PANEL ABSTRACT: DIGITAL PLACEMAKING

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This panel introduces and critically examines the concept of "digital placemaking" as practices that create emotional attachments to place through digital media use. As populations and the texts they produce become increasingly mobile, such practices are proliferating, and a striking array of applications and uses have emerged which exploit the affordances of mobile media to foster an ability to navigate, understand, connect to, and gain a sense of belonging and familiarity in place.

The concept of digital placemaking is both a theoretical and applied response to the spatial fragmentation, banal physical environments, and community disintegration thought to have accompanied the speed and scale of globalization. The increasing mobility of people, goods and services, information, and capital contribute to the impression of a world in flux where the "space of flows" dominates the "space of places," while at the more personal scale, multiplying public and private uses of digital media have produced varied discourses on the potential for these practices to dissociate or liberate users from co-present environments. The implication of these perspectives is that our collective sense of place has been disrupted, leaving people unsure of their belonging within conditions and boundaries that seem increasingly fluid. While it is imperative to attend to the shifting social, economic, and political conditions that give rise to such concerns, it is also necessary to recognize the many ways people actually use digital media to negotiate differential mobilities and become placemakers.

Papers in this panel address the concept of digital placemaking through a range of theoretical and methodological perspectives to investigate the lived experiences of assorted communities with disparate social and economic power. With contributions from scholars working in media, communication, anthropology, and information studies, we demonstrate how digital media can facilitate social and geographic boundary crossing while encouraging new ways of placing ourselves—symbolically, virtually, or through co-located presence. The panel demonstrates how digital media constitute new methods for experiencing physical locations, expressing differential mobilities, and how users participate in narrating a sense of place into being.

Two papers directly address placemaking in terms of how digital media participants experience physical places. Adopting a theoretical approach to analysis of digital media, "Communicating Place" interrogates Cresswell's theories of place as applied to three prominent mobile media platforms: Instagram, Snapchat, and Waze. This presentation sets the foundation for the remainder of the panel by exploring the ways that place is something continually enacted and negotiated across multiple levels of digital media engagement. Next, "Placemaking 'Experiences'" explores strategies that AirBnb "Experiences" hosts employed to effectively move their experiences online during the first months of the Covid19 lockdowns. The authors locate the embodied role of the local 'host' as key to connecting people to digital place.

Linking the focus on distinctive engagements with digital media to expressing mobilities of marginalized or underrepresented populations is "Digital Place as Preemptive Measure" and "Korean Foreign Travel Selfies." The first paper engages with the tension between migrant agency in place-making and the datafication of the migrant and migration processes. Practices like biometric registration and visual tracing on social media locate the migrant in physical, social, and legal place. Databases, social media profiles, and computational analytics create narratives that arrest "mobility" as a geospatial certainty through the logics of identification and location. In the latter paper, the author argues that when read as digital placemaking practices, selfies become salient to producers and audiences as political expressions of one's place in the world. Their article re-examines the selfie as an empowering, mobile means for producing place-identity and spatial habitus among Korean females travelling alone abroad

despite misogynistic reactions to these young females' experiences of mobility and globalization.

The final paper unites the panel's themes by addressing mobile experiences of locations through digital storytelling as artistic, oppositional, and pedagogical practice. In "Reconstructing Place," authors examine how students utilize the locative media app, GeoTourist, to encourage others to experience their campus through *participatory counternarratives,* or the ability to use locative media for new forms of digital placemaking that counter dominant histories and dominant stories told about a place.

The unique yet interrelated conditions of mobility addressed here focus on the matrix of mobile technologies, mobile texts, and processes of large-scale as well as personal movements. By focusing on issues surrounding mobile rights and risks associated with migration, creative tactics within the social and mobile media of travelers, and contested mobilities based on social power and access to digital infrastructures, we illustrate the breadth and depth of the theoretical contributions of our digital placemaking framework. Drawing from a diversity of approaches and methods, each paper illustrates how utilizing digital placemaking to research global and local experiences of place uncovers novel socio-cultural-technical tactics and forces that coordinate, govern, and express mobilities within digital infrastructures and imaginaries.

COMMUNICATING PLACE THROUGH MOBILE SOCIAL MEDIA – MATERIALITY, MEANING, PRACTICE

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Introduction

Within media and communication scholarship, place has come to be regarded as a somewhat problematic yet compelling and still very relevant concept. While our experience of place has long been understood as having been transformed by our use of media and communications technologies (Meyrowitz 1985), place, at the same time, remains of enduring importance, and is regarded more recently as especially important for understanding our engagement with mobile technologies. Ethnographic and phenomenological studies of mobile devise use practices have demonstrated "the significance of mobile technologies in asserting the importance of place as both a geo-imaginary and socio-cultural precept" (Hjorth, 2008, p. 93). Indeed, as the philosopher Jeff Malpas points out, the mobile device "is as much tied to place as any other phenomenon, and what it brings about is not a separation from place, but rather a

change in the way place is experienced, or better, in the particular way in which place is configured, and the modes of engagement that are operative within it" (Malpas, 2012, p. 31). Mobile media and communications technologies, and the services they support, are in fact "part of new '*place-making* projects'" (Agnew, 2011, p. 328).

Communicating place through mobile social media

In this paper, we extend the above lines of argument by examining the particular ways that place is configured in and through mobile device use, and the precise modes of engagement associated with three specific mobile social media applications: Instagram, Snapchat, and Waze.

In examining place and place-making in relation to these three apps, we draw on and adapt Tim Cresswell's (2009) tripartite understanding of place as something that is experienced through the combination and interplay of three elements: materiality (the material structures of place), meaning (the meanings that are ascribed to and associated with place), and practice (how what people do is associated with the meanings that a place might have). Rather than consider each in isolation, our interest here is in how these three are combined in the production of place.

Our argument in this paper is that place is not a thing that is merely recorded through these platforms. Rather, place is something that is continually enacted, negotiated and renegotiated across multiple levels of media engagement. We trace this process in relation to materiality, meaning, and practice. By *materiality*, we mean an examination of the material conditions (affordances) and experiences of each of the three services. Drawing inspiration from recent work on social media app research methods (Leaver, et al., 2020; Light et al., 2016; Highfield and Leaver, 2016; Robards & Lincoln, 2017), we engage directly with the interfaces of the three apps to examine their "technological mechanisms" (Light et al., 2016, p. 882) in order to understand how each service guides users and shapes user experiences of place. In addition, by materiality, we are also interested in examining the immediate as well as wider supporting material infrastructures of each of these three services, and the platform and political economic arrangements that underpin and sustain them (van Dijck, 2013; Wilken, 2019).

With respect to *meaning*, we examine how Instagram, Snapchat, and Waze engage in the conception or meaning-making of places. We argue, such platforms conceive of places fundamentally as venues or brands (D'Silva et al., 2018; Boy & Uitermark, 2017; Kuehn, 2016).

Finally, with regard to *practice*, we trace end-users' experiences of place as social relations and as events. We argue practice reveals how place is socially and temporally determined by users' engagement with these platforms. These end-user engagements are then re-enrolled back into these services in complicated ways. With respect to Waze, for instance, we are interested in understanding how this dynamic mapping and social media service acts as a mediator to create place-based and spatial meanings by translating between and inviting movements of users, vehicles, supporting ad programs, and so on (Lammes, 2017).

Digital place-making as interconnected socio-technical forces

In looking at these multiple levels of media engagement, our larger argument is that digital place-making, as it occurs through services such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Waze, is realized through the combination and interconnection of all three of the aforementioned elements. Materiality, meaning, and practice are mutually constituted. To paraphrase Tim Cresswell (2009), the material experiences of these three services is made by people doing things according to the place-based meanings they might wish these services to evoke and register. The meaning-making by the platforms themselves and practices of users can create tensions. Practices also may or may not conform to the expectations that come with material affordances and the "technological mechanisms" of these services. Digital place-making becomes both the product of and subject to these interconnected socio-technical forces.

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PLACEMAKING 'EXPERIENCES' DURING COVID-19

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Introduction

In the contemporary global economy, consumer aspirations—and the market offerings that fuel them—have shifted from the accrual of material goods to the pursuit of experiences. This has been referred to as the "experience economy," in which spending shifts from buying to doing, and digital and social media are at the core of how these experiences are accessed, lived out, and shared. Much of this new market is based on the logics of digital placemaking, through which physical places become sites to be consumed, produced, and reproduced via the creation of an experience. A stand-out example is Airbnb's creation of "Experiences" in 2016, which offers excursions with locals that aim to enable tourists to experience immersion into a destination rather than just a visit (Weise, 2018).

When Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic, travel was halted along with much of the experience economy. How could people buy experiences out in the world if they could not be in a place to experience them? Airbnb swiftly adapted the product by reaching out to successful hosts around the world, to encourage and assist them in moving their experiences online, where they would be marketed and delivered through the company's new product, Online Experiences. This collection of live, online interactive sessions are delivered over Zoom by various 'hosts' for small groups of 'guests.' The initial collection of two dozen or so experiences grew to over 200 by early

May. The vast majority of these experiences make use of a particular place, and the host's location in that place, as the essence of the experience itself.

Digital placemaking and embodied experience

Drawing from concepts of place as being constituted through both *social relations* (Massey, 1994) and *communication* (Caldas-Coulthard & Iedema, 2008), and stretching far beyond bounded definitions of location based on longitude and latitude, scholars increasingly find that digital and social media can connect and embed humans in place. Emerging research strands have considered how networked, geo-locative, and mobile media modulate and/or create new forms of offline place; examples include the creation of hybrid spaces or realities (de Souza e Silva, 2006; Hjorth & Richardson, 2017) and a sense of embeddedness in place that can develop through wayfinding (Halegoua, 2020) or geo-social interactions during frequent mobility (Polson, 2016).

This brings us to consider the importance of *embodiment* in conceiving of place and placemaking, as lived experience of the body in place (Caracciolo, 2014). Thinking about embodiment as lived experience points to the final node in our digital placemaking framework: the role of *experience* in relation to place. Farman (2015) points out that mobile media may be used to produce a meaningful, embodied experience in place; rather than seeing embodiment as a result of how well a technology can simulate reality for a user, he argues it stems from how, through the mediated experience, users go beyond the screen to interact with (and experience) the places that surround them. Cresswell (2020) posits a meaningful 'sense of place' might be based on shared experiences and that experience "is at the heart of what place means" (117).

We explore this interweaving of meaning-making in relation to place (through social relations, communication, embodiment, and experience) as digital placemaking through analysis of the AirBnb website (content, form, and visual representations), as well as participatory observation of seven online experiences across Europe, Africa, and South America, and host interviews. Importantly, this placemaking does not occur organically but is part of a strategic set of practices undertaken in a gig economy milieu by hosts working under the umbrella of a large and powerful company with global reach.

The 'Host' as Digital Medium

AirBnb's original Experiences site read, "One of a kind experiences, hosted by locals," and the local hosts and their local expertise were marketed as embodiments of authentic cultures, histories, and social connections. For example, a DJ offered a musical history tour of Havana; an "Indigenous Cook" taught how to make mole in Mexico City; a "local guide" led a desert adventure in Oman. Each experience located a so-called authentic aspect of a local culture in the body and abilities of the local 'host'. Each day, these locals—whose localness was sold with beautiful photos, emotional language, and a user-friendly interface on the Airbnb website—helped paying guests connect to that locality.

To quickly create Online Experiences, Airbnb trained hosts on the technology (e.g. Zoom, mobile camera devices) and assisted with design and marketing strategies. Many hosts are supporting multiple families in a village or funding their NGOs, and this creates immense pressure to succeed in the effort to "switch to online," while still helping people feel as if they were "there, together, in person," as one host explained it. We noted the following strategies used by hosts to transport participants and create an emplaced experience: Use of narrative devices (e.g. sharing life histories and telling stories while moving through space), locative signs (e.g. language, music, and imagery), sensory cues (closeup camera shots of textures, or of hands reaching and touching things, as well as audible background noise), formal properties (e.g. knowing when to employ professional versus handheld/chaotic camera angles) and virtual sociality (engaging participants in the conversation).

Wilken and Goggin (2012) argue that place is "central to how embodied, technologically mediated mobile social practice is understood" (18), and we've found that these practices are also central to placemaking. Considering the places that are being made in Online Experiences, at issue is *not* how close the new products are to the in-person, IRL experiences from which they were derived; rather, the question is through which means the experiences give meaningful and memorable moments of connection with another part of the world. As arbiters of these momentary, ephemeral encounters, the hosts and their manifold strategies to substantively engage end-users are at the crux of digital placemaking. While technology is the conduit, the hosts are the gateways, the mediums, the media.

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DIGITAL PLACE AS PREEMPTIVE MEASURE: THE DATAFICATION OF FORCED MIGRANTS

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Research on migration and technology has illustrated the importance of social media and digital devices for migrants to create a sense of place while being on arduous journeys and while settling down (Andrade & Doolin, 2016; Awad & Tossell, 2019; Borkert, 2018; Dekker et al., 2016; Gillespie et al., 2016, 2018; Leurs, 2016; Smets & Leurs, 2018; van Liempt & Zijlstra, 2017; Wilding & Gifford, 2013; Witteborn, 2015, 2018, 2019). At the same time, research has highlighted how migrants and migration processes are increasingly datafied, from digitized borders to digital identity systems, challenging the notion of migrants as digital agents and raising the issue of data privacy and digital rights for those with limited political, legal, and civic protection (e.g. Gillespie et al., 2016; Dijstelbloem & Broeders, 2016; Latonero & Kift, 2018; Latonero et al., 2019; Witteborn, 2020).

Within the migration literature, forced migrants (asylum seekers and refugees) have received special attention since 2015 and have been shown to position themselves through technology as sociocultural and political beings-in-place (Alencar 2018; Fisher, 2018; Maitland, 2019). Through technology, the people can speak from a cultural and social position that transcends the label "asylum seeker" and a discourse of essentialized ascriptions like being poor and uneducated.

However, as Maitland (2019) has argued, there are limits to self-presentation and construction of place. Digital place increasingly creates problems for the displaced. Censorship (Maitland, 2019), misinformation (Borkert et al., 2018; Latonero et al., 2018), and the criminalization of social media content and usage for asylum claim determination are examples (Brekke & Brake Stalver, 2019). As mentioned previously, migrants experience privacy violations through hacked databases or collection of their personal information without their full consent (Maitland & Bharania, 2017; Latonero et al., 2019; Witteborn, 2020). In sum, locatability through technology and data has become an essential part of place-making - digital and embodied - for those crossing borders and needs to be examined as such. *Digital locatability*, here, refers to computational data gathering, processing, and machine/human interpretation practices, with the consequence of verifying people in place and time and/or authenticating humans as a category. While the example of asylum seekers is by no means comprehensive, it should be robust enough to extend it to other legally and socio-

politically marginalized populations crossing space, including the homeless, sans-papier, or poor migrant workers.

The research first explores the place-making literature on migration to show its conceptual biases, including digital agency, followed by a discussion of digitally locating migrants in place. Two practices – biometric registration and visual tracing on social media – are analyzed through ethnographic data and through the eyes of asylum seekers to illustrate how their datafied representation shapes physical and social place-making. Data materials were gathered through personal interviews with asylum seekers and refugees in Germany and participant observations of digital practices of the displaced.

Overall, the study highlights how the datafied representation of humans is key to verification and authentification with socio-legal consequences. Data have emerging potentiality (Simondon, 1989) as they amplify emotional ways of being of asylum seekers - such as fear - and construct a biographical narrative, which in turn enables predictability by national and transnational entities (Amoore, 2011). The study concludes that within the thickening contexts of datafied personal and collective lives, human narrative as an epistemic mode of being and relating gains renewed importance, interfering and engaging with an algorithmic logic which constructs the human as a category within a binary data story.

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KOREAN FOREIGN TRAVEL SELFIES AS CONTESTED PLACEMAKING PRACTICES

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Introduction

Typically, the selfie is associated with celebrity and self-promotion through bodily display or a means for inviting acknowledgement and attention from others. Senft and Baym note that there is an unnecessary and ineffectual over-reliance on psychological analyses of selfies as narcissistic, showcasing emotional or mental instability, body dysmorphia, and low self-esteem in lieu of more sociologically and culturally nuanced examinations (Senft & Baym, 2015). However, many scholars counter these assumptions by focusing on the ways in which selfies are constructive articulations of identity and agency (Abidin, 2016; Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Rettberg, 2014). As Tiidenberg explains, selfies allow us to exert control over how we are seen and to construct our identity through the people, places, and activities that we imbue with value (Tiidenberg, 2018). The composition of the image, mise en scene, situation, and location photographed indicate aesthetic and ontological choices that reveal values, social positionality, and identity performance of the person taking the selfie (Harrison, 2004; Hess, 2015; Wargo, 2015).

When read as a digital placemaking practice, the selfie becomes salient to producers and audiences as a political expression of one's place in the world. Traces of placemaking practices can be found in the activities and texts of selfie producers but only appear in the margins of scholarly analysis. This paper re-examines the selfie as a means for producing place-identity and spatial habitus and argues that thinking about selfies as placemaking practices inform the productive and potentially empowering nature of this photographic practice. What type of emplacement and place attachment is produced through selfies? What geopolitical work do selfies do? How do selfies circulate meanings of place and identity through the presence and presentation of bodies?

Selfies and Placemaking

An emerging body of literature has begun to interpret selfies in relationship to digital placemaking with much of this work engaging with the concept of the "spatial self", or instances where individuals document, archive, and display their experience or mobility within space and place to represent or perform aspects of their identity to others (Gibbs et al., 2015; Humphreys, 2018; Saker, 2016; Schwartz & Halegoua, 2014). While social media users may form an image and expectations of a particular place based on their perception of people who have been there (Redi et al., 2015), social media users also monitor and critique others' selfies as inappropriate or inaccurate. Social media users police collective meanings of place through attempts to publicly delegitimize others' selfies as placemaking practices. Critiques and backlash against these images construct the status of the people in the photos (the selfie producers) as outsiders that actively or unwittingly resist or disrupt dominant structures of feeling or reputation, decorum of place, and imaginations of who "ought" to be in a given location. Selfies that celebrate one's presence within a particular place, but that are contested or ridiculed by other social media users discredit the role of certain people as placemakers, and confirm social hierarchies and hegemonic meanings of mobility.

Korean Foreign Travel Selfies

This paper analyzes a case study in which the visual culture and digital placemaking practices of selfies are represented and critiqued. Since the early 2000s, South Korea has experienced a boom in international travel among women in their 20s and 30s with the number of women travelling alone for leisure and educational opportunities substantially increasing as well (Kim, 2012). Concurrently, Korean demographers and popular press outlets continually report dwindling marriage and birth rates, high youth unemployment, and precarious job opportunities and job security for college graduates. Reports from organizations like the Korean Women's Development Institute have noted growing misogyny among young and middle-aged men where women become targets for frustration around cultural shifts and economic precarity or competition (Lee, 2017). Some of this "gender war" has played out in online spaces such as public discussion boards, blogs, and social media sites. Although heavily moderated, sites like Naver and Instagram as well as the notoriously politically incorrect forum, Ilbe, evidence traces of violent misogyny toward Korean women. Several organizations have been tracking the effects of online sexist ideologies, stereotypic and misogynistic comments, and pornographic images on women's digital participation and find that such images, language and behavior tend to silence women online and increase withdrawal from online activities (Lee, 2017) .

Within this social context, "foreign travel selfies" shared on platforms such as Instagram and Naver blogs that document Korean women's excursions to foreign countries have become sites of virulent public criticism. Through textual and discourse analysis of the images and criticism faced by Korean female nationals who travel abroad alone, I examine the vernacular creativity, representations of place and mobility, and tensions that emerge regarding expressions of the "spatial self" online. Not only are critiques of these images couched in consternation and frustration over the financial capital and conspicuous mobility enjoyed by women during a period of economic precarity, but online comments also evidence efforts to police women's bodies as well as their experiences of globalization, cosmopolitanism, and locational capital.

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RECONSTRUCTING PLACE, ONE LOCATIVE VOICE AT A TIME

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Places are filled with stories, with histories that shape how people understand their world. As Doreen Massey (2005) puts it, places are unique sets of trajectories—each with a story—coming into contact. However, just as much as places are defined by their histories, they are also shaped by the histories that are forgotten, or far too often, actively suppressed through dominant narratives (Farman, 2015). After all, dominant media of spatial, public memory—e.g. plaques and public monuments—often reproduce dominant narratives of a place, narratives created by the powerful. These places then become core to how people live their lives and how they relate to a broader understanding of their place in the world. This project examines how digital media can be deployed through locative technologies to push back on dominant spatial narratives and make places more polyvocal in consequential ways. Or to put it different, we explore how locative media can bring lives and stories back to the history of a place.

The method we use to examine place-making practices through locative media is a pedagogical intervention at a university in the Southeastern United States. On the surface, this university is typical of many U.S. universities. The campus is in a small, semi-rural college town. The town revolves around college life; the flows of people and business tend to flow with the typical U.S. academic schedule. And like many universities in the southeastern United States, the history of the university is inextricably tied to the history of oppression and slavery. Less than a quarter of a kilometer from the authors' offices, the campus quad has a building that is still has "Plantation" in its name. Campus buildings are built on top of old slave quarters, a stockade to house convicted laborers, and a cemetery where slaves were buried. And going back even further, the land the university sits on was originally inhabited by indigenous Cherokee peoples. Like many universities in the U.S, this is a place built on a history of oppression.

The university has a few plaques in place, but few students know of the history of the place outside of the university-approved narrative. Few know they may attend classes on land that was slave quarters or go to meetings in a building built on a base of bricks built by slaves. They have little perspective on the lives lived in this place, the voices silenced through dominant narratives. Consequently, this project intervenes in the public understanding of the place in the classroom by helping students develop what we call *participatory counternarratives:* the ability to use locative media for new forms of digital placemaking that push against dominant histories and dominant stories we tell about a place.

To develop these participatory counternarratives, we had students in multiple classes use the mobile application Geotourist. Geotourist is a locative application that enables people to geotag information, map the information, and upload audio files that describe specific locations. People can then either access the maps online, or they can use the mobile application to physically walk from place to place to experience the audio narration in the specific location it describes. Students were required to study the history of their university and create a counter-map to the dominant historical narratives found in the place. For example, one group created a walking tour of the locations important for the indigenous people driven from the land. Other groups created walking tours of the university's history of slavery to point out where exactly that history took place and how those narratives have been essentially erased through "progress." This presentation will examine that work and

how these interventions impacted how students understood the places that shape their daily lives. And while our project includes pedagogical dimensions, we do not position this as an explicitly pedagogical article. Rather, we explore the concept of participatory counternarratives more broadly to include any intervention—whether in the classroom or not—that engages with digital placemaking by creating location-based texts to add new voices to how places are socially constructed.

To situate our pedagogical intervention within existing research, we first explore the concept of hybrid space, which refers to how digital and physical have merged in many cases (de Souza e Silva, 2006; Frith, 2015). In other words, digital information now shapes how people know the physical world, just as their location shapes the digital information they access. Relatedly, we then engage with the growing literature on spatial annotations (Angus, 2010; Farman, 2013; Frith, 2015; Humphreys & Liao, 2011; Løvlie, 2011), a term that refers to the ability to create location-based narratives through various forms of locative media. These narratives can include everything from locative fictionalized storytelling to locative audio tours to location-based reviews through applications like Yelp or Foursquare. In fact, Ben Russel's (1999) *Headmap Manifesto,* a prescient late-1990s artistic statement about the potentials of locative media, focused on how spatial annotation could remake place through locative digital media. Twenty years ago, he wrote

> *there are notes in boxes that are empty*
> *every room has an accessible history*
> *every place has emotional attachments you can open and save*
> *you can search for sadness in New York* (p. 3).

Our paper examines those accessible histories—those empty boxes filled with geotagged notes—through a pedagogical intervention. Our ultimate goal is to provide concrete account of how locative media can enable novel forms of digital placemaking that push back against dominant narratives and shift the stories told of a place. Though the making of a place is never perfectly egalitarian or democratic, the potential for digital tools to pluralize the stakeholders capable of being involved in the narrative annotation of a place opens up possibilities for initiatives such as the participatory counternarratives outlined here to tell better, more inclusive stories. This presentation will be just one of those stories.

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