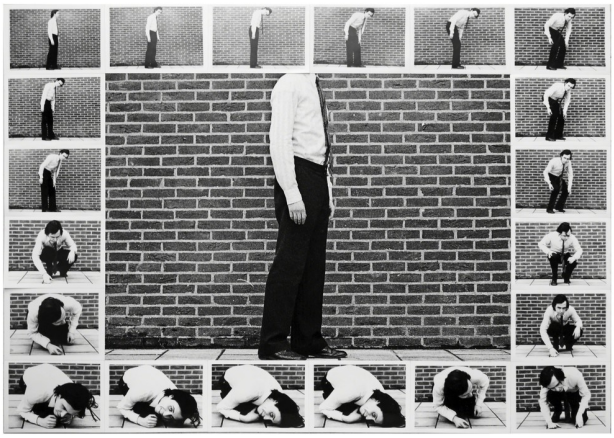

Figure 2: Jacques Lizène, *Contraindre le corps à s'inscrire dans le cadre de la photo 2,* 1971

Figure 3: Jacques Lizène, *Petit maître liegeois s'introduisant joyausement dans le cadre d'une photo,* 1971

Figure 4: Robert Mapplethorpe, *Young man with arm extended*

Figure 5: Jacques Lizène, *Petit maître liégeois s'introduisant dans le cadre d'une photo depuis une autre photo,* 1973

Figure 6: Jacques Lizène, *Petit maître liégeois hésitant à entrer dans le cadre d'une ou l'autre photo (1971)*

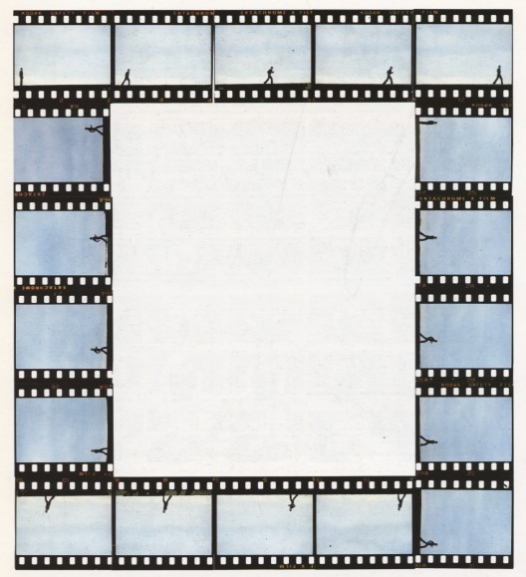

Figure 7: Jacques Lizène, *Art spécifique photographique: Promenade autour du cadre* 1971

Figure 8: Installation view 1, *New Topographics,* 1975

Figure 9: Robert Adams, *Subdivision street, South Denver, Colorado,* 1973

Figure 10: Robert Adams, from left to right:

Service Station, 1973

Subdivision street, 1973

Lakewood, 1974

Figure 11: Installation view *2, New Topographics,* 1975

Figure 12: Joe Deal, *Untitled View (Albuquerque),* 1974

Figure 13: Robert Adams, from left to right:

Tract house, Westminster, Colorado, 1974

Tract house and vegetable garden, Colorado 1973

Remodeled tract huse, Thornton, Colorado, 1973

Figure 14: Lewis Baltz, *Foundation Construction, Many Warehouses, 2892, Irvine* 1974

Figure 15: Robert Adams, *Frame for a tract house*