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Photography and placemaking

Introduction

This essay delves into broad discussions around photography and placemaking, with an emphasis on the photographs produced in the course of the **A-Place** project. As a starting point, the essay will introduce and discuss the intricate relationships between photography and placemaking, establishing a historical timeline and contextual overview of pivotal moments. These contextual discussions serve as a foundation to subsequent discursive and visual analytical commentary on the photographs. In addition, the historical overview and contrasting views on place and ways of placemaking offer valuable points of reflection on how photography has become integrated into various projects, agendas, and modes of representing places. These reflections lead us to the present, a compelling period characterised by the interplay of various camera technologies and lens-based modes of representation which are in a constant state of visual flux and change, shaping our contemporary understandings and ways of perceiving the world.

From the outset, I explore key ideas related to the invention of photography and how it quickly became integrated into the agenda of place representation and making. Subsequently, I engage in discussions concerning the notions of place and placemaking. The term “placemaking” is critically examined in the context of photographic imagery and practice, emphasising the intrinsic connection to the subjective processes of perception and understanding. This exploration highlights how

photographic practices and imagery are utilised to probe the various dimensions of place which are rooted in memory, affect, and cultural perception. I posit that photographic practices are inherent to our daily lives and also part of an agenda of understanding places as means to placemaking. In this context, placemaking encompasses various facets related to the process of developing, consolidating, and asserting understandings of a place through and with photography. In other words, placemaking intersects with photography through pathways of knowing, experiencing, disseminating, and making places. These contextual discussions serve as a foundation for subsequent analysis and commentary on the **A-Place** archive of photographs.

My focus is on a specific subset of images aiming to provide broader insights into particular aspects connected to the photographs, including their patterns, explorations, subject matter, approaches, and genres. Thus, the intention is not to critique every photograph but rather to present overarching critical reflections and discussions on a selected collection. I will begin by examining the relationship between photography, place representation, and placemaking processes.

Photography and placemaking: Origins and practice

Photography and placemaking have a long-standing relationship. The invention of photography, during the first half of the nineteenth century, was linked with wider objective paradigms and ways of understanding the world. Photographic practices were initially part of a wider paradigm of modernism, associated with making sense of the world through scientific principles of information gathering which were mostly observational (Kossoy, 2001). Key protagonists of this time include the French inventors Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, the creator of the heliograph, and Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, the inventor of the daguerreotype technique. In addition, British scientist William Fox Talbot advanced innovative uses of light sensitive papers impregnated with silver chloride. These techniques informed fundamental photographic approaches and, during the 1840s, photographic practices were quickly incorporated into different agendas and disciplines, including colonisation, anthropological studies, portraiture, and landscape photography as well as surveying and documentation (Kossoy, 2001; Schwartz, 1996; Schwartz & Ryan, 2003). These practices form the basis for the development of photographic modes of place representation.

In 1860, British photographer Roger Fenton was commissioned by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert to photograph Great Britain's Windsor Castle, the Home Park, and Great Park. Fenton produced a series of 31 prints depicting the grand vistas and magnificent gardens of the location, including a photograph titled "The Long Walk". Author Liz Wells (2011) contextualises these photographs with the rise of nineteenth-century royalty and the ways "the commanding view from the house on the hill over its own park reinforced the symbolic status of the owner for whom this (expansive) space was 'my place'" (p. 29). Coincidentally, these photographs were produced in the same year as British photographer William Temple's "Scene in the Bush", a colonial photograph produced in Aotearoa New Zealand during the British invasion of the Waikato territories. Fenton's and Temple's photographs could be reinterpreted as a product of the European ideals of the time, a way to reinforce and ascertain particular ideologies and ways of representing and making places underpinned by colonisation, landscaping, gardening, and architecture.

Eurocentric ways of understanding places and placemaking can be traced back to the fifteenth century and the Renaissance period through the concept of linear perspective and landscape as ways of seeing. According to Denis Cosgrove (1985):

... landscape was, over much of its history, closely bound up with the practical appropriation of space... In painting and garden design landscape achieved visually and ideologically what survey, map making and ordinance charting achieved practically: the control and domination over space as an absolute, objective entity. (p. 46)

Furthermore, Gunhild Setten (2010) argues that “linear perspective provided power to the eye, giving it absolute mastery over space and ultimately uniting science, architecture in particular, and art” (p. 137). These ideas highlight the ways landscape, and the concept of linear perspective shaped the Western gaze or ways of seeing and the rendering of places into two-dimensional surfaces, such maps, plans, paintings, and later photographs.

The discipline of anthropology also incorporated photography in the form of photographic ethnographies to document places and societies. Interestingly, photography and anthropology both emerged in the nineteenth century: photography in 1839, and anthropology in 1837 (Pinney, 2011). In the 1850s biologist Louis Agassiz and anthropologist Thomas Henry Huxley inaugurated a history of nineteenth-century photo ethnographies and uses of photography for scientific purposes (Smith, 2004).

Therefore, it is possible to say that these photographic practices and the paradigm from which photography emerged have informed the development of modes of place representation surrounded by specific codes and conventions. Place becomes, in photographic terms, subject matter, and combined with photographic technologies the camera becomes a placemaking apparatus. By revisiting the early days of photography, it is possible to trace the initial applications of the medium in representing places. During the 1820s, Niépce engaged in intensive experimentation and created a heliograph that depicted the view from his workroom’s window. This scene, now fixed into an image, is considered one of the very first photographs ever created. Similarly, in 1838, Daguerre created a photograph, a daguerreotype, from his studio window, depicting a street view titled “Boulevard du Temple”. These photographic acts represent a practice, an approach in time, a gesture of creating an image from the vantage point of one’s window. The question arises: Can this approach be deemed a form of placemaking

photography? I would argue in the affirmative, suggesting that Niépce and Daguerre’s photographs might have contributed to a particular way of gazing and framing a place. Through the window frame, the exterior space was both contained and represented. Niépce referred to it as a *point de vue* (point of view), establishing a perspective on the scene. It is intriguing to ponder why Niépce and later Daguerre have chosen to photograph views from windows, perhaps to document the everyday act of looking out, or simply viewing. One could speculate about their motivations, taking into account the technical limitations of their time. These primitive photographic techniques, like the heliograph, required abundant light to sensitise the photographic emulsion, allowing for image generation and recording. It is questionable whether Niépce or Daguerre could have ventured outside their workrooms to create a photograph and yet they both pointed the camera apparatus outside the window — a place has been photographed.

Within the discipline of geography and, more recently, human geography, discussions around the role of photography in making places have been well inserted and part of a growing interest in research that deals with photographic practices and place representation. Renowned scholar Joan Schwartz and human geographer James Ryan highlight the reverberating effects of photographic practices and imagery connected to geographical understandings of place and placemaking (Schwartz & Ryan, 2003):

... photographs have been used not only in a ‘multiplicity of ways’, but also in profoundly influential ways to shape modern geographical imaginations. From daguerreotypes to digital images, from picture postcards to magazine illustrations, photographic images have been an integral part of our engagement with the physical and human world. A powerful means of ‘picturing place’, both literally and figuratively, they participated actively in the making and dissemination of geographical knowledge. (p. 5)

In addition, the relationship between photography and place has been extensively examined and critically analysed in the field of tourism. Tourism is intrinsically connected with photography, particularly due to the advancements in camera technologies, marketing strategies, and the subsequent production and consumption of photographic images (Aquino, 2014). Therefore, discussing tourism and photography necessitates recognising the profound impact of pioneering photographic companies in shaping the ways we view and understand places. During the 1920s, Kodak led the visual grounds of the well-known present photographic place clichés, such as the tourist photography of particular

sites and scenes. The company deployed its top marketing and advertising experts to travel across the USA, taking photographs of the "best" scenic places and vistas. These locations were then sign posted with the words "picture ahead, Kodak as you go" (Aquino, 2014). This collection of images served as a visual catalogue of vistas and locations to be photographed using a Kodak camera around the United States and beyond. Subsequently, this inventory became a template, shaping the creation of more images that reinforced familiar depictions of the same places. With the advent of digital technologies, these processes have been multiplied to *ad infinitum*, establishing defined parameters, conventions, and modes of place representation. This evolution significantly influences how we imagine, interact with, and make places photographically in the digital age.

At present, digital photographic technologies are widely available and used, enabling the partial recording of daily life in a fluid manner. This widespread availability reinforces the role of photography in shaping our understanding, experiences, creation and dissemination of places. This can be considered an exciting moment in time, as photography is now a widely available and accessible medium able to relocate each individual as an image creator and placemaker at pace with the advancements in digital imaging technologies. In this case, the sense of place is mediated, translated, and activated by photography, which actualizes subjective imaginary spheres of place and influences how individuals navigate psychological, sensory, and emotional engagement with places. On this note, social scientist, ethnographer, and social anthropologist Sarah Pink (2011) argues that photography "can be understood as both bound up with everyday practice, conventions, technologies and as emergent from specific experiential engagements with physical environments" (p. 95). Photography and placemaking are clearly overlapping processes, continuously informing each other with no definitive beginning or end; a form of becoming that never ceases and yet leaves 'loose ends.' From this dynamic interplay, a photograph emerges.

Place

In this section, I will discuss broader theoretical notions on place that will shape the progression of this essay and its ideas. As a starting point I draw on the disciplines of human geography and environmental psychology as well as the influential works of Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), James J. Gibson (1979), and Edward Relph (1976). These ground-breaking authors helped shape scholarly understandings of place and hence the interest in these earlier works. These authors offer valid discussions surrounding the notion of place and perception and possible intersections with photography and placemaking. Tuan (1977), for instance, argues for placemaking through visibility:

Place is whatever stable object catches our attention. As we look at a panoramic scene our eyes pause at points of interest. Each pause is time enough to create an image of place that looms large momentarily in our view. (p. 161)

This is an important point as it can be considered the precursor of the photographic image, retained and actualised through the act of taking a photograph. In addition, Relph (1976) points out:

By taking place as a multifaceted phenomenon of experience and examining the various properties of place, such as location, landscape, and personal involvement, some assessment can be made of the degree to which these are essential to our experience and sense of place. (p. 3)

Relph makes an important point, by emphasising the stable properties of a place and linking these to the processes of placemaking. However, these ideas will be later challenged by new materialist and non-representational theories and by how place can be subjectively affective, unstable, not fixed, and always under a process of becoming. Would photography here have the potential to fail as a mode of place representation and not being able to actualise particular place layers? I believe the contrary, that places may offer us clues that photography can render and directly or metaphorically actualise one or another historical place layer. This point leads to Gibson's (1979) ideas around perception and how "perceiving is an achievement of the individual, not an appearance in the theatre of the mind" (p. 239). Place in this case may be considered extremely hybrid, open to interpretation, and porous, a complex composite of layers and histories (Massey et al., 2007).

On the other hand, and drawing from recent theoretical discussions about place, author Nigel Thrift (1996, 2008) positions our interactions with the world (and place) as part of expanded exchanges, at times sensorial, affective, experiential, and interactive. Meaning and placemaking are therefore triggered by these processes and become independent of static representational and discursive structures of meaning (Anderson & Harrison, 2010). This position is useful to understand the shift from static places to fluid place becoming. These ideas help forming a useful framework for this essay and to subsequent analytical and discursive discussions about **A-Place** as both project initiative and repository of a diverse array of placemaking photographs. I argue now, and will reinforce this point later in this essay, that the diverse modes of photographic representation, styles, genres, approaches, and perceptions displayed in the selected photographs are at pace keeping with present notions around place, operating in a state of representational flux, non-static, and highly diverse.

A-Place

A-Place not only aims at generating reflection and insight into places but also offers a counter approach to non-places or places in which people feel unable to establish meaningful bonds. This counter approach proposes a stimulating take on place, actualising alternative and meaningful ways of imagining, interacting and engaging with places and thus providing a thread which will guide more grounded people and place developments and relationships.

This essay focuses on the photography-based initiatives of the **A-Place** Mapping Places contests [2021](#) and [2022](#) editions, as well as the resulting photographs of the *A Confined Place* programme of activities. These photography projects facilitated the collecting of photographs documenting and representing participants' subjective place and placemaking processes. As a result, a compelling archive of photographs has been compiled, offering the wider public a glimpse into the present perception of places and the diverse modes of photographic representation. This compilation serves as a repository of visual imaginaries activated by the participants. It cuts through a temporal period marked by extreme challenges, changes, hardship, and reflection, covering pre-during-and post-pandemic stages.

In **A-Place**, participants in the activities were invited to capture their photographic placemaking and were encouraged to submit a photograph along with a descriptive text describing their experience. This format, blending imagery and text, evokes the work of Nigerian-American writer, photographer, and art historian Teju Cole. In his book *Blind Spot*, Cole (2017) combines photos from diverse locations around the world with poignant textual fragments, offering a new perspective on how photography and writing interact. Cole travels to a multitude of places around the globe and takes photographs. However, he avoids typical tourist spots and captures overlooked scenes, avoiding common visual clichés and highlighting what often goes unnoticed. With a similar purpose, **A-Place** invited individuals to engage with places in fresh and insightful ways, fostering a deeper connection with their lived environment.

Another significant period for placemaking photography occurred during the Great Depression in rural USA. In the 1930s, ten photographers were commissioned to document a time of widespread poverty. During this period in the 1930s, ten photographers were sent out to document a time of great poverty in the USA. From this documentary project some of the most iconic photographic images of our times emerged, including Dorothea Lange's "*Migrant mother*" and many others. Place and people were the main subjects, and the genre of documentary photography was forever changed after this intensive period of exploring the language of black-and-white photography, documentary techniques, and the relationships between people and places. Within this period, I highlight the work of Walker Evans and his attention and sense of structure and space while depicting rural homes, shop façades, and urban scenes in the southern regions.

It is equally fitting to mention the work of Italian photographer and essayist Luigi Ghirri. His work is particularly relevant to **A-Place** as it aligns new possibilities for place perception. Ghirri (2017) understood photography's ability to offer "a method with which to look at and depict places, objects and faces of our time — not to catalogue or define them, but rather to discover and construct images that also offer new potential for perception" (p. 89). Ghirri's images of landscapes, gardens, place-scenes, and monuments around Italy offer a rich template for placemaking photography through detailed lessons of attentive observation, wit, and apparent amateur compositional and subject matter approaches.

A-Place: A Confined Place and Mapping Places contests (2021/2022)

During the *A Confined Place* programme conducted from March to June 2020, architecture and humanities students from the higher education institutions participating in **A-Place**, were asked to reflect and photograph their places of confinement during the lockdown. This initiative fostered profound photographic placemaking connections between the individuals and the places they inhabited during this unprecedented global situation. The programme was conducted in an academic setting with specific pedagogical strategies, encouraging students to explore relevant references — authors and themes — related to photographic modes of representing places. Visual motifs, such as windows, window views, façades, urban and interior domestic scenes, are common threads in the photographs created. The early experiments by Daguerre and Niépce laid the foundation for window views and the use of the window frame to compose a scene, which later became well-established photographic strategies for depicting exterior spaces and places. Robert Frank's poetic take on this motif, "View from Hotel Window — Butte, Montana," 1956, also shares this strategy. However, Frank went further and used the window curtains as a frame to the outside place, creating a veil between two worlds just as a poet would do when writing a verse.

To begin with, I selected the following three photographs: Catarina Cabral's "From my bathroom", Jordi Carbajo's "Working with the master" and Arlinz González's "Window". Each of these photographs depict windows and employ different compositions to direct the viewer's attention in the image. These are useful examples of the diverse ways **A-Place** participants approached windows as framing devices and visual motifs. In his book *The Photographer's Eye*, John Szarkowski (1966) referred to the frame as the delineating lines that define the picture, encompassing the borders of the film or, in this case, the window frames. In times of confinement, there is an allurements and compulsion to gaze out the window more intentionally and photograph it in a more compositional manner. To illustrate these ideas I highlight Catarina Cabral's photograph "From my bathroom". The window frames here are present and help direct our gaze to what appears to be a blanket hanging on a washing line of an opposite apartment block. The scene is enclosed by surrounding buildings and the main point of attention is indeed the blanket and how it partially covers the window from the downstairs apartment, a common scene in crowded urban environ-



Catarina Cabral, "From my bathroom"



Jordi Carbajo, "Working with the master"



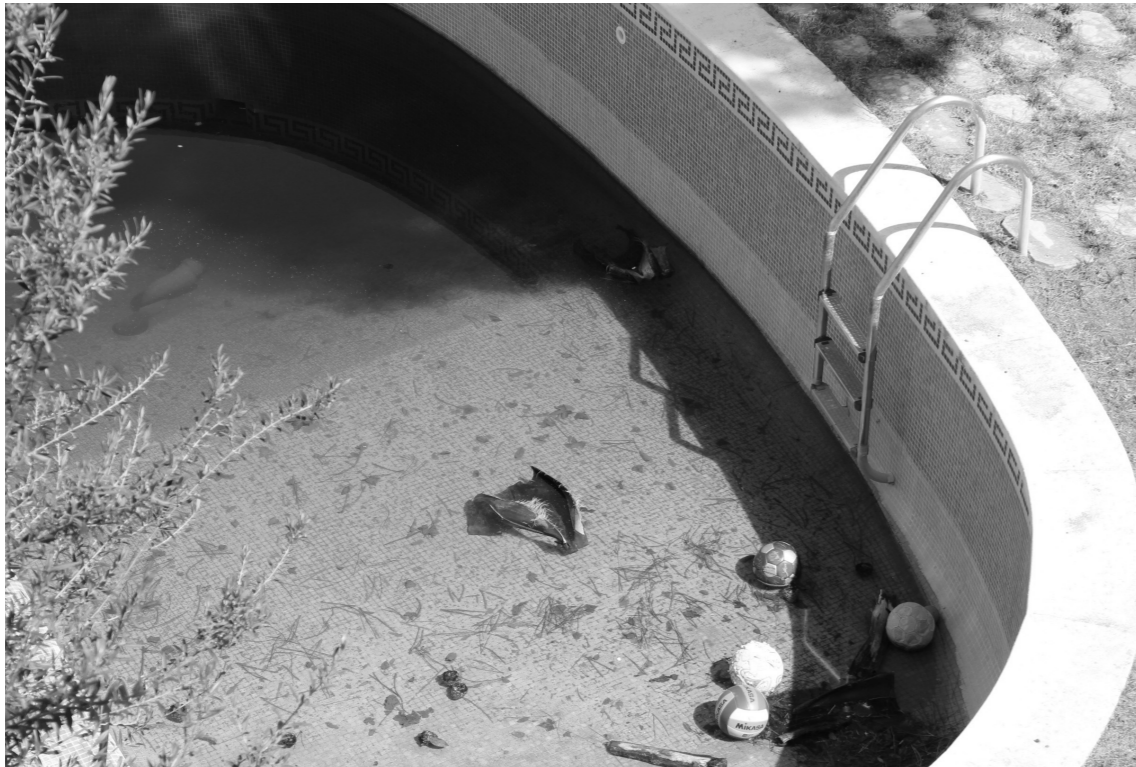
Arlins González, "Window"

ments. This photographic gesture raises questions: Why do photographers resort to century-old photographic clichés and the use of the window frame to express their placemaking feelings and emotions? It appears to be a process of photographic reincarnation, reviving images deeply ingrained in our collective consciousness and integrating them into our contemporary visual society.

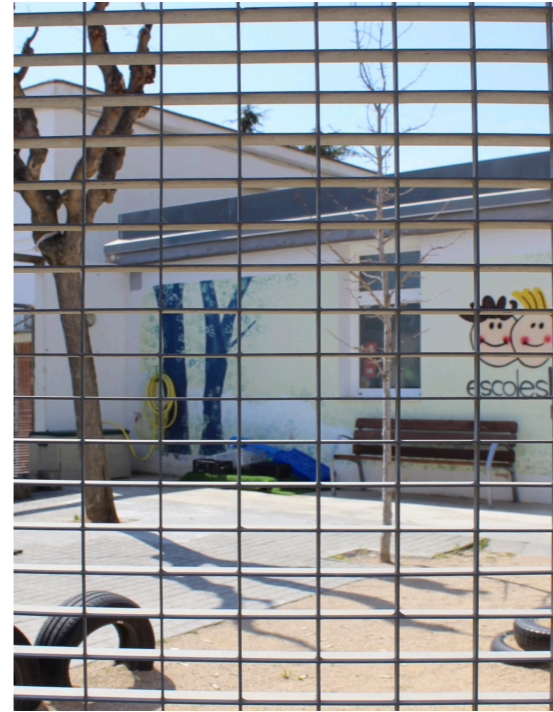
A Confined Place participants were encouraged to explore a diverse range of topics, including the emptied city, public/domestic places and spaces, the city inside home (domestic visual metaphors to exterior urban environments), inhabited rooftops, intermediate spaces (shared spaces), and augmented spaces (digital spaces). The period of confinement provided students with the opportunity to reflect and pay closer attention to their surroundings, both indoors and outdoors. It allowed them to perceive places in unique ways, at various times and from diverse points of view. Consequentially, this unique vantage point led to the creation of images capturing empty places and emptied spaces.

To reflect and discuss the theme of emptiness, students employed a variety of strategies. For instance, Narine Bagdasaryan photographed an empty kindergarten courtyard and an emptied swimming pool, whereas Martina Blázquez decided to capture an empty playground, reflecting on the loss of meaning and purpose in these spaces. Among the three following photographs, the most compelling one is the swimming pool. The image portrays an emptied swimming pool with what appears to be sports equipment left on one side, while the opposite side is still covered with a shallow layer of water, possibly rainwater or remnants from previous use. The water appears murky, and a mysterious object is submerged, which adds a touch of ambiguity to the scene. The use of black and white photography serves as both form and language, imbuing the image with nuanced meanings and a poetic perspective on what may have been a recurrent situation during the pandemic.

Beyond the visual aspects, it is equally important to emphasise the resulting spatial phenomenon that emerged during the pandemic. Places and spaces underwent temporary reinterpretations, becoming empty and unused, inhabited and reimagined in new ways. Interestingly, the perception of places during the pandemic was unique, bound to specific moments in time and particular spaces. Unfamiliar places emerged, and photography played an instrumental role in rendering these new, empty spaces visible. Coincidentally, all three images feature symbols and motifs associated with children, such as a playground and kindergarten courtyards. This aspect strengthens the photographs, as viewers can establish psychological and emotional connections, eliciting possible



Narine Bagdasaryan, "Lost and Found"



Narine Bagdasaryan, "Isolation"



Martina Blázquez, "Uninhabited Park"

affective reactions based on the memories, meanings, and imaginaries associated with places frequented by children.

Photographs created within domestic environments, exploring the relationships between interior and exterior spaces and perspectives, are part of well-established practices related to place and photography. These approaches were increasingly explored and further catalysed during the pandemic. As a starting point for the next set of images, I share the work of North American photographer Larry Sultan and his explorations around the theme of home. In his book *Pictures From Home*, Sultan (1992) dives into the world of his parents' domestic habits through a compelling series of intimate photographs of his mother and father in their home in California, USA. The photographs depict Sultan's parents in various domestic situations, mostly banal everyday scenes, like his father getting ready to leave the house with his golf gear, watching television, or reading the newspaper. These are possible everyday placemaking gestures and actions one undertakes at one's home. Similarly, Pau Garrofé depicted what could have been a banal domestic scene now transformed into an unexpected moment during the lockdown periods. Garrofé's photograph shows two individuals performing different actions: cycling on a stationary bike and doing woodworking. The camera is positioned to capture both actions in a vertical composition, possibly set up on a timer. Both persons appear to be in the living room section of the apartment, and the camera angle and field of vision suggest a small area. The image exudes a sense of dynamism and liveliness, capturing the ongoing actions. This scene evokes memories of Sultan's photograph depicting his father swinging a golf club in the living room while the television played in the background.



Pau Garrofé, "Multifunctional"

The mood of Garrofé's photograph is uplifting, with bright pastel colour tones, sunny lighting, and smiling subjects. There is an apparent motivation to capture this moment as something unique, a one-of-a-kind experience perhaps. Obviously, Sultan's and Garrofé's photographs have different intentions and underpinning motivations but somehow intersect in the act of home place and photography.

Guillem Hernández photographed a desk full of objects, books, stationery, drawings, and learning materials, reminiscent of Larry Sultan's portrayal of his father's desk. It is remarkable how the arrangement of items can reveal distinct realms of places, practices, gestures, and performances, forming an assemblage intricately linked to a specific place and time. Both images were taken in from a top-down perspective. Stephen Shore similarly employed this viewpoint to photograph the plates on the table at "Breakfast, Trail's End Restaurant, Kanab, Utah," conveying a sense of ownership, whether it be "my lunch" or "my work desk". These visual cues introduce dimensions to place, underpinned by the idea that places consist of multiple, transient layers, shaped by situations and performances. In this context, a working desk covered by stationery, books, drawings, and objects reveals a certain placement and its photograph a certain way of placemaking.



Guillem Hernández, "Reclaimed classroom"

Like other students, Amanda Rojas depicts scenes in "The Limits of Space" and "The Window" that are illuminated by a window. She uses the underexposure technique to enhance the effect of bright window light splashing onto a desk and chair. The camera is set to expose for the highlights, creating stronger contrast and deeper blacks. A subtle foreground contrasts sharply with the harsh exterior light and urban surroundings in the background. This motif has been revisited twice, from different angles and compositions, employing the language and style of black and white photography. In a sense, these photographs may suggest late nineteenth century pictorial movement approaches to image making, capturing mood in an expressive manner, working with shapes and forms, albeit re-configured this time in a *quasi-noir* style.



Amanda Rojas, "The limits of space"



Amanda Rojas, "The window"

Similarly, Anabella Valero's "The Details in a Place" and Moisés Chalouh's "Dawn" also deserve attention in this context. The subject matter of both photographs is light crossing the boundary between outdoors and indoors, with the focus on the interior space. In Valero's photograph, the light is both filtered and captured by the curtain and the blinds. Chalouh's photograph employs poetic interpretations and representations of the experience of being confined in a place/space. It incorporates strong pictorial elements, using shapes, forms, and light from a curtain to evoke a sense of closure and confinement. The strategic use of perspective enhances the image's composition, intensified by high contrasted tones; it creates a feeling as if the light strives to permeate the place but is obstructed by the curtain. The light attempts to penetrate the darkness, slipping beneath the barrier, akin to Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, where the interplay of light and shadows seeks to project the external world. In this context, place is shaped by perception, a specific viewpoint (or *point du vue*, as referenced by Niépce). But how does the notion of place relate to Plato's allegory? Place, as a fluid and hybrid concept, encompasses various 'truths,' and it is the individual's prerogative to make sense of a place, exploring its many layers (light or shadow) or focusing solely on a specific place-form (such as a cave). Photography extends perception, allowing to frame a particular aspect and actualise it as a place. An individual with a photographic camera at hand seizes the potential to become a visual placemaker.



Anabella Valero, "The details in a place"



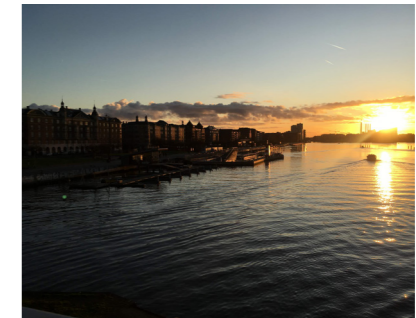
Moisés Chalouh, "Dawn"

Like the photographs created during the *A Confined Place* programme, participants in the **A-Place Mapping** contests were encouraged to capture a significant place through both a photograph and accompanying text. Submissions came from participants around the world, although most were from regions across the European continent. To discuss and analyse some of the submissions I compiled and curated photographs from 2021 and 2022 contests into different collections. The first selection features photographs depicting cityscapes captured at various times and seasons throughout the year. The second selection focuses on commentary regarding the three winners of the 2021 contest, while the third showcases a collection of experimental and dreamy images. This is followed by further discussions on photographic approaches and imagery from selected entries in the 2022 contest. Together, these collections present contrasting ways of capturing and interpreting places, highlighting the diversity of photographic modes and strategies employed by the participants.

Within the theme of cityscapes I have selected the following photographs from the 2021 contest: "Good morning Madrid", by Alejandra Rivera; "From Russia with love", by Carla Moya; "Happiness", by Paloma Sigüenza; "Sunset in Copenhagen", by Alejandra Rivera; "Bratislava: A place of heavy air", by Alejandra Rivera; "Before COVID hit us", by Andy; "Punto de referencia", by Carolina; "parkaleidoscope", by Alba Baro; "Parklet — a space for people", by Luisa Bravo, and "Finding a-place", by Isabella Jaramillo.

I curated these photographs into an installation of placemaking cityscapes, capturing various locations across different seasons. The views are mostly wide or panoramas, though there are a few exceptions like Andy's "Before COVID hit us", which is framed more tightly around the buildings. Most images employ linear perspective to convey a sense of scale and grandiosity to the depicted places.

Linear perspective stands as a fundamental visual technique in placemaking, providing a sense of scale. It is a practical method deeply intertwined with architecture, mapping, and ordnance charting — all geared toward controlling a space and presenting it as a place, offering a relatively objective viewpoint. However, a desire to capture a sense of thought, mood, or feeling is present in some of the photographs, such as in Alba Baro's "parkaleidoscope". This photograph acts as a portal, separating the outside world through a window. Interestingly, the image has a noticeable caption stating "Shot on Redmi 7 AI dual camera". The incorporation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in photography enables au-



A-Place Mapping contest 2021. From top to bottom, left to right:

Alejandra Rivera, "Good morning Madrid"; Carla Moya, "From Russia with love"; Paloma Sigüenza, "Happiness"; Alejandra Rivera, "Sunset in Copenhagen"; Alejandra Rivera, "Bratislava: A place of heavy air"; Andy, "Before COVID hit us"

automatic adjustments to camera settings based on subject identification. This technology, now integrated into digital photographic tools, presents a fascinating prospect: the potential application of established photographic conventions — of ways of seeing — to enhance a scene. Consider this: could a computer or algorithms recognise Vaquero's image as a landscape and adjust camera settings to achieve greater depth of focus and vibrant colours? How would AI discern the ideal settings for a specific scene? These questions are intertwined with photographers conditioning to adhere to certain conventions, which become intrinsic to their visual placemaking toolkit. However, Baro's intentions diverged; a palpable nostalgic element pervades the photograph, contextualised by the accompanying text. The motif of the window serves as a conceptual framework underpinning the image, adding a layer of depth to its meaning. This distinction sets Baro's work apart from the examples discussed earlier. In her photograph, the window becomes both a visual motif and metaphorical element, offering a nuanced reflection on the subject matter. This approach aligns with Robert Frank's hotel window in Montana, even without the presence of curtains as in Frank's photograph. Baro adeptly infuses the image with a lyrical sense, incorporating visual and mental reflections in a layered and yet subtle way.

The following photographs correspond to the first, second, and third prizes of the **A-Place Mapping** contest 2021. The first prize winner, "Mon fou d'amour" by Tea Tannouri, showcases a vibrant building façade, capturing the interplay of shadow and light with rich orange and earthy tones. The second prize, "The unknown" by Marina Papadaki, presents a compelling scene in a cave with the ocean in the background. And the third prize, "Spirituality descending upon simplicity" by Taher Abdel-Ghani, adopts a photojournalistic approach, offering an aerial view of buildings in Cairo. Each of these images invites reflection on diverse topics that might be related to the COVID-19 pandemic, personal or biographical circumstances, or simply the passage of time. While the first and third prize photographs convey an urban sense of place, the second one immerses us in nature in a more lyrical way.

The photograph "Mon fou d'amour" although well composed, exhibits angled lines instead of perpendicular ones, a flaw within architectural photography conventions. Nevertheless, it evokes a sense of neighbourhood, presented in pleasant colours akin to a scene from a Pedro Almodóvar movie. The vivid colours and warm sunlight infuse Tannouri's photograph with feelings and emotions, it is uplifting and pleasant, contrasting the surrounding challenges and psychological responses connected to the pandemic and confinement. In the text that



A-Place Mapping contest 2021. From top to bottom, left to right: Carolina, "Punto de referencia"; Alba Baro, "parkaleidoscope"; Luisa Bravo, "Parklet - a space for people"; Isabella Jaramillo, "Finding a-place"

accompanies the photograph, Tannouri discusses cultural and personal aspects connected to memory and nostalgia and how the vivid colours of the building bring back home memories from the Mediterranean. Here text and image combine to form a composite of many place layers sitting at the intersection between memory, nostalgia, photography and placemaking.

Marina Papadaki takes us on a journey to another dimension, using a tunnel as a passage to an alternate sphere, perhaps. This photograph, despite being presented in black and white, a loaded and historical photographic language, explore more metaphorical pathways to meaning-making than its previous contenders. It merges contemporary approaches to place and photography, rooted in feelings and emotions connected to the landscape, with late nineteenth-century pictorial techniques. The intersection of subjective readings and place perceptions with pictorial image-making leads to fluid and expanded modes of place representation. The resulting image becomes open to diverse processes of meaning-making, facilitated by ambiguity and metaphorical elements.

Lastly, Taher Abdel-Ghani used the language of black and white photography to depict the contrast of architectural styles, histories, and traditions, an appropriate way to discuss place as multifaceted and layered. Abdel-Ghani draws from the language of documentary photography, crafting an image reminiscent of those found in Life or Time magazine photo-essays. Consequently, place here is represented through the lens of a photojournalistic informed photograph, showcasing contrasting views and understandings of place. However, I find this approach contradictory, as it uses the form and language of conventional black and white documentary photography to delve into the complexities of place. This approach uses a more direct language to address indirect and subtle topics, appearing more descriptive than suggestive. The use of the shadows cast over the rooftop houses is useful to create this separation, splitting place in two spheres, black and white, shadow and light, old and new.



Tea Tannouri, "Mon fou d'amour" (first prize A-Place Mapping contest 2021)



Marina Papadaki, "The unknown" (second prize A-Place Mapping contest 2021)



Taher Abdel-Ghani, "Spirituality descending upon simplicity" (third prize A-Place Mapping contest 2021)

Dreamy-looking images can indeed be a part of photographic approaches to place representation and making. The following are a brief collection of images I have selected from **A-Place Mapping** contest 2021 to illustrate this mode of photography: "Panoramic views - de Madrid al cielo", by Marie Poulain; "Waiting", by Andrew Stiff; "Capturing the socio-ecological memory", by Suruchi Didolkar; and "In-Betweenness", by Madalina.

Each photographer employed a different strategy to convey a sense of place. From blurring, glass reflections to montage, collage and the compositional use of a frame within a frame, exemplified in Marie Poulain's photograph. These methods bring forth the idea of place as a composite of multiple layers, employing digital technologies, colour, composition, and collage to suggest hybrid spaces and places, along with liminality and psychological responses to place. Consequently, they operate within a dynamic flux of representational strategies and alternative visual approaches to place.

The **A-Place Mapping** 2022 contest prompted participants to reflect on their domestic places. This year marked a transition for many people, representing a shift from pandemic to post-pandemic times. But how does this transition affect our connection with place, and how can photography serve as tool for placemaking in this new reality? For many people, particularly in urban areas and primarily in the northern hemisphere, the experience might have been a blend of introspection and the anticipation of new beginnings.

Domesticity and affective responses to home environments informed the selection of photographs discussed in this section. Within the idea and theme of sharing domestic experiences, entrants submitted photographs of their living places and spaces, asserting, in a way, that "this is my place". Photography thus played a role in helping individuals to make sense of places that underwent aspects of psychological or physical reconstruction during the pandemic. In the photographs presented to this contest, we catch glimpses, exemplified earlier in Garrofé's image capturing people engaged in activities within an apartment living room. This represents a form of spontaneous placemaking, where every day (or extraordinary) performances unfold, remaking places in the process. The image portrays a woman exercising on a stationary bike and a man doing a woodwork project. These activities were likely temporary, a response to the unique circumstances brought about by the pandemic and governmental lockdown measures. Thus, they epitomise the transience of time and place, providing an opportunity for innovative photographic approaches to document the novelty.



A-Place Mapping contest 2022. From top to bottom, left to right: Marie Poulain, "Panoramic views -de Madrid al cielo"; Andrew Stiff, "Waiting"; Suruchi Didolkar, "Capturing the socio-ecological memory", and Madalina, "In-Betweenness"

A-Place Mapping 2022 entries seem to offer a perspective on consolidated places, capturing both new and repeated performances and possible new ways of home placemaking. There appears to be a heightened desire to capture a sense of belonging, manifested in many ways, including photographs of living rooms, bedrooms, corridors, objects, and personal spaces. Moreover, feelings of memory and nostalgia are also present, emotions that likely emerged from post-pandemic reflections.

Nuné Tunjikian's photograph titled "Healing shadows" serves as a compelling example of nostalgia, expertly conveyed through its soft lighting, composition, choice of family photographs as subject matter, and the deliberate use of grainy aesthetics, lending it a pixelated texture. These carefully orchestrated aesthetic and compositional elements harmonise to create a photograph that delves into memory and recollections, offering insights into present placemaking experiences. The image captures an assortment of family photographs, varying in sizes and framing styles. The gentle sunlight is hitting on one of the images, serving as a focal point that beckons viewers to engage in a process of meaning-making. This nuanced interplay between light and imagery is a crucial face of place, portraying it as a repository of memories, stories, and narratives that extend beyond the surface appearances. In this context, photography assumes the role of a vessel, reviving these elusive memories or ghosts from the past and merging these with present experiences, transforming them into a tangible, place-made space.



Nuné Tunjikian, "Healing shadows"

On the other hand, Paulo Sérgio Steil's "The homesick" adopts a more direct, descriptive, and objective approach in his exploration of homesickness and memories from Brazil. Much like Tunjikian, Steil captures a photograph of his hometown in Brazil, depicting a sunlit scene in contrast to Belgium's grey skies in the background. Once again, the window emerges as a motif, serving as a literal and metaphorical portal that seamlessly melds past and present, thus conveying a sense of place.



Paulo Sérgio Steil, "The homesick"

The following photographic sequence on the right encapsulates a heightened sense of domesticity, capturing the nuanced daily rituals and performances that shape one's life. organised in an assemblage. These images coalesce into a cohesive narrative, illustrating diverse modes of placemaking bound together by shared shapes, forms, and tones of yellow colour. More specifically, spaces like the bedroom have emerged as recurring themes in submissions to **A-Place Mapping**, each explored in unique ways. Within this sequence, the bed takes centre stage in two of the photographs, serving as both subject and locus for temporary, intimate, and repetitive gestures. The bed and the bed chamber as photographic subjects have been explored extensively in the history of photography. Early twentieth-century photographs, such as those depicting Queen Elizabeth's bed chamber, 1930s images by Walker Evans from post-depression USA, and more contemporary works by artists like Alec Soth and Tracey Emin, have delved into the intimate spaces of slumber.

In the context of the lockdown, domestic environments gained unprecedented attention through photography. The mandatory confinement during these uncertain times prompted a surge in the documentation of domestic spaces. The images gathered by **A-Place** convey the idea of the dwelling as a retreat, a sanctuary, where to find comfort and refuge, a respite from the challenges of the external world.



Oscar Barbery, "EDDCM – El desorden de mi cama"



Eugenia Pettina, "Paz"



Özgür İlter, "Second place"



Cate Mahiri, "The lemon house"

Final reflections

Photography and placemaking are symbiotic processes capable of generating nuanced understandings of places. This essay has traced a historical timeline, emphasising key aspects, practices, and moments related to photography and place representation. Photography, as a practice, has been relocated at the centre of placemaking developments in a range of contexts and moments in time. These historical developments have led us to the present times, where individuals fluidly operate as both place and image makers, surrounded by rapidly evolving digital photographic technologies and diverse ways of understanding places.

Photographic conventions, contextual factors, and concepts related to place were combined with visual and discourse analysis to create a framework for discussing photographs from **A-Place**. The aim of this exercise was not to scrutinise each single photograph, but rather to highlight patterns, explorations, singularities, and how the body of photographs, as a visual inventory, relate to placemaking as a concept and a practice.

A Confined Place and the **A-Place** Mapping contests were discussed regarding notions related to place, discourse, and photographic conventions. This analysis included references to key practitioners and artist models, shedding light on various themes and motifs contained in the **A-Place** photographs. One notable observation was the recurring use of the window as a motif, point of view, compositional tool, and subject matter throughout different periods in photographic history, with Daguerre and Niépce's as key precursors in the evolution of this mode of photographic placemaking.

A-Place has undertaken the task of collecting, compiling, curating, and presenting individuals' relationships with place and the ways in which photography intersects with these processes. In this context, the photographic camera becomes a tool for people to create places. Common themes such as urban spaces, squares, home environments, windows, views, objects, cityscapes, and landscapes, were present in the photographs. The COVID-19 pandemic provided the perfect backdrop for many of the approaches and themes, implicitly shaping a form of photographic placemaking. The diverse approaches and models of representation mirror the multifaceted nature of place, encompassing its permeable layers, accounts, imaginaries, histories, and memories. In this context, the individual equipped with a camera, becomes an active placemaker.

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