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Digital Cameras, Personal Photography and the Reconfiguration of Spatial Experiences

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Digital technology has transformed the nature of photography and its cultural significance. This article addresses how the use of portable digital cameras and the subsequent exploitation of personal photos as major user-generated content on the Internet have transformed the cultural meaning of framing, taking, displaying, compiling, and reviewing photographs. It especially focuses on how digital photographic practices have changed as people are increasingly choosing to carry digital cameras with them at all times and to compile their output on the Web, as well as how these practices have affected people's spatial experiences with and within the physical world. Based on qualitative interview data collected from nineteen Korean digital camera users, this study explores how personal digital photography, as a tool to register personal experiences in physical space as well as a currency for communicating in digital space, has affected people's sense of physical place and thus has contributed to the ongoing hybridization of physical and digital experiences.

One of the main concerns of media studies is the way that changing media environments have redefined the interdependence of the media and its human subjects and consequently how media have shaped the way we perceive and make sense of the world around us. As Marshall McLuhan's (1964) notion of media as "extensions of man" suggests, different forms of media affect the nature of our interactions with the world, and human experiences are conditioned by the specific quality of media technologies. Digital communication technologies, which

process all kinds of information in the form of digital bits, have created a new media environment that has transformed the way users access, process, manipulate, store, and distribute information. These technologies have enabled us to select, appropriate, create, and disseminate media contents, as well as to have access to a digital media space of communication that extends beyond the constraints of time and space. Although the asymmetrical relationship between mass-media producers and the audience remains, anyone can become an amateur media producer and participate in diverse communicative activities, thus creating participatory culture (Jenkins 2006). Moreover, the development of mobile personal digital media has provided users with their own portable media space while they move about in physical space (Gumpert and Drucker 2007), thus allowing them to coordinate their temporal, spatial, and sensory experiences in the moment. The portability of personal digital media, coupled with their easy connection to wireless or wired networks, has affected people's experiences both with and within physical places, and has made their media practices in physical space closely interconnected with those in digital space.

The snapshot camera, which was introduced by Kodak in 1883, is an old portable medium that allows users to record personal experiences. The camera makes it possible for anyone to visualize his or her being in the moment, thus pursuing democratized aesthetics. However, these possibilities were not fully explored, as snapshot practices were institutionalized mostly as constituents of family rituals and tourism. The development of digital cameras, and their connection with communication networks, has transformed photo-taking conventions and expanded the range of photography's social usage. Digital cameras are more likely to be carried by people no matter where they go, and their photographs can be compiled and shared beyond an immediate circle of family members and friends. Thus, conventional photographic moments and occasions, the limited post-photo-taking events and photo-sharing practices, and

the cultural meanings of popular photographs begin to transform.

This study attempts to examine how the everyday use of portable digital cameras and the subsequent exploitation of personal photos as major user-generated content on the Web have reconstructed not only people's photographic practices, but also ways of experiencing place. This examination tries to apply qualitative and microscopic research to concrete cases of digital camera users' photo-taking and photo-sharing practices. Based on qualitative interview data collected from 19 Korean digital camera users, this study explores how personal digital photography, as a tool to register personal experiences in physical space as well as a currency for communicating in digital space, has affected people's sense of physical place, and thus has contributed to the ongoing hybridization of physical and digital experiences.

SNAPSHOTS IN A DIGITAL AGE: TOWARD A POSTHOME MODE OF COMMUNICATION

When snapshot cameras became available on the mass market with the advent of Kodak cameras, they were carried to celebrate the rites of family life and to constitute familial self-presentation and memory. Popular practices of photo-taking and keeping a photo album were contextualized by the modern familial ideology that put great value on the "stable and united" family (Hirsch 1997; Holland 1997; Williamson 1993). Snapshot cameras were used to record special occasions such as graduation ceremonies, birthdays, wedding ceremonies, anniversaries, and other family rites, producing indexical references to represent family life and their imaginary harmoniousness. Kodak's early advertising campaigns introduced the adventurous Kodak Girl to promote its easy-to-handle (albeit poor-quality) snapshot cameras, and to emphasize their playfulness and spontaneity in capturing outdoor experiences (West 2000). Still, one of the most popular uses of portable snapshot cameras was to record family life and ceremonial events and to accumulate their idealized images in a personal or family album. Additionally, the production and consumption of snapshots were a constitutive part of modern tourism (Sontag 1977). To carry cameras as "tourist identity badges" and to take photographs were indispensable parts of the tourist experience (Chalfen 1987, 101). As the capitalist commercial projects of leisure industry have formed a significant context for people's photo-taking practices, photo taking has constituted "leisure event-structure" (Slater 1995, 141).

However, traditional methods of compiling and sharing personal photos were usually conditioned by "the home mode of pictorial communication" (Chalfen 1987, 8)— that is, the oral contexts shared by families and intimates. Since photographs are "message without code" that ren-

der an awareness of the having-been-there of the thing and, at the same time, its absence in the here and now (Barthes 1977, 1981), they need textual or oral contexts to anchor their interpretations and meanings. Photo compiling and photo sharing are acts of contextualizing the interpretations of pictures and leading their viewership in certain ways. When the compiler organizes photographs into albums, one builds a mnemonic framework for oral presentation and collective conversation that brings one's stories into the presentation of photographs in an album (Lanford 2001). Traditionally, the home mode of communication has constructed meanings and narratives around images of personal photographs, and this communicative practice has helped to foster intimate relationships and communal membership among those photo sharers.

Digital cameras have brought about a transformation of photo taking and photo sharing. As numerous information communication technologies (ICTs) have provided new settings for taking and sharing photographs, they have transformed the nature of photographic performance and its cultural significance. First, the digitalization of photography, which processes images as a form of calculable data, has enabled people to experiment with its presentational form to express their sensory experiences and emotions. Users can easily review, edit, retouch, or collate the photographed images, and enjoy being the active producers and distributors of those images. As digital photography is far less expensive than traditional film and print, it eliminates the expense of wasted shots, and requires no input from external "photo experts" to achieve the final image. This frees the photographer to be more experimental. With digital cameras, people can take as many shots as necessary to get a desirable shot, or they can test various techniques that were previously available only to professionals. Digital cameras enable ordinary users to take "professional-looking" or creative pictures at no further expense (Cobley and Haeffner 2009). The changing materiality of digital photography and its wider availability have extended "the range of potentially photogenic situations and opportunities," and consequently its social practices (Shove et al. 2007, 81). Moreover, as digital cameras have been increasingly adapted as a part of personal media, they seem to revive, in a new way, the early promise of the light-hearted, mobile Kodak Girl who enjoys the pure pleasure and adventure of taking photographs. People can playfully take pictures of moments in their everyday lives, let alone the special moments of family events, holidays, and social occasions. The range of potential photo-taking situations tends to expand beyond the conventions of recording and commemorating the ephemeral but significant past (see Kindberg, Spasojevic, Fleck, and Sellen 2005; Lee 2005; Okabe 2004). Digital cameras as an intimate mobile medium allow people to readily visualize every moment of their experience.

While the altered materiality of photography has transformed the nature of photographic performance, the digital network has recontextualized the oral condition that usually shapes the conventional processes of remembering and interpreting snapshots. Consequently, photographs can be used to enhance people's shared experience in the photo-taking moment, and to help people remember as well as to converse over it later (Kindberg et al. 2005). The oral performance, which used to be a post-photo-taking event to evoke memories, now proceeds in different ways. One can take photos and use them for ongoing conversations with people sitting together or remotely; in turn, this oral performative condition can constitute a playful context for photo taking. Moreover, as photo-sharing practices can now be placed in more diverse communication modes, snapshots and their associated stories are extended well beyond personal or familial communication circles, taking on new social functions and meanings. Photographs taken by individuals have become an integral part of user-created content on the Internet. As they are displayed and circulated via blogs, personal Web sites, or community bulletin boards, personal expressions can be easily accessed not only by intimates, but also by the general public.

Personal photo-taking practices today have new social, public meanings, and are potentially affected by the expansion of communication contexts where they are appreciated and interpreted. Dialogues and social relationships on the Internet can condition photographers' expectations for their output, for their relationships with objects to be photographed, and thus for their experiences with the physical places in which they circulate. Whether people use their photographs to maintain existing relationships, to create social relationships, or to express themselves, their Web activities influence the moment of photographing (Cohen 2005). As Web activities such as blogging become a major way of sharing pictures, these come to constitute another kind of oral performance that makes sense of and signifies photographs. Thus, the Web activities tend to be implicated in the photographic act of framing, taking, displaying, compiling, and reviewing photographs. In addition, they have affected photography's traditional commemorative function by distributing personal pictorial memories over the Web and allowing them to emerge in various unforeseen and public contexts (Van Dijck 2008).

DIGITAL SNAPSHOTS AND SPATIAL IMAGERY

The photographic frame presents a part of infinite and boundless physical space, cut out by a photographer's gaze. This gaze, which demarcates a space inside a frame from the referential physical space, tends to be conditioned by dominant spatial discourses. These discourses construct the cultural codes that define a physical place's

social and aesthetic value, and they modify the popular taste of a spatial scene, turning a specific site into an appreciable and visitable one. As a result, they have shaped people's expectations and experiences of a place, as well as their photographic practices (Urry 2002). Photography, as a major medium for representing place and landscape within its frame, has embodied these discourses and has often served as a "pre-text" for consuming places (Osborne 2000). For instance, images of tourist places, projected by mass media and tour marketers, shape people's perception and photo-taking practices at the tourist sites, and those photos of tourist icons, in turn, become another form of image projection that perpetuates the iconic images of the places (Jenkins 2003). The photographic gaze of a place is likely to be subsumed by the discourses where commercialism and stereotypical imagery have articulated the ways of occupying, using, and appreciating a space.

However, the moving public's photographic practices can reconstruct the cultural notion of walking about or strolling. Benjamin's (1973) *flâneur* is fascinated by the urban phantasmagoria of urban streets and arcades that display the spectacles of modern wonders and commodities, and yet scrupulously reads how these modern fetishes and illusions have emerged and how the present has mingled with the past. De Certeau's (1977) association of practices of walking with the speech act also suggests the possible resistance of ordinary people's walking, in opposition to the top-down planning of an urban space and its commodification. Cameras can provide, for these *flâneurs* and pedestrians of "enunciating" spaces, a tool to disclose their reflections on urban contradictions and to enrich their creative tactics of walking against the administrative and commercial organizations of space. Susan Sontag (1977, 55) suggests this possibility by describing the photographer as "an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes."

The photographer as *flâneur* extends the voyeuristic vision of the world as spectacle, and yet the photographer can see into, and make visible, "ambiguities and shadows" within spaces. Especially now, with digital technologies that give ordinary people the position of creator and allow them to produce and distribute their own images, individuals' trajectories and spatial stories can be expressed and shared with the public. While, conversely, digital cameras as a personal, portable medium can intensify voyeurism over everyday places, they can serve as a tool with which individuals visualize their place-based experiences and memories during their acts of walking and rewrite the city as their space. The private interpretations of spaces can quietly meddle in the given cultural codes of spaces.

Several studies have explored how user-created content, including photographs, has become a constitutive part of

geolocational data on the Web and how it has provided new ways of perceiving and engaging with urban spaces (Hardey 2007; Lee 2007). Blogs and "mashups," which visualize and map everyday urban life, present multilayered spatial imageries that include personal experiences and depictions of particular places at specific moments. These geolocational data and images become a reference from which other people can reimagine and make sense of urban space. People can create new representations of physical locales they visit or move around, share them via wireless and wired networks, and refer to these data for their spatial practices.

Although these studies have examined the role of Web 2.0 resources for geographic imagination and have suggested that individuals, these resources, and spatial practices now share a new "synergistic relationship," we need to further research the characteristics of individuals' agency to transform geographical imagination, as well as the rearticulation of people's senses of place through their use of digital media, including digital cameras.

CASE STUDY

For a closer look at people's everyday photographic practices, their interconnected Web activities, and the subsequent transformation of spatial practices, I have examined Cyworld, which is similar to MySpace and one of the Republic of Korea's leading online social networks. I interviewed nineteen users who actively show their pictures on their Cyworld mini-homepages and other blogs. As of 2008, the Internet usage rate for the Korean population aged six years and above was 77.1 percent, and among these Internet users, 43.1 percent were blog or mini-homepage owners in the previous year. In particular, young people in their twenties show the highest ownership rate (74.4 percent) among all age groups (National Internet Development Agency of Korea 2008). The popular reception of mini-homepages and other blogs, which prominently feature photos, has created or has been accompanied by people's—especially youngsters'—enthusiasm for various types of digital cameras from mega-pixel camera phones and compact digital cameras to high-end digital single lens reflex (DSLRs).

To recruit interview participants, I visited several mini-homepages linked with Cyworld's "Story Map" (http://map.cyworld.com/menu/view.map), where users attach their pictures and "stories" to the map's geographical information. Interviewees comprised those who were contacted via these mini-homepages and who responded to my message requesting that they tell me about their experiences of photo taking, as well as the acquaintances they would introduce to me. I had a face-to-face meeting with each individual for an in-depth interview from January to May in 2008. They were aged from their early twenties to

their mid-thirties, and two thirds of them happened to be women (I have received more positive responses to my requests for interviews from female users). I looked at their photographs that were posted on their mini-homepages or blogs before interviewing them, and tried to hear about the interviewee's experiences of taking these pictures in a fairly open framework. Although interviewees' enthusiasm for photo taking varied (they ranged from serious amateur photographers to casual camera-phone users), they all had something in common: They usually carried more than one camera, including a camera phone, to be ready to take pictures, and they posted their pictures on their mini-homepages or blogs. Their accounts give us some insight into what kinds of practices have been newly cultivated with digital camera usage, and how people's experiences with and within places have been reconfigured by digital photographic practices and their associated Web activities. In the next three sections, based on the interviews, I examine the cultural practices of digital photography and their relationship with spatial experiences and spatial imagery.

CULTURAL PRACTICES OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRRAPHY

The changed materiality of digital photography and its connectivity with wired or wireless networks have provided new possibilities for people's photographic practices. The nature of photographic performance has been changed by the lack of need for film, easy operation, instant production and reproduction of photographs, manipulability, and usability within various communicative activities on the Web. With the popular dissemination of various information technologies in Korea since the late 1990s, digital cameras have become a desirable personal item and their ownership has been perceived, especially among young people, as a trend. The proliferation of camera phones has also helped form an environment where people can use photographic functions in their everyday life. People have easy access to digital cameras and are more likely to carry them as a personal belonging. The communicability of photography has been extended, and the wired or wireless networks have become a significant context for photographic practices.

Photography is a distinctive symbolic environment for representing the world. Photographs have functioned as an objective testimony, as well as technical prostheses to memory because of photography's representational form, which can mechanically visualize and reproduce an exact image of a slice of space and time. However, photography can also be used as an expressive tool that conveys an individual's visual experience and feeling at that moment. According to Susanne Langer (1942), its representative form is nondiscursive or presentational photography, which can provide symbolic analogues of our sensory and emotional

experiences, in contrast with the discursive forms of language based on syntax, which can offer "propositions" or statements (see also Nystrom 2006). The photograph's nondiscursive signification with "neither fixed connotations nor explicit denotation" can convey factual and sensitive or emotional aspects at the same time (Nystrom 2006, 296). With digital cameras, people have explored this linguistic capability of photography in mundane and private ways. Interview participants have reported that they have taken numerous pictures with digital cameras to record various moments, ranging from special occasions such as a vacation to everyday moments. Digital cameras have allowed them to photograph "recklessly" and "unconditionally" without consideration of the cost of film and printing and to consequently capture moments that traditional photography would not value. Although they have taken photographs to make records of their special trips for a keepsake memory, they captured what would have been considered insignificant details along the way (for instance, a subway exit they passed by on their way to the destination, or the signboard or menu of a restaurant on the site). Digital cameras serve as a tool for memo taking or chronicling what people see and experience. In addition, small things and events in their daily life, as well as microscopic moments, have been captured. Interview participants captured moments such as when "I put on makeup," "I turn up my hair," "I buy a new clothing," "I eat a brand-new snack," "I meet my friend," "I find a crane-like cloud in the sky," and so on. They have documented the detailed experiences of "here I am" in their life-world, sometimes by design and other times improvisatorially, creating evidence of their being in the moment. Digital cameras accompanied by individuals have extended the subject matter of photography. To some degree, they have reproduced traditional photo-taking practices to commemorate specific occasions, and yet they have begun to include mundane and ephemeral images in their photographic repertoire, turning ordinary scenes or banal moments into something noticeable, and thus something recordable.

Digital cameras have also been used to make images of affective moments and to express feelings. One's mindscape can be both a context for photo taking and a subject to be expressed. People have photographed when they were emotionally attached to a sight or their visual sensations were stirred up (for instance, "I felt beauty in the scenery viewed from the rooftop of my apartment complex after pulling an all-nighter," "I was looking at a bus stop near my home, missing my ex-boyfriend," etc.). Personal affections and artistic sensibilities have created situations for photo taking, privatizing a specific time and space. In this process of subjective photographing, any daily scene can be transformed into a personally meaningful and unique one. People's sensory experiences at the moment can also be turned into visual images (for instance, they took pictures because "I wanted to photograph the sound of a wind I liked," or "I had a great appetite for a food"). With digital cameras, people are more likely to represent their ways of sensing, as well as their feelings of a situation at the moment. Digital cameras have facilitated people's visualization and aestheticization of their subjective experiences. Most interview participants believed that photographs would show not only things and events but also themselves: who they are and what their feelings or perspectives are. The more they get into photo taking, the more they look for their unique shots.

The most distinguishable characteristic of digital photographic practices is their close connection with communication activities on wired or wireless networks. The moments captured by our photographic eyes can be shared and interpreted in a present conversation or later in an individual's social space on the Web. Most interview participants' enthusiasm for taking photos is directly related to the need to visually express "who they are," especially in the social network of the Web. Photographs on mini-homepages or blogs are considered to be expressions of an individual's feelings and aesthetic sensitivity, or the images that objectify and testify oneself in a specific time and space. At the same time, they provide material through which one tries to converse with oneself, friends, or the unknown public, and thus function as "the new currency for social interaction" (Van Dijck 2008, 62). Most of the interviewees have routinely spent a certain amount of time selecting, modifying, editing, storing, or uploading numerous photographs they have taken, and they have done so as part of a sort of "self-impression management" on the Web. The classification of photographs into different categories is considered to be a useful tactic to stage communication settings for photo sharing. According to the characteristics and scale of the actual or imaginary audiences for mini-homepages and blogs, an individual tends to divide photographs into classes for one's personal viewing, for interaction with intimates, or for public viewing. When one selects, classifies, and edits photographic images, as well as designating the range of their potential audience, there occurs a self-reflection to ponder on how to negotiate potential viewership on the Web. Sometimes one discloses personal photographs for attention getting, and at other times one keeps them within a private sphere to avoid unwanted responses. The invisible others tend to have a part in an individual's deployment of self-presentation.

Interview participants have considered others' responses as the best reward for photo-compiling efforts. They pay keen attention to the number of clicks, replies, and scrapings. Also, they have a feeling of satisfaction when photo viewers become aware of, and understand, an individual's unspoken emotion or inner mind that lies

beneath the photographic images. Three interviewees who had their photographs recommended for placement on the front page of a social network site or a popular photo gallery site have temporarily experienced the fame of the so-called microcelebrity—"the phenomenon of being extremely well known, not to millions, but to a small group—a thousand people, or maybe only a few dozen" (Thompson 2007). Most interviewees tend to be "microcelebrity-wannabes" who want their blogs to get attention from and be well-received by their intimates or the unknown public. Because photographs are a primary vehicle for self-presentation and connection, they become more concerned with the expressive quality of their photographs and the social gaze of viewers on the Web. Moreover, they tend to agree with the idea that an individual's photo album can serve as a public form of a personal statement to promote oneself.

> It's the age of self-promotion, and by exposing oneself, one reveals who one is. These days, the job world is more likely to favor those who own and manage mini-homepages and blogs. These people are followed about by others. . . . I try harder to manage my mini-homepage when I receive messages from people who understand my sensibility and acknowledge my efforts. (Seeun, female, student, age twenty-one years)

Since pictures are significant elements of the individuals' "show-and-tell," this promotes the desire to take better photos, which in turn leads to a desire to buy high-tech cameras. The commercial deployment of mega-pixel camera phones, as well as the popularization of high-end portable digital cameras and DSLR cameras, seems to be closely related to people's intensive use of photographs and their demands for higher quality photographs to enhance their communicative ability on the Web. Most interviewees revealed their desire to buy high-tech digital cameras if their financial conditions allow it. Some interviewees have joined digital camera users' online communities, and others read books or attend photography classes to improve their photo-taking skills. For them, high-end digital cameras represent their enthusiasm to enhance photographic quality, rather than merely self-display to distinguish an individual's sophisticated cultural tastes from the others. They tend to show interest in new camera models and their technological abilities, and to assume that there is a hierarchy among cameras in terms of their photographic qualities, such that high-tech cameras can create better photographs. However, cameras' portability and their ability to express personal feelings rather than mechanically refined images are also valued. While interviewees tend to favor digital cameras or DSLR to capture anything novel and spectacular, they also use camera phones to get self-images and to substitute for other cameras.

The desire for better pictures often leads to an excessive self-consciousness in searching for photographic subjects and frames. Since an individual's photographs signify personal feelings and an aesthetic sensibility that are likely to be reframed as vehicles for interaction and social networking on the Web, one wants to have a better photo-taking ability, and even to go out with a friend who can take "good" pictures. Digital photography technically enhances the malleability of images and increases the user's control over the final image produced. However, as photographs become tools for self-exposure as well as connection, their productions become subject to the forms of circulation, and people begin to use their photographic eye to search for "pro-photographic" events (Burgin 1982, 83). This then intersects with the social gaze of viewers on the Web.

DIGITAL *FLÂNEURS* AND PHOTOGRAPHIC WAYS OF EXPERIENCING PLACE

Physical places have usually been the foreground or background of pictures when people capture a certain scene in a place where a personal act of photography is situated. Cameras have been used to record one's experience of being there, to visualize one's perceptions and engagements with the place, or to explore one's aesthetic, expressive abilities. While traditional snapshots have usually been taken at special places and occasions such as well-known tourist sites and photogenic landmarks for the commemoration of their "having-been-there," digital snapshots tend to be photographed far beyond these traditional sites and circumstances. As they are likely to be personally carried by people at hand, digital cameras tend to extend the range of sites for photography. People have become interested in capturing moments and places that conventional photography has typically disregarded, such as those moments that are banal but personally intriguing, those events that people experience accidentally or instantaneously on a site, or those routine places where people don't usually carry cameras. These places for photography include not only the privatized public places such as restaurants and shops, but also streets and transit stations that people pass by in their travels. From a cup of coffee at a café to goods in a showcase to alleys in the neighborhood and the ever-changing sky on their way to and from work: All have become prophotographic objects. Everyday users do not merely travel to tourist sites but also walk around familiar urban locales as "a strategy for accumulating photographs" (Sontag 1977, 9). Handy digital cameras can easily transform daily life into pseudotouring experiences in which an individual hunts and collects images to be later used for his or her storytelling on the Web. An interview participant reported that the everyday carrying of a camera made him expect something novel or unfamiliar out of routine life, as if he were on a trip. Other participants also identified digital cameras as "a partner" or "a part of

oneself," which made them more aware of their surroundings, both visually and in a microscopic way. For them, taking pictures is no longer restricted to special occasions and holidays; cameras in an urban space are no longer "tourist identity badges."

These photographers are a new kind of *flâneur* in a digital age. They observe cityscapes from their point of view or photographic eye and, at the same time, they constitute a part of urban scenery. They are the voyeurs of a city's everyday life, who continuously look around buildings, shops, restaurants, coffee shops, pedestrians, peddlers, and so on, and curiously seek out any eye-grabbing, unique things. They dislocate the specific aspects of an urban space through photographic frames and relocate them in their narratives on the Web. At the same time, their photographic practices often appropriate public or commercial spaces, and induce them to discover that there exist various ways of looking at subject positions.

> There is a telephone pole in my neighborhood. One day, I took a picture of "here" and on another day, I took one of "there." My mom laughs at me, saying, "What is it?" Yet I have a new feeling whenever I see this pole. On one day, there was some liquid at the bottom of the pole, and on the other day, there was a garbage bag there. When I look, I find new things. I always tend to go by the same place, and to have the same subject position toward the scene. When I am about to lose interest in the subject, I move my position a little bit and get a completely different picture. I like this. (Noori, female, student, age twenty-two years)

As one usually takes pictures of a place from a shifting and personally nuanced perspective, the place is signified by a fragment of the reality shaped by the photographer's personal, microscopic gaze. *Synecdoche* (to represent a whole from its part) is a common rhetoric of personal spatial imagery (see figure 1). As they become accustomed

to seeing a locale through photographic framing, mobile photographers become more attentive to its details. They often visualize the temporal sequence and path of their trajectories. Strolling about to look for scenic points to be photographed, one is able to become an observer who glances at and collects various signs in a locale. The photographer is privatizing the site for his or her own photography, as well as for sociality in other places—virtual or remote places. Photographs of details often serve as significant material that is to be used later for recollecting spatial experiences, for the blog's creation of personally nuanced micronarratives or for its production of geolocational data. Pieces of photographic images of a locale, which convey an individual's subjective position of photo taking, his or her activities, and feelings on the site, are interwoven to form an imaginary space bounded by the modes of communication on the Web. Then, are these digital camera users mere onlookers who are detached from a locale and carelessly appropriate its images for their private photography?

The act of photographing is not merely the act of pressing a button to mechanically fix a part of the world into an image or to reproduce a standardized gaze of photographic conventions. It can also be a practice of being attentive to a series of temporal and spatial moments in the locale and trying to make sense of and interpret a subject. Through the practice of walking around the site, searching for photographable objects, and framing what one wants to capture, one can face the challenge of how to make sense of what one sees. These practices can induce a curiosity for the memories of the locale and the people who have lived there, or make the viewer see a shadowed reality under the surface of a photogenic site. One can be put into a contradictory position of being both a voyeur with vigor for aesthetic visuals, and a detached onlooker who comes

FIG. 1.   Examples of synecdochic spatial imagery.

to be aware of the locale's diverse aspects. Some interview participants expressed cynicism about the tourist-like behavior of other photographers who were moving around in flocks and were only obsessed with their private photo taking of well-known scenic spots. Others tried to create their versions of seeing, framing, and meaning-making at the locale. For instance, an interview participant said the following:

> There is a steel fence at the mid-slope of Cheolsan-dong. From there, you can see one side, where shacks are about to be removed in the near future and where their residents live day by day like a dayfly. On the other side, there are newly built apartments awaiting their new residents. Although everybody works hard from one's given position, there is no case of "a black hen laying white eggs." Will these people have a place to live? Would it be too idyllic for them to have a small nest where their family can live together? I feel the world is too unfair. (Jieun, female, receptionist, age twenty-eight years)

When she went to one of the few remaining hillside slums in Seoul, she found beauty in narrow alleys or worn-out cement walls, but she lamented uneven distribution of wealth caused by urban development and commodification. The camera tends to make photographers voyeurs and at the same time lets them have a reflective distance from their physical surroundings. Photo taking is not only a way to create new iconic images of a place, but it also provides a chance to observe and reflect on a place for those who carry out these photographic practices. The immediate reproduction of photographic images also enables users to examine the difference between reality before one's eye and its image captured on a camera's screen, or the difference between the mechanical eye and human eye. Such differences create another pleasure within photographic practices. Through the processes of photographic representation, a place serves as a physical environment where an individual walks around and plays with cameras and also as an object under the individual's photographic gaze. Bits of image of a place, as framed and defamiliarized by the individual's aesthetic sense, have become materials for self-presentation and a place's referential data that float on the Web.

CIRCUIT OF SPATIAL IMAGERY

Television, films, magazines, books, and newspapers have been important sources for people's reference to places. They constitute spatial discourses, which designate certain locales as "must-sees" to visit or photograph, and they instruct how to see and experience them. These discourses have dominated people's experiences and memories of places, and furthermore have interfered with the formation of people's individualized memories of the site. However, individuals' photographs on the Web have been recently added to this image pool for spatial imagination.

As photographic images, taken by individuals, increasingly proliferate and provide unprecedented sources of created content in digital space, they become an integral part of people's spatial imagination. Bloggers distribute place-related images among the various modes of communication and are able to have an influence on the place's reputation. Their images and experiential stories provide another source to which people refer for what they can get from the locale and how they can meet their needs there. Pictorial information on the Web has contextualized people's anticipation of a place, and they are profoundly engaged in how we perceive, orientate ourselves in, and talk about the physical space. These pictures contribute to the formation of a new sense of place and to further making us perceive and interact with space through photographic eyes.

Digital camera users have often posted their pictures on the Web to create self-presentations and to enhance social relationships. As bloggers, they provide particular pictures and information related to a local site, and they share them with their intimates or the public to be acknowledged by them. Even though such practices of photo display and photo sharing don't have an explicit commercial purpose, they ironically tend to create an effect of promoting certain images that marketers, shop owners, or city administrators are upholding. An individual's personal photographic practices can unintentionally coincide with the interests of commercialists and administrators. Moreover, as commercial locales have become more aware of the publicity effects of bloggers' opinions and ratings, they have started to think about how to use microcelebrities on the Web. For instance, an interview participant said the following:

> My blog is usually visited by ordinary people. However, restaurant owners are very sensitive to the data I post. They often send me messages. . . . I think that Samcheong-dong has been changed a lot due to blog culture. During the weekend, it's very crowded with people taking pictures. Newly opened shops welcome these crowds. They know people will upload their pictures, so they serve them very well. (Eunjin, female, a script writer, age thirty years)

Although people search for images that fit into their storytelling on the Web, their pictorial documents with and within places have made details of a cityscape visible. As a result, their spatial imagery enhances the commercial potential of the locale. However, since their efforts are to express themselves and get acknowledgment from others rather than to acquire material reward, they can keep a distance from the commercialists' interests. They are more sensitive to their audiences' responses.

However, personal photographs can inform people of a locale and affect its reputation; they provide one of the references with which people find out about and make sense of the locale. When people search on the Web for

information about a locale, they are able to get a sense of place before getting there, and to visit the locale based on this information. Personal photographs provide visual details of numerous places, make them aesthetic and desirable, and consequently extend the pool of destinations that are considered worthy to visit. People's spatial experiences are more likely to be contextualized by these visual images and photographic practices. In the past, mass media imagery was the main source that structured the gaze and experience of a locale, but now personal spatial imagery also provides a source that shapes this gaze and these experiences. Personal photographic images become a part of geolocational data, with which people consult to make plans for visits and to choose a subject position for their photographic gaze. People tend to experience the effects of these images rather than the physical reality itself.

However, when images dislocate certain particulars of locality and turn them into visual icons, people become disillusioned. On the Web, such personal disillusionment coexists with the familiarized iconic images of locales. When they visit the actual places in those images, people are often disappointed with the reality. They come to realize that photos' synecdochical images are only delivering fragmented and dislocated signs. As people take photographs, share them, refer to others' pictures, and compare images with their live experiences, they come to learn the possibilities and limits of photography's visual effects and communicability. They tend to depend more and more on the user-generated information and images as a source for knowing locales, but they do not blindly follow them. The archive of spatial imagery is expanding in the process in which the production of images of locales is continually interacting with responses and reputations on the Web. While individuals' experiential, personal, emotional, and aesthetic interpretations of a place are posted, accumulated, and responded to, the ways of walking, resting, recreating, shopping, and dining are, in turn, affected by this imagery. Through photo-taking and photo-sharing practices, the users are provided an opportunity to participate or intervene in the representation, circulation, and consumption of places, and at the same time their spatial imaginations are more contingent on the floating images and comments on the Web.

CONCLUSION

In discussions of digital media culture, one of the most frequently mentioned concepts is digital media users' activeness, which emphasizes the transformative power of digital media users' participation, interaction, creativity, and subjective choices. This notion tends to focus on the instrumental usability of digital media, and leaves unexamined the ontological question of changes in everyday life, as well as our perception and understanding of the world. For example, what does the phenomenon of people circulating their pictures and self-images via digital networks and pictures culturally mean? How do digital media affect our sense of the world, as we begin to habitually externalize our experiences in visual forms with cameras at hand and then expose ourselves in those forms in various communication settings?

This article has examined how the everyday use of digital cameras and digital networks has reconstructed ways of capturing moments and of experiencing place. People with digital cameras have become urban *flâneurs* who have transformed their spatial experiences and trajectories into visual signs to tell their stories and to call for dialogue in both physical and virtual spaces. Their everyday photographic practices tend to make them urban voyeurs and at the same time give them a chance to be aware of their physical surroundings from their subjective gaze and meaning making. Moreover, people's photographic gazes are affected by, and affect, spatial imagery circulated on the Web. Their digital pictures come to constitute a part of spatial imagery and contribute to shaping and defining people's perceptions of the realities. Individuals' everyday photographic practices provide a new opportunity to reflect on their physical environment and to participate in the creation and circulation of dominant spatial discourses. They can be new *flâneurs*, who continuously look around their surroundings with curiosity and find multifaceted aspects of locales.

Although their photographic practices may be merely kitsch performances that conform to the familiarized, prearranged spatial imagery, their individualized frames and comments of locales may lead to a self-reflection on their practices and disillusionment toward photographic imagery. Through their everyday photographic practices, individuals have a chance to see a gap between the beautified visual fragments and the integrity of a physical place. They can also realize that these practices and experiences are a source for self-empowerment. As personal photographs that express individuals' aesthetic sensitivities and experiences are proliferating on the Web, the ways of constructing spatial discourses and imagery are changing, and so, consequently, is our sense of place.

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