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# **Synaesthetic Placeholders: Multidimensional Spaces in Photography and Music**

## **Extended Abstract**

This paper proposes a synaesthetic understanding of photographic space by examining how micro-scale visual phenomena - reflections, refractions, and transient light events - function as *placeholders* for expanded, multidimensional environments. Drawing from my dual practice as a photographer and composer, I explore how small visual incidents hold open the possibility of entire worlds, much like subtle timbral events in music can suggest vast, resonant spaces. My work approaches photography not as a record of an external place but as a generative field in which light, material surfaces, and embodied perception construct spatial imaginaries that exceed the literal frame.

My photographic practice began as an extension of my musical training. During my early composition studies, the composer Boris Tishchenko once remarked that my piano pieces resembled “musical photographs” - not in the sense of static images, but in the sense of atmospheres that one can enter, inhabit, and contemplate without being pushed forward by conventional developmental logic. This observation revealed to me an underlying method: I did not seek to “develop” musical material, but to *listen deeply* into its internal resonances, as though examining a visual field with heightened attention to its smallest frequencies of color, light, and shade. When I later turned to photography, I realized that I was searching for images in the same way I listened to music: for the moment when a single event becomes a world.

My work relies on multilayered spatial construction through reflective materials - mirrors, glass, metallic paper, translucent fabrics - and elements such as steam, water, ice, and shadow. These materials are arranged in specific configurations that allow light to behave unpredictably, forming multi-dimensional reflections, echoes, and distortions. At other times I simply wait for a naturally occurring phenomenon - a fleeting shift in sunlight that may last only seconds - and attempt to capture it before it disappears. The photograph, in this sense, is not a documentation but a *trace* of a moment of resonance, a placeholder for an expanded spatial experience that unfolded in real time.

This approach parallels my work with sound. In music, subtle resonances, multiphonics, harmonics, and extra noises often serve as microscopic events that suggest vast inner spaces. I intuitively search for the photographic equivalent: the shimmering edge of a reflective surface, the interior of a water droplet, the layered shadow of translucent fabric. From these minimal signs, entire landscapes emerge - architectural, cosmic, oceanic, or entirely abstract. Such micro-events act as spatial placeholders: small perceptual triggers that stand in for an environment far larger than their physical scale. They anchor the image while simultaneously destabilizing any fixed sense of location, echoing the conference theme’s tension between localisation and fungibility.

My synaesthetic perception further shapes this work. Each color and texture in my photographs corresponds to an auditory sensation of timbre, pitch, or harmonic coloration. This cross-sensory mapping intensifies my attention to subtle visual phenomena, allowing me to construct images as if composing a multi-layered score. The photograph becomes a synaesthetic interface: a surface through which sound, light, and space converge. The resulting images exist between transparency and opacity, between clarity and noise. They are not indexical representations of place but atmospheres in which

place is continually deferred—an interplay between what appears and what resonates.

This brings the work directly into dialogue with the Photomedia theme of *Placeholders*. Technical images today often act as proxies, tokens, or stand-ins within larger systems of sensing, modelling, and platform logistics. My practice responds to this condition not by resisting it but by showing how placeholders operate at the perceptual and aesthetic level. In my photographs, a small reflective surface becomes a placeholder for an imagined spatiality; a blurred resonance becomes a proxy for unseen depth. These images do not map physical territory but invite viewers to inhabit the instability of place itself. They foreground the poetic potential of placeholders: rather than flattening meaning, they open a field of possible interpretations.

My work with opera and video also expands this inquiry. In *Macondo* and *Tintagiles*, the entire visual environment is constructed from photographs, layered and transformed into shifting spatial scenes. These operatic worlds are not tied to a specific location; instead, the images function as placeholders for psychological, sonic, and emotional spaces. They are compositional spaces in which light and sound merge into a synaesthetic dramaturgy. This reinforces the idea that photographic images - far from depicting place - *produce* place by enabling new modes of orientation, disorientation, and resonance.

In this paper, I will analyse several works in detail to show how micro-scale phenomena generate macro-scale spatial worlds. I will also discuss how these images resist fixed interpretation, acting as placeholders that remain provisional, dynamic, and open to reconfiguration by viewers. Through a synaesthetic and process-based approach, I argue for an expanded understanding of photographic space as a resonant field rather than a representational one. In doing so, I aim to contribute to ongoing discussions about how photographic images produce place, participate in its contestation, and offer alternative ways of sensing spatiality in an age of displacement, automation, and abstraction.

**Keywords:**

synaesthesia; photographic space; placeholders; multidimensionality; micro-scale phenomena