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The Darkroom Series: Constituting Place Through Camera-Phone Photography

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The Darkroom Series:
Constituting Place through Camera-phone Photography

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

This research project explores how the social and creative practices of camera-phone photography are implicated in the constitution of place. From 2012 to 2014, there was a series of exhibits in Seattle, entitled the *Darkroom Series*, showcasing Instagram photos taken by Pacific Northwest residents. A mixed methods approach was adopted to capture the picturing and viewing practices of Instagram users at multiple on- and offline sites across various *Darkroom Series*-related activities. Camera-phone practices are considered in the contexts of earlier amateur photography traditions and contemporary developments in networked mobility and communication. Drawing upon concepts from tourism studies of embodied performances of place enacted through photography, the personal, social, digital and sensory experiences of individual camera-phone photographers are seen to contribute to public, collective representations of regional identity and the configuration of place.

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This thesis is dedicated to Hervé Cantin

For two of the greatest joys in my life, merci

Your stories carry on

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On the night of January 6, 2012, Zeitgeist Coffee, a coffee shop and art space in the historic downtown Seattle neighbourhood of Pioneer Square, was abuzz with vibrant conversations and energy. It was opening night of a photography exhibit entitled the *Darkroom Series* featuring 30 photographs by ten mobile device photographers from Seattle and the Puget Sound. The public web post announcing the *Darkroom Series* noted that:

What we present to you in this series are individuals taking mobile photography to higher levels; the casual user as Artist, the casual user as Photographer...In towns and cities, in rural and urban areas all over the world, mobile photographers have the ability to capture moments in time with unprecedented clarity. The advantage mobile devices or smart phones provide is that ultra-spontaneous element: Your phone, your camera, is always with you. Every ordinary moment becomes an opportunity to compose a stunning photograph...mobile devices are not just phones, but are now valid cameras and darkrooms. A photographer can now edit, much like in a darkroom, the shots they take on their mobile device through a multitude of apps. All of which can create the same effects of an actual darkroom. (WeAreJuxt, 2011)

The announcement also included a note about the show's closing ceremony, to be held three weeks later, that would incorporate a public "photowalk/shootout" through Pioneer Square, with the gallery as its final destination. Opening night was well attended and garnered mention by the local news channel, as well as lively commentary on Twitter, Instagram and other social networks that night and in the following days. Photos of the exhibit and of the attendees were snapped and shared on Instagram.

As of 2016, smartphone penetration in Canada has reached 76% of all Canadians, up from 62% in 2014 (Catalyst, 2016). While developments in mobile technologies and software innovations have expanded media uses of the phone - for example, visualizations of the data of our movements tied to fitness sensors and GPS-tracking devices, or audio samples created, captured and edited for DJ soundtrack creation - phones are most used in the mainstream as a device to create visual media, that is, photos and videos.

The convenience of being able to take pictures from a device that is always in your pocket, and the increasingly sophisticated camera technologies being built into the phone camera have helped to solidify the smartphone as the camera of choice for image capture. According to Flickr, a long-time web repository of professional and amateur photography archives, the iPhone overtook Canon and Nikon in early 2014 as the most popular brand of camera (counted by percentage of photographers) and has not appeared to have been unseated since, accounting for 47% of all cameras being used in 2016 for photos being uploaded to its site (Roth, 2016).

A recent study about mobile media found that people upload a staggering 2 billion photos a day on the internet in 2015, up from 2013's count of 500 million photos daily (Meeker, 2016). This jump in the number of uploads is attributed to the proliferation and penetration of mobile devices all over the world. The adoption of the camera-phone in the mainstream has been so notable that by 2013, "selfie" was not only adopted into the English language but was chosen by Oxford English Dictionary as the Word of the Year (Oxford, 2013). In 2015, "instagram" as a verb was accepted as a term into the Macmillan dictionary. These words exist only because of the smartphone camera and are indicative that camera-phone photography and its practices have become part of everyday popular culture.

In addition to Instagram, most likely the best-known and most popular photography app for the smartphone, a myriad of photo apps have been developed for mobile devices, such as Eyeem, Trover, VSCO, OkDoThis, whose photography function is tied to an exclusive social network that is accessed through the app on the mobile device, or sometimes accompanied by additional access to the social network from a web browser. All of these photo-sharing social networks allow users to add contextual information - commentary, emoticons, and hashtags - before posting them. But what distinguishes these platforms from other social networks such as Facebook or Twitter is that their very basis is to share images. Other purposes may be integrated, for example growing one's social circle, but the primary function of these apps is for taking and sharing photos.

At the same time, the rise of geo-location-based technologies and the related development of mapping and location-tracking apps and location-based services (LBS) such as Yelp and UrbanSpoon, two examples of user-based business review apps, have emphasized and enhanced the relationship between our mobile devices and place. Mobile media created on phones often include geo-location metadata embedded into the media itself, which can be viewed and mapped by the sender or receiver to corresponding physical locations online or in-app. Both Yelp and Urbanspoon also allow users to upload and tag photos to specific places. The geo-locative function is significant enough that apps that don't necessarily have mapping or location-based intentions will still integrate the data into their coding and user interface. Four out of five of the photo apps mentioned in the previous paragraph have geo-location-based search and display views built in to the app itself.

Increasingly, our experiences of place - our orientation, interactions, memories, and understandings about and with and in place - are tied to these mobile devices that are always

carried with us. "Where are you?" is probably one of the most common questions heard on a smartphone, and returning to the topic of photos, most smartphone users have probably at one point snapped a picture of an object or experience in the moment and posted or sent it to someone not with them at their present location and time. User-created photos are shared privately and publicly by text, on social networks, travel websites, maps, and product and business review sites. Images about places are more widely accessible, and now can be found and browsed easily on the device in one's hand.

While photographs and experiences of place have always been associated - the most obvious case being tourism - camera-phone photography makes us reconsider the nature of this association. Mobile technologies have implications for the modes of media sharing, the reach and exposure of our shared media, and the traces left behind in digital space that can be tracked and mapped to specific places in the world. With the extreme proliferation of photographs produced, circulated and viewed on mobile devices with their modern technological communicative and locative functions, how does camera-phone photography impact our engagement with place? More precisely, how do the practices of camera-phone photography contribute to the constitution of place? Is this contribution different from that of earlier digital forms of photography?

In this project, I explore how place is constituted and experienced on mobile phones, specifically through the embodied and social practices of camera-phone photography. The particular case that forms the nexus of this study is a 2014 camera-phone photography exhibit in Seattle centering on the theme of the Pacific Northwest, showcasing photos taken and shared by local Instagram users.

The exhibit mentioned at the start of this introduction turned out to be the first of 12 local and global mobile phone photography exhibits organized by a Seattle mobile arts collective called Juxt, since renamed Gryyo in 2014. Some of these exhibits, including the subsequent shows in the *Darkroom Series*, titled *Darkroom V2.0* and *V3.0*, were closely linked with an active local Instagram community, called @Igers_Seattle, featuring photos exclusively taken and shared using the Instagram app. By the *Darkroom Series V3.0*, held in 2014, the theme of regional identity was explicit, as denoted by the expanded title of the series, which previously only included a number, and was now qualified with a hashtag: “*The Darkroom Series V3.0: #NWisbest*”. The *V3.0* exhibit statement described the hashtag as “a very specific tag to the Great Northwest, it showcases the beauty of our region through the eyes of mobile photographers” (WeAreJuxt, 2013). This hashtag, as well as its variations, #northwestisbest” #pnwisbest, and #pacificnorthwestisbest, are used on Instagram, added by users to individual photos shared in-app to distinguish photos taken in or representing the region.

Thus, in the *Darkroom Series*’ photography exhibits and its related local camera-phone activities, Seattle and the Pacific Northwest served as both the subject of the events and of the photographs, and as their setting. This tie with the region was emphasized in the media that emerged prior to and following the shows - in news articles, reviews, public commentary on social media, and videos.

While this exhibit was borne out of a long-standing tradition of amateur photography - with its shared local photographic practices, public viewing of the captured images, a banding together by the photographers as an artistic community, the *Darkroom Series* and its attendant activities highlighted one distinctly modern feature of photography, that is, its apparatus of capture: the camera-phone. In its current iteration, as opposed to the earlier flip-phone camera

from the 1990s, it was now capable of producing photos that were show-worthy, able to be blown up and printed onto photography paper.

This 2014 exhibit serves as my starting point in exploring the relationship between camera-phone photography and the constitution of place in the Pacific Northwest. The investigation consisted of not only an excavation of the exhibit, but included an examination of the setting out of which the photographs emerged and the circumstances of their production and circulation. Because the photography is essentially linked to the smartphone, the exploration also looked at local camera-phone practices, including mobility, communication, and sociality as a part of understanding how they comprised people's interactions and experiences of place.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The two theoretical legs of this project have to do with camera-phone photography and with place. This chapter begins with a review of relevant research about camera-phone photography. This research is situated within the broader body of work addressing earlier forms of amateur photography and its practices, in both film and digital format. From there, I will move on to a discussion about place, with particular attention paid to works in the fields of critical geography and media studies, especially as they have addressed place in relation to photography and its practices. Finally, I will highlight a few examples of studies that have specifically considered questions of amateur photography and place.

The Emergence of Popular Amateur Photography

The invention of the Kodak camera and its variants and their mass promotion from the 1880s onwards made possible the shift from photography as a complex and highly specialized activity, intended for the science-minded or trained professional, to something more accessible to anyone who could afford the apparatus. The operational aspects of the photographic devices were simplified such that the camera could now be wielded and used by amateurs. Ease of use was a key selling point for Kodak Eastman in the early adverts for its products, assuring customers that anyone, “even woman and children” could be a photographer (Collins, 1990). The Edwin Land Company’s introduction in the 1940s of the “one-step” Polaroid camera, whose instant print technology made the darkroom and its chemical processes of transformation unnecessary further rendered camera use accessible to the public. Without having to worry about framing, composition, light conditions, or the intricacies of photo development, the amateur with a Polaroid in hand could now just point and snap and produce a printed photograph, underscoring a new category of leisure activity suitable to the masses (Buse, 2008). Notably, the introduction of the instant print precipitated the collapse of the experience of producing and consuming the image (Buse, 2010), which fundamentally altered the way photographs were experienced. Now, the print-in-hand could be enjoyed and viewed at the very events and places in which they were taken, often accompanied by conversation, commentary and shared acknowledgement of a moment (or event or thing). Out of these developments in photographic history emerged the snapshot, “the archetypal readymade image: placeholder for memories, trophy of sightseeing, produced in their millions by ordinary people to document the rituals of everyday life” (Rubinstein & Sluis, 2008, p.10).

The rise of amateur photography was paralleled by the emergence of camera clubs, or

amateur photography clubs. Bourdieu (1996) presents an influential analysis of the practice of amateur photography, socially distinguished by class. Among certain members of the middle class, the pursuit of photography-as-art serves as a way to reject (lower) popular norms of photography. Within this photography club, members could foster and encourage artistic skills and an aesthetic gaze. In contrast, for the working class, the focus of their photography clubs was the technical aspects of the camera and developing photographs. This focus was seen as contradictory to the pursuit of artistic values and thus early photographic pursuits were seen to be split between photography as art and photography as technical skill.

Dona Schwartz (1987) provides deeper insight into a historically important part of the social world of the serious amateur: the photography club. Through her ethnographic work with such clubs, she found that they are organized through a series of highly ritualised social activities, such as dinners, exhibits and competitions. Schwarz also emphasizes the aesthetic aspect of such clubs. The club members used codes drawn from the fine art forms of painting and sculpture to establish an aesthetic standard of pictorialism (1987b, p.259) to which the club held itself. In another study, Schwarz observes that “art photographers' activities, in contrast, are characterized by their exclusivity,” drawing upon art codes to distinguish themselves (1987a, p.165). Schwarz notes that the club actually seemed to adhere to rather narrow conventional notions about what constituted a “good” photograph (1987b, p.253), focusing on highly technical details such as exact exposure, representational realism and perfectionism (pp.260-262). Furthermore, these exacting standards extended to exhibitions: such as the mounting of photographs and the expectations of judges of photo competitions (p.272).

Another aspect of the amateur photography club that Schwarz and others (Edwards, 2013) point out is that in the socialized setting of the club, traditional and accepted norms of

photographic practices and standards are iterated and reinforced. Schwarz furthermore argues that for the amateur photography club, the common aesthetic values and accepted conventions around competitions served as social norms that not only bound the club together, but also served to reinforce and perpetuate other community standards of good photography, such as those of the Photographic Society of America (1987b, p.265). This club context for photographic activity “produces a symbol-sharing community which nurtures and maintains traditional aesthetic values” (p.279).

The historical contexts of the amateur photography club and of snapshot photography – especially the immediacy of (re-)experience that the instant Polaroid print prompted and the proliferation of photos encouraged by portable and more accessible cameras – are relevant as we consider developments in camera-phone photography and the specific local mobile phone photography communities and practices that were examined in this research project.

The Emergence of Camera-phone Photography

The introduction of these early Polaroid and Kodak cameras are seen as two pivotal moments in the history of photography. They marked new technological innovations packaged in products for popular consumption that encouraged and helped promote photography and foster a new hobby for the amateur. Their emergence and adoption by the masses are echoed in the proliferation of the camera-phone today. Some of the very features that popularized the Kodak cameras of the early twentieth century, for example, ease-of-use and basic user control of camera features, are echoed in the marketing and promotion of camera-phones today (Gye, 2007). As the first popular cameras were adopted by the public as a tool for a leisure activity that resulted in the widespread visual capture and documentation of family and commemorative moments, so

also has the smartphone been taken up as the gadget of choice for everyday snapshots. Camera-phone photography has even been defined as a “proliferating version of snapshot photography” (Shanks & Svabo, 2014, p.230).

Due to the nascent character of the camera-phone, it is only in the past ten years that scholars have been conducting research in this area. Enough time has passed since the initial emergence of camera-phone research, around the early 2000s, to distinguish between first- and second-generation camera-phone studies (Larsen, 2014). In the 1990s and early 2000s, camera phones were new, not necessarily plugged into the internet, had small screens and low-resolution photographic capacities.

Notable findings from this period emerged from scholars in new media, sociology and computing, including Ito and Okabe (2003, 2005, 2006), who investigated the phone photography practices of Japanese youth in the early- to mid-2000s. Ito and Okabe established the three “S”s - sharing, storing and saving - of early phone camera photographs, which were found to be of predominantly “banal” and ordinary everyday subjects. Research in Finland by Koskinen (2004) confirmed banality as a dominant theme of the images taken on phones. This tendency towards the ordinary was dubbed a new vernacular photography (of the banal) attributed to the rise of camera-phone (Lehtimäki & Rajanti, 2008).

Prior to the camera-phone, photo subjects more broadly consisted of family snaps (Rose, 2010) and special celebratory and commemorative events such as birthdays and weddings. The other broad category of snapshots was that of landscape and tourist subjects (Crang, 1997; Sontag, 1977). The shift that was noted with the camera-phone was that while people in general were still capturing traditional kinds of images expressed in earlier forms of photography, users took a greater number of pictures which included more images of everyday, ordinary situations

(Van House, 2011, p.127).

Another theme in early camera-phone photography studies had to do with the manner in which photos are viewed and shared with others. Traditional means of sharing these personal snapshots were shaped by "the home mode of pictorial communication" (Chalfen, 1987, p.8). Chalfen's extensive work with home photography identified a number of practices about how snapshots were shared. These practices included how householders choose their photographic audiences; how story-telling while looking at the image is a key part of the shared, or group, viewing of the photograph; and how this shared narrative of the photograph, encompassing not just the particulars of the where and when of the image but of the photo's own place in the family history, contributes to the construction (or reconstruction) of reality (1987). While Chalfen's work at this time primarily dealt with the physical artifacts of photography - the printed snapshot and the photo album, his findings about this sharing mode persisted in early studies about camera-phone photography. Kindberg, Spasojevic, Fleck and Sellen (2004) found that even though some phones had the capability of sending photos by MMS to another user, photos were often shared face-to-face with friends and family over the open screen of the phone, where the photographer would narrate the event or subject with the image in hand. For all the various ways of sending and sharing a photograph from the camera-phone, camera-phone photographers were found to enjoy the shared aspect of looking at and narrating the story of a photo together (see also Van House, 2009). This sharing of visual stories echoes the narrative practices associated with sharing family photo albums discussed by Chalfen (1987) and others (Hirsh, 1997; Seigel, 2003). When images were shared outside of the phone, the photographs on phones from this early period were usually found to be shared via computer uploads (Hjorth, 2017, p.27), to be emailed or uploaded to social networks (Lee, 2010) or by MMS (instant messaging

or texting), as the development of and availability to access apps were not yet established.

While photographic images are seen as essential to memory-building and documenting personal histories (Kuhn, 2007; Van House et al., 2005), the shift from “family to individual use, from memory tools to communication devices and from sharing (memory) objects to sharing experiences” (Van Dijck 2008, p.60) that was identified by Chalfen (1987) was also found to be true of photos taken on a phone. The immediacy of re-experience (of events and places) that the Polaroid instant photo fostered was even more notable with the camera-phone. The gap between taking and viewing the image was actually erased with the camera-phone, since people could gather around the image, in this case, on the phone screen, *immediately*, to view and talk about the (very recent) event or circumstances of the photo. The emphasis here is on the live, shared experience. While this practice was also noted with people taking pictures on digital cameras (Larsen, 2005), the camera-phone, as a personal communication device carried by more people going about their everyday life at all times, not just in special situations like travel and tourism, was more likely to be used to capture images across various social occasions. This aspect of viewing photos together which promoted shared co-presence and experience has persisted from traditional film photography days, despite the major transformative influences of mobile communication technologies (Hjorth, 2007; Scifo, 2009). What has changed is the collapse of time between taking the picture and its consumption – that is, the consumption of experience – that was made possible by developments in photographic technologies originating with Polaroid and taken up in digital, and then in mobile phone photography.

Other studies from the period focused upon themes of self-expression and identity, reinforced and sometimes established through camera-phone activities (Gai, 2009; Van House et al., 2005), including increased intimacy established through sharing phone photographs (Lee,

2009). Broadly, these studies have identified the networked device as increasingly significant as a “convergent platform” for young people’s relational and entertainment activities (Scifo, 2009, p.186), including self-documentation and memory-keeping (Schwarz, 2009), as well as for sharing images, publicly and privately, as part of their social identification. It has been suggested that camera-phone photography has shifted the focus of traditional snapshot photography from family relations to friendship ties (Garde-Hansen, 2013).

It is important to note that in this early period of camera-phone studies, many of the phone photography practices were found to be very similar to those that were established broadly in digital photography research. This echoes findings by sociologists Shove and Pantzer in their discussion about the emergence of digital photography practices, where they noted that while there are innovative aspects to consider, mostly due to technology shifts, the practices themselves draw “from tradition established by film” (2007, p.159).

The second-generation of camera-phone studies saw more notable departures from these earlier works, and are broadly characterized by the emergence of the smartphone, with advanced computing power, perpetual access to the internet, the capacity to use apps and the ability to include geo-tags with location meta-data to shared media (Larsen, 2014). This second generation of studies may be generally distinguished from the first due to the onset of apps that have significantly changed how photos are viewed, captured, edited and shared - now more on social networks and instant messaging apps, as well as the emergence of location-based-software (LBS) apps, with the increased integration of geo-tagging to photographs and phone media in general. Pink and Hjorth (2012) note that shared pictures from current smartphones, with embedded geo-tags, are more associated with mapping and thus give rise to a stronger sense of place (see also Villi, 2012).

With this second wave of phones and camera-phone studies, what distinguishes camera-phone photography from earlier forms of photography is especially pronounced: the pervasive, networked and multi-functional nature of the mobile phone (Lister, 2013; Villi, 2012), where it is possible for users to share and communicate photographs instantly after taking them, using instant messaging (IM), email tools or social media apps that are integrated into the phone itself. Because of the phone's always-on connection to the internet and access to various communication streams, the sharing of images is seen as an inherent aspect of camera-phone photography (Larsen, 2014); it has also been characterized as “a routine communicative act” (Lobringer, 2015, p.1) conducted on the smartphone. Camera-phone users sharing photos on their smartphones are seen to be constantly participating in social-visual performances that are more likely to get “mapped across a variety of intimate and social publics” (Richardson & Wilken, 2012). These social publics would include networks like Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. The posting, viewing of and commenting on photos shared on these networks in some ways echo the experience of live sharing that we saw with the instant Polaroid, but now on a wholly different scale. With the virtual network, the photos are not only shared immediately, but they have the capacity to reach a much broader audience both in locales removed from and co-present with the sender. The audience for shared images and engaged conversations about those same images has completely broadened with the current iteration of mobile phones that enable always-on connection to and participation in a variety of social networks.

With recent developments in camera-phone technologies that have improved the various photographic functions of the smartphone - for example, a higher image resolution, improved light sensors and flash technology, rendering a more life-like image in dark settings - as well as the developments of apps which make possible more sophisticated photo editing on the phone,

the camera-phone, which was previously notable in its use more for capturing the banal is increasingly seen today to be well suited for other kinds of photo situations. The camera-phone has been found to be increasingly utilized by the public and even by traditional newspaper organizations to capture major media and newsworthy events (Reading, 2011).

In September 2015, Apple published a series of ads for the current iPhone which featured photographs taken on iPhones by ordinary users (Apple, 2015). Among the photographs featured, some were family snapshots, but others were images of breathtaking landscapes: mountains in Iceland and views over the Pacific Ocean that looked like they were taken by professional National Geographic photographers. These were not mundane subjects - but extraordinary ones, showcasing the camera-phone's suitability for these situations. While used constantly to capture everyday, banal scenes, the iPhone as camera was clearly not to be so limited; rather, it was encouraged to be used for an expanded range of photographic subjects that included those that existed prior to the camera-phone. At the same time, studies have emerged that have begun to discuss iPhone photography in the context of aesthetics and an "emerging art world" (Bakhshi, Shamma, Kennedy & Gilbert, 2015; Gomez Cruz, 2012; Halpern & Humpreys, 2014).

I will return to the camera-phone in the latter part of this chapter, but to summarize, camera-phone photography is understood within its historical context as the newest and most current form of popular amateur photography. Aspects of camera-phone photography are new - in particular, its direct connectivity to the internet and its integration into a device whose primary function is communication - but the social practices of camera-phone photography are not entirely departures but rather evolutions from its antecedent versions of snapshot photography, which draw on both film and digital photography.

Contemporary Understandings of Place

Below is an introduction to some relevant literature discussing the definition of place, situated within the broader body of work in critical geography which addresses the ties between place and technology and place and photography.

Place has become increasingly important in consideration of the modern world, as all human activities, in all that we do and experience, we are immersed and always situated in place. Geographer Tim Cresswell states that focusing on the human element - that is, how people inhabit and experience the world - gives us a framework for thinking about place as a way of relating to the world (2009). Place is the setting in which we are all “inevitably and unavoidably emplaced” (Pink, 2008, para. 4) and thus it is all-pervasive, a part of every person’s orientation and immersion in life.

Starting from the (geographic) perspective to become “more aware of the ways in which we inhabit and experience the world” (2009, p.4), Cresswell offers a useful framework for explaining place. In this definition, place consists of three main elements: materiality, meaning and practice.

Materiality refers to the actual structures of place – for example, the specific mountains or geographic terrain, a building’s walls and roof, a concrete barrier that denotes the neighborhood’s boundary - but also includes material things contained therein - “commodities, vehicles, waste, and people” (Cresswell, 2009, p.1). Thus, the physical elements of place are considered. In other words, these materialities are about the dimensional objects that gird, enfold, arrange and define the spatial order of place. In consideration of the technological aspect of this research project, I would add that they also include the things that enable mobile communication

– for example, cell phone towers, Wi-Fi hotspots, network satellites, and data cables. These things are not necessarily visible, but they must exist in the real world in order for the (invisible) networked connections and messages to occur via mobile devices. It has furthermore been suggested that the subject and subjective experiences and memories of a space “become folded into the material world and each become imbricated in the agency of the other” (Hetherington, 1997, p184).

The second element, meaning, is established through associations ascribed by the person thinking about place. These associations can be personal, biographical and possibly laden with memory, or something shared and socially constructed. Cresswell gives The Twin Towers as an example of the latter, a locale that is etched deeply upon the collective, public memory. Meaning is not fixed or universal, and can be contested and challenged through alternate representations (Cresswell, 2009, p.2). In his introductory textbook about place, Cresswell refers to Agnew’s (1987) definition of place as “a meaningful location” (2004, p. 7) which has a sense of place, by which is meant “the subjective and emotional attachments that people have to place” (p. 7).

The third and final element of place is that it is practiced, by which Cresswell means that things are done in places that partially give them meaning, but that also include mundane practices that are “continuously enacted as people go about their everyday lives...Space becomes a place when it is used and lived” (2009, p.2). It is especially the repeated, constant reiteration of processes (p.7) of the activities and people and institutions therein that give meaning to place. While Cresswell notes that all three elements are linked, the role of practice appears to be most influential, as practices can contest and challenge meanings of place by the doings of people and things and organizations. Said another way, the associations that people have with place, and the meanings ascribed to place, can be established or altered through practice.

This third aspect of place expressed by Cresswell resonates with Lefebvre's exposition of space, offered almost twenty years earlier, in which he emphasizes the material, active use of space as central to its realization. It is this lived space, where people are moving and acting and to which they are giving life and identity to a specific 'place' (1991). People's movements and activities, then, can be considered, as appropriate, as practices, especially those that are continuously enacted and reiterated in everyday lives. Casey elaborates that place is not merely "carved out of space or superimposed on space" (Casey, 1996, p.46) but is where particular moments intersect to create this "lived space" conceived by Lefebvre.

It is these particular moments of intersection that are of interest for this project. Doreen Massey speaks of "a particular constellation of relations articulated together at a particular locus" (1993, p.66) in her exposition of place. She attributes the specificity of place not to its "long internalized history" but rather to the particular mix of relations at a given time and place. Elements that enact these "relations" include the obvious: people, corporations, organizations and their interactions. If we take into account the current state of communication technologies and mobility in our everyday lives, the concept of social relations in place are expanded to include things that we cannot see, but nonetheless exist; for example, cellular mobile networks and digital information moving in and out and through place.

Thus, place today is deeply influenced by the emergence and adoption of mobile technologies, especially due to the (inescapable) integration of those technologies into our daily lives. Using mobile devices, users are constantly engaging with others, with media and with endless bits of information that are usually located and always moving elsewhere. Mobile telephony and other communication forms implicate the physical location of users, situated in and moving through one place while their communicative engagements are elsewhere. Wilken

(2008) suggests that there is a fundamental negotiation with place, unconsciously or not, that occurs with the use of mobile technologies, to the extent that our very understanding and engagement with place is transformed by mobile media. He argues that the ubiquitous, prominent use of mobile devices warrant a rethinking of place that takes into account the complexities of human-technology-environment interactions (p.41).

This is in contrast to earlier research about mobility that saw it as a disruptive force upon traditional understandings of place, that it destabilised and dislocated place (Ling, 2008; Meyrowitz, 2005). This was especially true of mobile communication technologies, which were understood to have operated “independent of place” (Wellman, 2001, p.236), dislocating users from place, envisioning them as solitary communicators detached from their locales. However, it has been strongly argued that the ubiquitous, overarching presence of networked communication technologies ought to rather prompt the reconsideration of the “where” of everyday places, acknowledging the fact of our engagement with place on and through our mobile devices (Wilken, 2005). In particular, studies about mobile communication in relation to urban spaces have led to new understandings and conceptualizations of place, including hybrid space (de Souza e Silva, 2006), networked place (Varnelis & Friedberg, 2006) and net-locality (Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011). These concepts, while distinct, are similar in that they all take into account the effects of digital media and technologies as urban residents increasingly perceive and navigate and locate the city through their mobile phones, leaving traces of data in their wake. They also emphasize the fact that while remote connections will always exist, they become integrated with the mobile users’ current environments, rather than displacing users from them (de Souza e Silva, 2013).

What is particularly useful from these various concepts (hybrid space, networked

mobility and networked space and net-locality) for this project is the emphasis on local place. Mobile technologies, while implicating users in remote situations and events, are seen to connect users in local place. While Meyrowitz (2005) rightly notes that “evolutions in communication and travel have placed an interconnected global matrix over local experience” to the extent that we can no longer talk really about “here” without an underlying awareness of “there” (p.23), this interconnectedness can be conceived as the interjection of the global into the local, realigning or shifting understandings of local place, not diminishing or isolating them (Wilken & Goggin, 2013, p.7; see also Massey, 2010). Meyrowitz comments that it is possible that we come to value the local even more because of our awareness of the global. In other words, belonging to a global network enhances and strengthens, not weakens, local connections. Thus, it is appropriate to take into account the global flows of information and connections when considering the constitution of local place.

Returning to Massey, it has been argued that relations and experiences that are happening at a particular place and time are actually “constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself” (Massey, 1991, p.320) and that there is always connection between the happenings within the local space with social realities and phenomena that exist globally. This complex meshing of local and distant flows of information, people and products also implicates the individual who may be at the centre point in a system of multiple connections. Places are both “internally structured in terms of a complex skein of interrelation” and are also connected externally in relation to other places (Wilken & Goggin, 2013, p.33). All these relations have implications for how experience, identity and culture of a place are conceived and externalized.

To summarize, place is understood to consist of materiality, meaning and practice

(Cresswell, 2009), and practices enact relations that occupy and move within and beyond a particular locale, especially in light of mobile technologies in place. Mobile technologies and the visible and invisible flows of information and connections that they engender do not dislocate users from place but rather encourage the invigoration and realignment of understandings of place.

Place and Photography in Tourism Studies

In the previous section, place has been established as a subject of primary interest to geographers and new media scholars. But scholars in the field of geography have also been particularly interested in photography as a “distinctive and pervasive form of geographical image-making, in the construction of landscape and identity” (Schwartz & Ryan, 2003, p.5) and as one of the practices which comprise the geographical imagination, “the mechanism by which people come to know the world and situate themselves in space and time” (p.6). In the field of geography, and its sub-field, tourism, the exploration of photography has yielded a rich body of literature in relation to place, place-making, sense of place and other related topics.

Early studies in geography analysed and credited the contribution of photographs in their representations of places and experiences (Schwartz & Ryan, 2003). Broadly, the material outputs of photography - the album, the individual framed snapshot, national archives, were found to be artifacts that shape perceptions of place, even long after the photo itself was taken. Photographic practices were seen to “play a central role in constituting and sustaining both individual and collective notions of landscape and identity” (p.6).

These contributions, while fruitful, have been critiqued for being too focused on the representational and material aspects of photography (Crang, 1997; Sontag, 1977; Urry &

Larsen, 2011). Later studies point out that an expanded understanding of photography, one that takes into account the contexts in which the photos are produced, consumed and circulated (Larsen, 2008; Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004; Schwartz & Ryan, 2003, p.7) can provide for a richer understanding of photography's contribution to constituting the geographical imagination, including the constitution of tourist places. Tourism itself is considered to be "inseparably tied up with the development and popularization of cameras and photographs", even as far as to say that "the invention of photography occurred simultaneously with the birth of modern tourism" (Larsen 2012, para. 2; Sontag, 1977; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Because tourism is essentially about people's experiences with (new) places, this vein of research has contributed richly to my own understandings and explorations of place. What follows is a discussion about place and photography offered by Jonas Larsen in his research into tourist photography.

In 2005, Larsen published a paper about an ethnographic study undertaken on the Danish island of Bornholm about tourist photographic performances, where tourist places are framed as "produced places." That is, tourists going about their ordinary activities of walking, sightseeing, commenting, taking pictures and so on, are seen to be "coproducers" of such places. Larsen calls these activities collectively as performances of place (2005, p.423). Drawing upon Crang, who notes that "technologies of seeing form ways of grasping the world" (1997, p.362), Larsen points out that photography has a crucial role in these lived performances, as capturing images are part of the practices through which tourists' immediate realities, and thus, their experience of the particular place are established. However, Larsen argues that photography here is not a purely visual activity, but an embodied one; not one of mere spectatorship (p.418) but one of active, bodily involvement by the tourist in which image capture is only one aspect of the tourist encounter. This reframing of tourism, and especially tourist photography, from its earlier focus

on memory and artefact (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p.185) to a focus on the performances of the *now* marks a distinct shift in understanding not only the definition of photography but in the way that its contribution to place can be approached.

Furthermore, Larsen draws from Crouch to posit an understanding of tourism that is “complexly sensual” (2005, p.421), where tourist performances of places occur “sensually, mentally and imaginatively” (Crouch, 2002, p.208), both in the physical and material images and objects of place, as well as the mental concepts that are formed and linger in a tourist’s mind. The dual elements of the imaginative place as conceived in the mind and the material, physical realities around the tourist are known through a bodily encounter in which photography participates.

In this particular study, the focus was on tourist photography conducted broadly on digital or perhaps film photography cameras. In a later paper, published in 2008, Larsen acknowledges the changing landscape of tourist photography brought on by developing technologies, including the emergence and rising popularity of camera-phones. While the focus of this paper is on research methodology in light of the rise of mobile communications and new media, what is useful for this chapter is that Larsen argues for an expanded understanding of the “picturing practices” of tourist photography that takes into account not only the embodied performances that occur in place at the moment of photography capture, but that should also encompass the “post-practices” of photography, including, for example, editing, deploying and circulating photographs (p.144).

He notes the significance of the movement of pictures after-the-fact, what he calls the “unpredictable flows of photographs as they travel” through wires, wi-fi, screens and other places (p.144), digital and virtual travel specifically, as an aspect of the continuous performances

of photography which he argues are part of the production of place. To restate, in the context of contemporary digital, networked photography, a thorough perspective on tourist photography as part of how local performances and places are constituted (p.158) means not only looking at the tourist encounter in-the-moment, including the act of taking pictures, but also includes the consideration of the photos after-the-fact. In today's milieu, these photos will likely exist in digital form, to be found, as Larsen mentions, in blogs, emails, apps, and messaging posts.

While a definition of photography as a set of specific photographic practices rather than a single act of snapping a picture is not new, as discussed earlier in this chapter, what Larsen and others (Gye, 2007; Okabe, 2006; Van House & Davis, 2005) emphasize are the practices that are associated with the merging of the camera with an internet-networked communicative device. Technological developments are seen, once again, to have transformed photographic practice. Larsen presents an understanding of photography that addresses the onset of digital and specifically, mobile phone photography practices and their attendant implications of extended communication and networked mobility. Contemporary camera-phone photography cannot be separated from the “performative practices of taking, editing, distributing, uploading and exhibiting photographs” (Larsen, 2014).

Examples of Studies

In this final section, I want to introduce two recent research examples that have looked at place and photography, and delved into the themes and topics discussed above, that together with Jonas Larsen, have been influential in my approach for this project.

The first example is a study that looked at personal digital photography, including camera-phone photography, of 19 Korean digital camera users and their photographic activities

in Cyworld, a leading social network in Korea. Using interviews with photo-elicitation, Dong-ho Lee (2010) found that the everyday use of portable digital cameras and the content produced have reconstructed photographic practices, and furthermore impacted ways of experiencing place.

The notable shift in practices that Lee observed had to do with the smaller digital camera that, carried with users at all times, enabled them to take more pictures of daily life experiences and thus provided more content which was then uploaded and output on the web. This content registered the users' spatial experiences in the physical world in a digital space on the web, contributing to an increasing "hybridization of physical and digital experiences" (p.267). Lee also noted the close connection between taking the photographs and users' communication activities on their social networks. Most of the participants' enthusiasm for taking pictures was directly related to their need to express self-identity, in anticipation of sharing the photos on the web. In this case, ICTs were found to have expanded the communication contexts in which the photos are appreciated and interpreted by audiences (p.268), which include friends and family members, as well as a wider public.

In this urban-based study, Lee, borrowing from De Certeau (1984) suggests that if the practices of walking can be seen as ordinary people's resistance to imposed routes and meanings of place, the camera can be seen as a tool for users walking in these urban locales to enunciate these spaces, and to "disclose their own reflections on urban constructions" (p.268). Digital photography technologies allow ordinary people to create and produce their own "images, individual trajectories and spatial stories" and to "visualize their place-based experiences and memories during their acts of walking and rewrite the city as their space" (p.268). Photographers are presented as a "new kind of flaneur in a digital age" where they observe the city's everyday

life, but “dislocate the specific aspects of urban space through photographic frames and relocate them in their narratives on the Web” (p.272). At the same time, they themselves also constitute part of urban scenery.

Lee points out that digital photography as part of everyday life, especially for those seeking photographic subjects, includes the practice of being “attentive to a series of temporal and spatial moments in the locale” (p.272). Thus, residents engaging in digital photography are provided with a chance to pause and reflect on a place (p.273). Furthermore, the uploaded photos on CyWorld and other web spaces provide new opportunities for the photographers and viewers to participate in dialogue as well as in the “creation and circulation of dominant spatial discourses” (p.274). Thus, while self-reference is the primary motive in sharing these photos, one of the results is increased spatial imagery on the web which in turn contributes to the shaping of the photographic gaze and people’s perceptions about the physical world.

The following year, Sarah Pink, known for her contributions to the field of visual ethnography, published a paper arising out of two years of research into the Cittaslow (Slow City) movement in UK and Europe. This particular work (2011a) explored how photography practices of the residents of Cittaslow towns were implicated in the constitution of urban identity. The participants were visually capturing events, activities and projects characteristic of Cittaslow and making associations with past representations of the towns and cities involved.

In framing her study, Pink presents a notion of place borrowing from critical geography, one that is shifting, “unbounded, constituted through movement” (p.93), and more importantly, that is “a type of entanglement or meshwork”, borrowing from Ingold (2007, 2008). Thus, to think of place as an intersection of entanglements – a particular configuration of happenings – is to think of place in a constant sense of becoming through practice and practical knowledge

(p.94). Her account sees place as interdependent with practice, where practices are a part of everyday life and knowledge-making (Shove et al., 2007), taking into account “material and non-human movements or flows” (p.94).

In this paper, amateur photography is conceived as a part of everyday practice, of “people’s sensory ways of knowing, making and imagining places” (p.95) and the making and creating of photos is part of people’s “material, sensorial and affective” engagements with their physical environments. Pink specifies that the images produced in her research go beyond memory documentation, rather, they are communicative markers of both individual and collective experiences.

Similar to Lee, Pink found that amateur photography practices (seen here to produce memories, evidence and identities) and the resulting images (and videos) contribute to emerging narratives that contribute to place identity, by both being framed by current discourses but also in responding to them by the users who create their own representations and share them, in digital and print forms. But Pink emphasizes the collective nature of the amateur photography practices in this case, and notes that these practices are always part of a “wider ecology of practices and things” (p.101). She concludes that these practices and the collective representations of place are tied to the constitution of place.

Summary and Research Questions

In concluding this chapter, I want to highlight the connection between the two bodies of literature reviewed in this chapter – about mobile phone photography, especially in relation to its social and networked aspects, and about place, especially as it has been considered in geography and tourism studies – and their relation to the notion of practice as has been mentioned

throughout the discussion above. Crang (1997) and Larsen (2005, 2008) consider practice in relation to tourist picturing and viewing conventions, while Pink (2011a) conceives amateur photographic activities as practices; all three scholars directly connect these understandings of photography to the making of place. The very meaning of place (Cresswell, 2009), or its specificity (Massey, 1993), is attributed to the particular practices enacted at specific junctures. This relationship between photography as practice and the configuration of place through practice provides the theoretical framework for exploring my research questions.

Framing this project thusly allows me to consider: how do the specific phone-photography practices of people in Seattle in conjunction with the *Darkroom Series* articulate or produce local place or places? Part of my research includes investigating and identifying those local practices within the contexts where they are enacted. Because these local practices involve the camera-phone, this research also considers the implications of doing photography on a connected device through a very active social network, Instagram: how do specific local practices associated with Instagram participate in or contribute to place-making? Related to this question is: is place as it is produced through camera-phone photography through a social network different from that produced through other, earlier forms of photography? Because these issues are explored in a specific local context, it raises a further consideration: if these practices occurred elsewhere, what kinds of places would be produced? Would they be different from this project's "local" place or places?

In the next chapter, I will outline some of the methods undertaken to explore these questions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

For this project, I undertook a mixed methods study that took as its starting point the *Darkroom Series V.3.0* mobile phone photography exhibit from 2014. First, the collection of featured photos from the 2014 show was examined in both their real-world and virtual settings so that I could know what was being shown, what the photos depicted and what kinds of potential interactions people were having with the images in both contexts. Second, I looked systematically at a set of Instagram photos from a photowalk associated with an earlier show in the same exhibit series and conducted an analysis of the photos' visual and textual contents to consider camera-phone practices relating to a real-world photowalk that was shared online. Third, I conducted three semi-structured interviews with camera-phone photographers connected to the exhibits to uncover detailed explication of key instances of photo-sharing from the specific collections of photos looked at, and to gain information about local practices and the local context. Throughout the research process, I gathered information from a variety of resources - media accounts, videos and articles, to help develop an understanding of the context in which local phone photography practices were situated and performed.

This chapter addresses the theoretical ideas that influenced the framing of my investigation, the methods used to conduct my research for this project, the types of data sought and how I went about collecting them. Finally, I will outline some of the challenges pertaining to this project.

Mixed Methods Research

Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) define mixed methods research as:

a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry... Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone. (p.5)

One of the rationales put forth for employing mixed methods is that using only one kind of approach will not yield the required data to be able to sufficiently tackle a research question. For example, in the case of a study that includes looking at activities of people on an online social network where their engagement results in the production of media in staggering numbers, and that the produced posts in particular are of interest in the investigation, a quantitative approach to their study may be a useful measure for collecting media data, depending on the research question. Combined with other qualitative data, this mixed approach may provide a stronger base for understanding the research problem.

That being said, certain kinds of studies are challenged by Creswell & Plano Clark (2007) as not necessarily falling into the parameters of what constitutes a pure mixed methods approach. The authors distinguish between processes of collection and processes of analysis. They give the example of a content analysis study where the researcher collects only qualitative data and transforms it into quantitative data by counting the number of codes or themes. While certainly this is an example “mixed methods data analyses” (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003) using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, the data collection process involves only qualitative data. Quantitative data is not sought, thus under some definitions of what constitutes a mixed methods study, including Creswell & Plano Clark’s, this example falls into what the author’s call the “gray areas” (p. 11), a study that might conform to part of what constitutes a mixed methods

research approach, but not fully. Some examples of studies looking at mobile media that employ mixed methods or mixed methods data analysis to achieve research objectives that would fall into this “gray area” are highlighted below.

One of the most influential and earliest studies about the uses of cameraphone photos and sharing by Van House, Davis, Ames, Finn and Viswanatan (2005) combined a focus group, multiple interviews and employed researchers as participant observers throughout the process. The authors emphasize that they were not aiming for quantitative descriptions of use but of qualitative understandings of emerging cameraphone uses. But in another study based on this same body of data, Van House and Davis (2005) note that furthermore, they “are also beginning to analyze the MMM corpus for content. Viewing images without the photographer allows us to code for public, not private, meanings” (p.2). Lucero, Boberg and Malinen (2012), in looking at geotagging mobile media content capture and sharing, combined questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation, and image analysis to determine if geotagging increases personal and social value of photos. In a study exploring how people’s museum experiences are communicated through Instagram, Weilenmann, Hillman and Jungselius (2013) used interviews, groups, and content analysis of two separate sets of Instagram images to convey museum experiences to the public. These are just a few examples of studies pertaining to mobile media and camera-phone photography employing multiple methods to obtain their research goals.

Photos Across Sites

The exhibit at the crux of this project comprised photos that were produced and shared in an online environment, and then later re-produced as tangible prints for display in a public art setting in the real world. Jonas Larsen (2008) articulates a framework for the exploration of

digital tourist photography, especially in relation to the creation of (tourist) place. The ethnographic approach that he suggests was influential in identifying and establishing the kinds of data I would be looking for in my project, and where – that is, which sites - they might be obtained. Defining tourist photography as a technical and social practice involving both people and things, made meaningful and performed in specific contexts, he suggests that researchers may find it fruitful to seek to acquire data at multiples sites to capture the picturing practices of photographers, as well as take into account the flows of images across various sites and screens, both home and away.

Because of the movement of digital photos across multiple places, both real and virtual, he suggests that in addition to the observation and exploration of the photographs being taken at their original site, it is important to also include “post-travel” photography work, that is, what happens to the photographs after they are taken (Larsen, 2008). Thus, the exploration of the images in and across their various sites involves not only paying attention to the activities and the photos around the point of their creation, but also in their post-travel afterlife. Examples of where these photos are manifested and re-produced include private sites - emails, private posts in social networks, a photo print, and public ones - blogs, re-posts to other social networks, magazines, books, albums and in art galleries. In this study, only the public sites are considered. As part of understanding “picturing practices,” Larsen furthermore suggests that researchers gather multi-sited observations together with interviews with photographers to access their direct experiences of photographic activities.

Larsen’s approach for working with contemporary digital photography in relation to the construction and meanings of place is influenced by developments in critical geography and sociology that look at mobilities as a way of addressing the contemporary world and can be

considered part of “the new mobilities paradigm” which puts forth the notion that multiple technologies of travel and communications move objects, people, ideas, and images across varying distances, and the multiple arising connections hold all of social life together (Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006). Accordingly, mobilities work calls for the tracking of not just the movement of people, but also the circulation of information, images and capital, as well as the physical structures and infrastructures that enable travel and communication, be they local or distant, to take place. Buscher and Urry (2009) suggest that a mobilities approach encourages “[i]nquiries on the move” related to studying and following phenomena that are mobile, examples of which include migration, search engines, race, and place-making. Because of the nature of these phenomena in a modern, connected, global society, these inquiries may entail innovative methods of academic inquiry that “provide compelling new modes of knowing” (2009, p.110). They note that such inquiries have, in fact, been particularly fruitful for research in certain contemporary topics where, for example, questions of sensory experience, embodiment, and emplacement have recently emerged.

In a study where the subject spans both online and offline settings, the researcher can and ideally should attend to both. Attention should be paid to the sites where activities are occurring. The outputs of such activities - the photos and the associated practices that are implicated in their production and circulation - were considered as part of the “flows of diverse mobilities of people, objects, images” (Larsen, 2008, p.157) for this project, in both their virtual and real-world contexts. They were all considered as part of seeing how people and their camera-phone practices are entangled in the constitution of a place.

Thus, to acquire data, first at the exhibit, then following the “flows of photography” to where the photos “travel, materialize, de-materialize and change meaning according to how and

where they travel” (Larsen, 2008, p.156) in both their physical localities as well as their online contexts, I adopted a mixed methods approach that included interviews, an examination of Instagram posts and photowalks associated with the shows, and my own active explorations and engagements with the environments in which local camera-phone activities took place.

Being Emplaced: the Exhibit Environment

In the previous chapter, I mentioned Pink, who articulates an understanding of place that is shifting, “unbounded, constituted through movement” (2011a, p. 93) and that is “a type of entanglement or meshwork,” where through the particular configuration of happenings, place is in a constant sense of becoming through practice and practical knowledge.

As place is thus conceived, Pink suggests that understanding and situating the researcher alongside or as part of these movements as an “experiencing, knowing and emplaced body” is a particularly fruitful way to become engaged with people’s “social, material, discursive and sensory environments” (2009, p.28). Emplacement here is understood, as “the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment” (Howes, 2005, p.7). Pink highlights the fact that as researchers:

“...We ourselves are emplaced, but at the same time we are both seeking to understand the emplacement of others and the practices through which the places they form part of are continually reconstituted” (2008, paragraph 4).

Pink proposes an approach that encourages the embodied immersion of the researcher in the practices of photography occurring “in movement.” This position calls for the researcher to explicitly acknowledge the researcher’s own emplacement in and as part of specific research contexts, as part of the knowledge-creating and place-making experience. Here, in addition to the

virtual setting, those contexts involve the physical spaces in which the local activities took place – the gallery setting, the neighborhood in which the gallery was located, and the streets and neighborhoods in which the photowalks took place.

Opening night for *Darkroom Series V.3.0* was January 2, 2014, and the exhibit continued until February 4. I travelled to Seattle during that month to visit the site. As the gallery was also a coffee shop, I was able to spend an extended time therein, during which I closely examined the displayed photographs, their presentation, the environment in which they were displayed, as well as the people in the public space and the manner of their engagement with the photographs. My intent was to see the exhibit photographs in their real-world gallery environment, as intended for public viewing, and to get a sense of how they were presented, what they looked like, and what they portrayed, both in broad daylight, and later, under artificial lights. Because I could now identify these photos, I could find them online and examine them in their virtual environment. I also had informal conversations with patrons and staff about the displayed photos. Additionally, I wanted to see and get to know the physical, material environment in which the photos and the gallery were situated. This neighbourhood was also the site of two photowalks that were part of the two previous *Darkroom* exhibits.

This first encounter and experience with the *Darkroom Series* served to orient this project. Being personally situated where the exhibits, people's encounters with the images and other activities arose, I could now engage in exploring and be part of the process of how local camera-phone photography is implicated in the construction of place.

Preliminary explorations gave rise to other direct and parallel lines of inquiry. I learned that the *Darkroom Series* shows had been intended as an annual event, and that they had usually incorporated a photowalk, a question-and-answer session or meet-and-greet with the artists, and

a kick-off opening night social. Thus, the *Darkroom Series* were not just a series photo exhibits; they were more a series of events over the span of a month, celebrating Pacific Northwest mobile phone photography. I also learned that the exhibit organizers, a local arts collective called We Are Juxt (<http://www.wearejuxt.com>), known colloquially as just “Juxt”, were not just there to put on a show, but that they were a central force in the Puget Sound region, mobilizing and raising awareness of phone photography activities. Some of Juxt’s members were founders of a Seattle-centered Instagram community called @Igers_Seattle. Many of those early, related lines of inquiry converged around Instagram specifically. Thus, for this study, I focused my online explorations on Instagram-related local photography activities (as opposed to other apps and online social networks) out of which the *Darkroom Series* and #NWisbest emerged.

Looking at Photos: the Instagram Environment

In February 2011, Instagram’s founders released a public Instagram API (Application Programming Interface, a way of accessing and querying application databases directly, without use of a graphical interface) which made it possible for third-party developers to create derivative services and websites, including public web-based tools that have made it possible to access Instagram’s photos outside of its own app. Because the Instagram app retains an archive of all of a user’s photos, captions and associated comments in a chronological order within its own app, some of these web-based tools made it possible to search and collect photos based on hashtag, username or the image’s geo-location tag. I used the public websites Statigram and Gramfeed (since renamed in 2015 to Iconosquare and Picodash respectively) to find images related to the exhibit. The photos retrieved were limited to those images from users whose default privacy setting was set to public, that had relevant hashtags assigned or had publicly

shared location data. After calling up a search, I was able to clip my browser findings into a data file on my computer. (Today, the functions of these sites are no longer available in the same manner they were during my period of research, and Instagram itself has since developed web interface features where some of that functionality is now available).

Exhibit photos. Because the *Darkroom Series*' exhibits, their organizers, featured photographers, and the gallery all have specific hashtags and/or usernames on Instagram, it was possible to search for related photos on the public sites Statigram and Gramfeed. I used both sites to account for possible differences in search results. I collected photos around the following hashtags: #darkroomseries, #darkroomseriesv2, #zeitgeistcoffee, cross-referenced with #juxt, #wearejuxt, and #igersseattle. I ended up with Instagram posts about all three *Darkroom Series*' shows, from 2012 to 2014. I also looked at the photo feeds of each of the ten featured artists from the most recent exhibit and clipped each of the ten specific photos featured in the show, in order to preserve the images and their attached comments, which were then examined more closely.

Looking at Photos in Movement: the Instameet

Instameet photos. Later on in my research stage, in exploring local community activities associated with the *Darkroom Series*, I explored four Instameets directly associated with or parallel to the *Darkroom Series*' shows, using Statigram to collect photos from each of them. While the collected data was useful in providing context and a view of local activities over time, for the purposes of this project, I will present and discuss the data and findings related to only the #bemobile "photowalk/shootout" (as Juxt called it) in Pioneer Square that took place on January 28, 2012, which was part of the closing events of the first *Darkroom* show. I collected photos

using the assigned event hashtag, but the #bemobile tag had become so widely used that I needed to cross-reference the search with another tag, #juxt, to narrow the results to the photowalk specific images. The selection of this event was also based on its significance to my informants - they either attended the photowalk, or they talked about them during preliminary conversations and during the actual interviews.

I collected all pictures with the #bemobile hashtag from the date of the walk, January 28 to February 3, 2012, extending the date in case some people posted their pictures from the meetup later instead of in-the-moment during the event. From the collected photos, I eliminated the photos that were not of the photowalk. I could determine that it was not from the Instameet by the location (i.e. Georgia, Atlanta), the subject (it was inside a hospice setting) or the “repost” comment that indicated that the photo was taken in the previous year but just posted recently with the #bemobile tag. There were likely more photos that were taken during the event in 2012, but the Statigram interface only revealed images for users whose permissions were set to public, and only current users. Also, if users from the event forgot to use the #bemobile hashtag, then that photo would have been omitted from my search. There were 106 photos collected.

Content analysis. Rose (2012) notes that “images rarely appear on their own...almost always accompanied by text, voice or music” (p. 94) which can alter what the image is meant to convey. She suggests that where appropriate, captions and accompanying text (or voice or music) may be included in the analysis of visual materials. While I analysed the posts for visual content, with cues from their captions, I also examined the attached comments for social and place-specific content and interactions.

My purpose in analyzing the Instameet photos and their comments was not to quantify information about particular photos, but rather to gain qualitative insights into the things that

were conveyed through the Instagram posts at their initial site of production (both on- and offline), and examine what those things could tell me regarding the online, as well as the real-world practices in which people were engaging. Data revealed in the analysis what people were seeing and doing at the photowalk. As well, thinking about images in the context of Instameets clearly identifies them as what Pink calls the “multisensoriality of images”, where they are located in “the production and consumption of images as happening in movement, and consider them as components of configurations of place” (2011b, p. 8). These posts provided a way of looking at the photos at their points of production, but also, some instances of their consumption (as indicated in the textual content).

I looked simply at two things when it came to visual content. First, what was depicted in the photos? What were the people looking at and photographing? Second, what were the different aesthetic qualities of the photo? For this, I just looked at anything that set apart the image from a “normal”, untouched photo, such as blurring, sepia or black and white tones, filters, vignette and blown out colours.

Regarding the comments, emoticons and hashtags which accompanied the images, I was guided to develop applicable categories of codes “in relation to their theoretical concerns” (Rose, 2012, p. 90). I took as my starting point my own review and observations of the 2014 exhibit photo posts on Instagram, as well as the list of the social uses of camera-phone photography established by Van House et. al (2005) as these uses, as discussed in the previous chapter, would assist in drawing out and categorizing practices, and still remain relevant to how people use camera-phone images today: memory, relationship creation and maintenance, self-presentation, self-expression, functional and social documentary. I added location/place to this list, to take into account the number of comments about that in the texts, and dismissed functional, which Van

House and Davis explain has to do with using the camera-phone as a helpful device - snapping a picture of a whiteboard, or a grocery list item, for example. After a first run-through the text, I also added technique, to capture all the comments having to do with photo editing and styles.

Finally, I ended up with a slightly modified and more relevant set of categories as follows:

1. Social - individual first time meetings and re-acquaintance.
2. Relationship maintenance – plans or appointments to take place in future.
3. Community - local or other group references.
4. Self-expression - a personal anecdote, or poem or joke or quote.
5. Location/place – mentions and discussions of specific locations and places.
6. Technique - photographic technical and editing comments.

I looked at the #bemobile images alone, and then at the images and the text together to first, see what people were taking pictures of; second, to get a sense of what people were talking about and reacting to from their photowalk experience; and third, together with understanding gleaned from prior literature, to see what these things could tell me about the practices locals were engaging in, as expressed in this particular virtual social space.

Lastly, it should be noted that the *Darkroom Series*' shows posts, both the photos that people were posting about the exhibits and the featured photographs from the 2014 exhibit, were not included in this analysis. While I looked at some similar things as with the #bemobile photos, because I had a pre-determined set of things I was looking for from the *Darkroom Series*' photos - specific interactions about the show, its theme, the featured photographs and their experiences of events - they were excluded.

While the analysis of these photos provided useful data, they only told a portion of the story. Photo analysis alone would reveal only partially the happenings at local Instameets, unless

I also could understand the specific setting and context within which the photowalk and associated activities were occurring. There were also some results that were a little surprising. Thus, I expected that speaking with those directly involved in these photowalks would provide explication, as well as fill in gaps in my knowledge pertaining to this event and its related activities.

Talking to People: the Camera-phone Photographers

Interviews are key to hearing and gathering from photographers their own descriptions of their “life-world,” which then provide the researcher with richer context in interpreting said activities (Kvale, 1983, p.174), taking into account the photographers’ own perspectives in the analysis of the resulting data. Interviews may also serve to verify, validate and expand data obtained from sources other than direct personal participation and experiences (Lindhof & Taylor, 2011, p.172). As my investigation would involve speaking with Seattle-based camera-phone users regarding their personal photo practices, I applied for, and received Ethics approval from the Conjoint Faculties Research Board of the University of Calgary on November 24, 2014.

I did not know any of the participants prior to this investigation. The ten artists featured in the exhibit all had public Instagram accounts, and their usernames and personal websites, if applicable, were listed in the exhibit announcement. Participants were contacted through private messages on Twitter and via email. I sent inquiry emails to 14 potential participants, and received four responses. After subsequent extended communication over email, I was able to recruit two people: one of the artists featured in the show, and the other a member of the Juxt collective who happened to be involved in the organization and launch of the exhibit, and who was also a featured photographer in the first *Darkroom* show. After committing to be

interviewed, they were sent a formal communication stating the purpose of their involvement, their voluntary responses to the questions during the interview, the confidentiality of their identities and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Early conversations with participants highlighted both their participation in the Seattle Instagram community and I was encouraged by both to contact the Instagram community leaders to follow up on parallel activities to the exhibit that contributed to the context out of which both *Juxt* and the *Darkroom Series* emerged. One responded back with a willingness to participate in my project. Recruitment ceased after I obtained three participants because of time constraints, lack of commitment from other potential participants, and scheduling conflicts. I had subsequent conversations over email, Twitter and Instagram with the three participants over the months and we were able to arrange appointments for the interviews. I met the participants at various locations in Seattle, as convenient to our respective schedules. The meetings, which took place over shared coffee and teas, lasted about 90 to 120 minutes, of which the interviews themselves ranged from 60 to 90 minutes.

The interviews provided a “way in” for me, an outsider, to experience and hear about local people’s engagements in and through their photography-related activities at their various “sites” - online, the exhibits, and the Instameets - in which they were situated. Considering my main research questions, I wanted to hear their own tellings regarding their personal phone photography practices, about Instagram, and their thoughts about place. To prepare for the interviews, I created a list of 15 questions as a guide, organized around themes of personal engagement and experience; setting and place, in particular the Pacific Northwest; aesthetics and visuality; the role of local camera-phone community organizations; and mobile technologies. During the course of the interviews, I also asked questions about specific photos on their

Instagram feeds that I had seen. I designed the questions so that while the conversations addressed my main topics, interviewees were encouraged to share their own experiences and perspectives about the local camera-phone photography scene, attendant personal and community practices and their relationship to their environments. The semi-structured format of the interview made it possible for conversations with participants to take place naturally (Patton, 1990). Coincidentally and fortunately for this project, each individual recruited had a distinctly different (though sometimes overlapping) role and experience with regard to the *Darkroom Series* and the local camera-phone community - artist, exhibit organizer, local Instagram community manager. During the interviews, I had a notebook into which I jotted notes, adding my immediate thoughts and responses to what was being shared by the speakers. After each interview, I returned to my hotel and reviewed my quick notes and wrote my field notes immediately, in order to best capture the encounters while they were fresh in my mind. These notes later supported the transcribed interviews, preserving my reflexive thoughts and emergent ideas during and immediately after the interviews. I reviewed the interview texts and together with the data from the Instagram posts, they were instrumental in helping me develop a sense of how camera-phone practices in this region are implicated in the representation and the constitution of place.

Supporting the Research Process

Throughout my research endeavours, I took notes to organize my thoughts and my data, which accumulated into what essentially became my research diary. Although my iPhone was always on hand and capable of taking snapshots and capturing notes, I preferred handwritten notes, which were not always convenient if I was on foot or outside on a rainy or particularly

cold day. I took many photos throughout my visits to the gallery, to meet my interviewees, in Pioneer Square, and in other places I visited to aid my memory and as part of getting to know the local environment. The notebook thus contained annotations on photographs I had taken. Comments and observations about places and images I saw were recorded, along with interpretive notes, which I sometimes added when reviewing notes at a later date. Sometimes, when it was difficult write down full descriptions in the midst of a particular activity (i.e. while moving or during a conversation), short notes were jotted down at the spot in my notebook or on my iPhone that would act as memory aids when reconstructing notes at a later time (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). During my three visits to Seattle, whenever I was on foot or during conversations with people when I could only take short notes, I attempted to write out the full notes in my notebook as soon as I was able – as soon as I returned to the hotel or arrived at a coffee shop where I could sit and write out the earlier encounter or observation - in order to capture and preserve the immediacy of thoughts and observations as closely as possible to the actual encounters. I also kept notes about emerging affinities, contradictions and points for further inquiry arising out of my data collection process. For security and to create a backup of my notes, as well as for ease of access, I later scanned pages of my notebook into a private folder on my computer. Keeping track of my notes and continually referring back to them was especially helpful in organizing my materials because of the complexities around tracking the data from the multiple methods employed in this project.

Underscoring my project is the specifically mobile technological aspect of my topic. This aspect warranted being sensitive and aware of the fact that human interactions were taking place on and through mobile devices, even as those interactions occurred in place. Speaking of photography, Pink states that “mobile and cameraphone technologies, practices and images” are

understood as part of mobile phone users' "sensory ways of knowing, making and imagining places" (Pink, 2011b, p. 95). For this project especially, the role and presence of technology pervades throughout, even if it is not obvious.

Perhaps because of this premise, I was explicitly aware of the presence and use of my iPhone throughout all my research activities: in taking pictures, communicating with my interviewees, recording notes, taking notes when my notebook was not handy, documenting specific places and bits of information that I wished to retain, looking up and mapping specific places and locations, following and searching for hashtags about relevant subjects. While in ordinary day-to-day life, the presence and awareness of the phone fades from primacy as it becomes part of everyday routine, this was not the case while pursuing research investigations, during which I was vividly aware that a large portion of communication, access to and engagement with media (both their creation and consumption), my interviewees and others in the Instagram and Seattle communities took place on my phone. It was my preferred tool for looking at Instagram photos and comments even though I had access to the web interface. Even though I was not purposefully trying to use my iPhone in my research activities, it became an integral tool in my engagement in my exploration of both physical and virtual sites. It also made me aware of just how much I was using my phone in my own engagements with place.

Challenges

My initial research plan envisioned my direct observation of and participation in a few camera-phone events beyond the initial exhibit. I had planned to attend, and had tentatively coordinated with my interviewees being part of at least two events. Due to changes to personal circumstances, I was not able to attend these activities in person. Thus, I was faced with the

challenge of considering if and how I could achieve my research objectives. In this, I was aided by informal conversations with my interview participants who mentioned certain events and media accounts that highlighted certain local mobile phone photography activities. After looking into them, I gained some confidence that they could provide information about local practices. The interviews were a particularly valuable source of information in my research process, because in addition to providing data, they furthermore provided insight into the data collected from other accounts and the analysis of Instagram posts. Finally, they enabled me to test out my “emerging interpretations with the people involved” and sources other than my direct participation and experiences in local camera-phone events, and to guard “against a reliance on over-simplified second-hand accounts” (Hine, 2015, p.19).

Another challenge relating to my research had to do with the scope of my investigation. While the question of place can be very localized, the Pacific Northwest is a huge geographical area, with wide-ranging, diverse and conflicting identities and cultural articulations. As of March 2015, there were over 560,000 Instagram posts that were tagged with #northwestisbest just under 31,000 photos tagged with #nwisbest. (As of March 2017, those numbers are 1,157,648 and 101,715 respectively.) Tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of individual users have posted images that somehow they associate with the Northwest. Thus, it was daunting to imagine developing a concept of place where there was such an overwhelming number of images.

Attempting a study and discussion about how #NWisbest is conceived, albeit through the lens of mobile media practices, could easily devolve into an overwhelming endeavor, both geographically and online. Camera-phone photography activities in the Seattle area extend to a multitude of sites, including on social networks like Twitter, Flickr and Facebook, as well as to real-world sites such as in the Seattle community colleges, and Seattle’s beloved football team,

the Seahawks. Thus, overt choices were made as to what comprised the field for this project: only those specific activities arising out of and touching the *Darkroom Series*' exhibits, and only those photos and conversations around Instagram in relation to the exhibits were included.

Finally, given that knowledge is generated through and by the researcher's engagement in the various stages of producing the thesis, it is not possible to fully eliminate subjectivity from the process. Experiential and interview data, while collected with objective intent, will always reflect the researcher's own situatedness. Such data arises out of a dynamic relationship that the researcher has with the literature, the environment, the research tools, and the people involved in the project (Mason, 2013, p. 72). We can address this subjective situatedness by acknowledging its existence, and by being aware and careful during the analytical process. Related to this awareness is the reflexive stance that I have taken towards researching and writing this project. Lindlof and Taylor argue that "the enactment of reflexivity provides us with better data," in that it enables the researcher to gain a nuanced understanding of what people are doing and saying (2011, p.73). This is aligned with Pink's ideas around the explicit emplacement of the researcher with and in the setting where people are engaging in their activities (2008). The research exploration should be undertaken and the text written with the awareness of the researcher's own role as a co-creator of knowledge, along with research participants, in a collaborative endeavour of knowledge-making (Rose, 2007, p.246).

Engaging with the *Darkroom Series*

Drawing together the data from my interviewees, the Instagram posts, and readings of various accounts, in addition to my own explorations in the region, I attempt to weave together a picture of how within this locale, people "doing" phone photography not only express but in turn

become part of and make place. Analysis of the data, taken together with understandings drawn from the literature presented in Chapter 2, provided me with insight about the ways in which local people's social and creative activities, as well as the material surroundings and structures in which they and their camera-phone practices are situated - all part of their everyday lives, can be implicated in the larger picture of constituting place.

In the following chapter, I endeavour to articulate this local picture of camera-phone photography activities and practices in Seattle. The following chapter section has three sections. The first section tells the story of my initial encounter with *Darkroom Series V3.0* and aims to convey the representation of #NWisbest through the images at the show and online, and through the eyes of one of the artists. The account is based on a composite of data gathered from my time at the exhibit and exploring the neighborhood, my interviews with two participants, and the photos on Instagram. The second section shifts to the past and presents an account of the first *Darkroom Series* show, from its opening night to its closing ceremonies, which incorporated a photowalk in a specific urban neighborhood of Seattle. It includes a discussion of the findings from the analysis of the photos from this walk, taken together with interview data, and how they reveal specific social and creative camera-phone practices, which in turn are implicated in local creative expression and the representation of place. By framing the two accounts around the two specific *Darkroom* shows, I also highlight two contrasting visions emerging from the exhibits, each arising out of the people involved in then current, local camera-phone activities. In the last section, drawing upon interview data and other media resources, I provide a snapshot of the specific local context, in particular the roles of the two mobile phone photography communities, Juxt and @Igers_Seattle, and their contributions to shaping local camera-phone photography and arts practices.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Darkroom Series V3.0

Photos in situ: the exhibit at Zeitgeist. Bundled warmly against the chill January wind, I make my way on foot on clear sidewalks from my hotel in the Seattle neighbourhood of Queen Anne, just slightly northwest of downtown, to catch the #4 bus that will take me to my destination, a gallery cafe in another neighbourhood of Seattle. Queen Anne is an old, gentrified community, situated on the tallest hill of the city, named after the architectural styles of the homes of early well-to-do settlers to the area. Lower on the hill, where the main roads leading into Seattle central are situated, I walk a couple of blocks passing coffee shops, an indie movie theatre, and a grocery store towards the correct bus stop, according to the directions on my iPhone.

The bus that will take me to Pioneer Square follows a southward route that cuts through downtown Seattle, past the iconic sky-high red sign of Pike Place Market, the largest farmer's and craft market in Seattle, past towering financial buildings in the downtown core, and past the bustling activity of tourists (even in January!) and workers going about their everyday activities. In about fifteen minutes, the bus nears the intersection of 3rd Avenue and Yesler Way, which serves as the boundary between downtown and Pioneer Square, where I disembark, intending to travel the rest of the way on foot.

I head south on 3rd Avenue, turning right to shift over one block to 2nd Avenue for the remainder of the southward trip. Immediately noticeable is the unique style of buildings, not modern, but with the stamp of being from another time. Later, I read that some of these buildings were rebuilt in the Romanesque Revival style following one of the most notable events in the

history of Seattle's development, the Great Fire of Seattle in 1889. The second thing that is obviously noticeable are the people lying on the ground or leaning against the buildings, some in wheelchairs, others with sleeping bags, huddling together in small groups or alone. I am reminded of Hastings Street in downtown Vancouver. All big city downtowns seem to have sections like this, I think to myself, a kind of skid row. From what I know of municipal development projects, it is often in these kinds of areas of cities that space is reclaimed for revitalization. This Seattle neighbourhood is no exception as apparently, that is exactly what happened to historic Pioneer Square.



Figure 1: A walk in Pioneer Square, 2014

Photo courtesy of the author

The original downtown of Seattle, now registered with the US National Register of Historic Places as Pioneer Square - Skid Row District (National Register of Historic Places, 1970), used to house among its many enterprises, a lumber mill, factory spaces, a rather renown

strip of houses of ill-repute, and temporary lodgings for pioneers wanting to cash in on the American gold rush in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Sections of this neighbourhood were reclaimed bit by bit through the 1990s and 2000s, replaced by new cafes, specialty sandwich shops and art galleries.

In less than ten minutes, I reach South Jackson Street and 2nd Avenue. On this particular strip along South Jackson, there is clearly a different feel than the couple blocks prior - there are storefronts, the sidewalks swept clean, and there are no more people sleeping or loitering on the road. It is about 1:30 in the afternoon, and across the street, I can see through the large windows along the front of Zeitgeist Coffee. From here the coffee shop looks bright inside, and there is a smattering of patrons within. A number of them have taken seats along the long ledge against the front window.

Zeitgeist Coffee, established in 1997, is a cafe-art gallery that regularly houses art works and hosts live performance artists. Named so because zeitgeist means “spirit of the times,” founder Brian Yeck intended that the shop would be connected to art and endeavored to “to show interesting, challenging and thought-provoking works” (Guzman, 2009). It has served as the site for a number of mobile phone photography exhibits. The space seems suited to such artistic activities: the interior is wide and expansive, larger than it appears from the outside, with high ceilings, exposed metal pipes and structural beams along the top, warm golden wood shelving and furniture bolstered by black steel metalwork throughout. Red brick is featured in most of the exposed walls, except for one side adjacent to the patrons seating area, which is covered with a smooth surface and painted a bright white. I give myself time to take in the interior, taking in a whiff of the roast coffee scent, pacing myself, orienting myself to the layout and space, before surging eagerly towards the primary objective of this visit.

My eyes (eagerly) seek out the photos on display, the main purpose of my trip to this particular gallery, and to this city this time around. On the other side of the cafe from the front door, where there are square tables and seats for patrons, I see a series of photographs in square frames mounted in a straight line at about eye level along the far brick wall. It is too far to make out the details from here.

Before heading over to take a closer look at the photos, I head to the cashier to purchase some food, both for substance and to justify what I intend to be a long stay. While waiting for my coffee and palmier to be served, I see that the cafe guests consist of a mix of working professionals - marked by crisp dress and air of purposefulness, what looks like friends having a visit, and students - with their open textbooks, highlighters, and laptops. I wonder if these people are regulars or first-timers, if they are residents or visitors to Seattle, like me. I also wonder if they notice the photographs, and if they do, what they think about them.

Food in hand, I ensconce myself at a table directly against the far brick wall where the photos are displayed. My seat is closest to the last of the ten photos featured in this particular exhibit, and has the advantage of allowing me a broad view of all the photos in the exhibit as well as any interactions that other people may have with them.

The photos themselves are printed 8 x 8 inches, mounted on wide square white mats, contrasting with the thick black frames in which they are contained. The red brick wall where I am seated holds 6 pictures; the other 4 are mounted on the adjacent white wall towards the back of the gallery.

To get a better look at the photographs, I need to get up and walk around. The current configuration of the space means that I have to walk around tables and other guests to reach the photos, and in a few instances, stand uncomfortably near them, almost in their personal space, to

view them close up. I first make my way over to where the exhibit brief and artist biographies are posted, at the head of the series of photos on the brick face. I see that the exhibit introduction repeats the online announcement of the exhibit: “Zeitgeist Coffee and We Are Juxt presents The *Darkroom Series V3.0: #NWisbest*.” The statement reads: “Anyone with a camera phone can snap a picture or preserve a moment. What we present to you in this series are individuals taking mobile photography to higher levels; the casual use as Artist, the casual user as Photographer.”

Regarding the theme, #NWisbest, the exhibit statement quotes Ben Schuyler, one of the featured photographers of this show who is ascribed with originating the hashtag on Instagram:

Northwest is Best became a rally cry I latched on to each shot I shared of my homeland here in the Northwest. I enjoyed that it could be shared on a hiking picture, a shot of the city, or a shot of a ferry. Its far-reaching nature has given opportunity for folks to share it in the way they see fit.

The quote is apt for the exhibit, for the photos consist of exactly that combination of images: seven of them are of rural vistas in the Pacific Northwest; two are urban scenes, and one is a view of the waters of the Puget Sound through the window of a ferry.

I make a conscious attempt to empty my mind of any thoughts as I take my first slow glimpse of each of the ten photos; I want to be open to any instinctive reaction or response I might have to each of the pieces. I make my slow walk along the two walls of the gallery, taking in image after image, and noting the artist and the location of each piece. Locations include downtown Seattle, Coldchuck Lake, Lake Cochman, Wenatchee National Park, Whiskey Creek Beach, Tommie Peak and the Puget Sound in Washington, and Brandon Beach and Sunset State Bay Park in Oregon. Their names evoke a sense of western history, of pioneer days, and for some reason, lonely places. Only the one photo from the ferry features a person as a primary

subject. In the one other photo among the ten that include a human figure, the person is part of a black and white scene, with a sweeping view from Mount Rainer, looking across the Cascade Mountains. The dominant impression of the collection as a whole is that of nature: mountains, mist, fields, sands, trees. The most prevalent feeling from the photos is a sense of space - mostly of its openness - that recurs across all ten images. The artists' statements reinforce this focus on landscape. One artist can most often be found

exploring the surrounding luscious scenery with the people she loves. Whether wandering a rocky beach, or catching sunrise atop a mountain, [the artist] is driven by discovery and wonder, capturing her most treasured moments in photography along the way.

I think about the theme of the Pacific Northwest. Looking at each of the photographs, the questions that arise to the forefront of my mind is about the photographers: what were they thinking or intending when they snapped these images? Did they want to capture the particular experience, or the particular beauty of the specific location? Were they alone or with friends when they took it? Were they at the pictured locations by chance or had they been purposefully sought out? Was the picture intended for a particular audience or just a spontaneous snapshot? Had they edited these images prior to posting them, or were they raw, in their original state as first snapped on the phone? I realize that as I move from one photo to another, the fact that these photos were taken on a smartphone does not really enter into my initial reaction or consideration of the framed pieces.



Figure 2: Zeitgeist Coffee at closing time, 2014

Photo courtesy of the author

As the name implies, this particular show was the third of this photography series, organized by Juxt. Established in 2011, Juxt’s original website noted that Juxt “was formed with intentions to learn and share more about this emerging and amazing world of mobile device artistry” (WeAreJuxt, 2012a). Each of Juxt’s original four founders already had passion for photography, and this passion transferred to, or, in some cases, flourished once they discovered photography on their mobile devices. They recognized that while others may not consider taking pictures on phones as art, they kept calling the creators “artists because the images we were seeing online were so amazing” (WeAreJuxt, 2012b). Thus, from its inception, Juxt promoted and fostered the idea of mobile phone photography as a creative and artistic endeavour.

In its own words,

Juxt represents the idea that mobile art forms are quickly advancing along with mobile

device technology. Mobile art is defined simply as Art created and developed on a mobile platform (for example iPhone, Android, Windows Mobile). The advancement and popularity of this art form has created a culture where community is highly valued and art is constantly pushing the limits. (WeAreJuxt, 2012a)

At the same time, there were already other small mobile phone photography initiatives emerging in the Seattle region. The Seattle Instagram meetup community had been recently established. Trover, a location-based app was just developed and launched for the iPhone by local app developers, utilizing geo-tagging and photographs to foster place discovery. Part of Juxt's initial efforts was connecting these and other already existing mobile arts and photography groups, such as the Seattle Flickr group, and PhotoCentreNW, a local non-profit photographic centre, and cultivating initiatives with a focus on mobile phone photography. While the founders individually were sincere and enthusiastic believers of what could be done on mobile devices, they were successfully able to bring together various groups throughout the region and foster linkages between them, establishing a foundation for a larger community around a key interest - in this case, a mobile arts community - through which people's own endeavours, passions and stories around mobile phone photography could be encouraged and find expression in the region.

Two years and twelve mobile phone photography exhibits later, Juxt was getting ready for their third *Darkroom* show. Bridgette, one of the Juxt team members involved in organizing the show, told me that for this particular show, the Juxt team looking after the exhibit came up with a list of ten Instagram users who were known for gorgeous images in and around the Pacific Northwest. A couple of the Juxt team members invited them individually to take part in this next instalment of the *Darkroom Series*. Each photographer was encouraged to submit up to four images from their Instagram feed to be considered for the show. The criteria for the submissions

were that the photos had to have been taken on a mobile device, and they were to represent for them the Pacific Northwest. After the photos were submitted, the organizers then selected one image per photographer to be included in the exhibit. The limit of one photo was in contrast to previous years, where three or four photos per photographer were shown.

Another departure from the earlier shows was that while in previous years the photos were mounted directly onto the walls of Zeitgeist Coffee during their exhibitions, this show would feature images more distinctly showcased, with each photograph mounted professionally in elegant black box frames. According to Bridgette, this was an aesthetic choice decided by the Juxt team: changing the look of the presentation of the photos would affect the vibe of this exhibit - it was a little more formal - compared to the earlier *Darkroom* shows and some of the other Juxt mobile phone photography exhibits. This formality aligned well with the fact that, unlike the first *Darkroom* show, most of the artists featured in this third exhibit were more seasoned photographers – most of them having shot photos on their iPhones for a few years now, and half of them practicing digital full-frame and analogue film photography as part of their livelihood or as dedicated amateurs. A further distinction between this third installment and prior exhibits was that most of these images featured landscapes around the Pacific Northwest, whereas earlier exhibits were noted for being mostly street pictures, taken in public or exterior places (Graves, 2013). Finally, whereas the two earlier exhibits included as part of the month-long shows a closing photowalk and discussion, there was none associated with the V3.0 show. In 2014, the photowalk was rather scheduled around an annual world-wide Instameet where Instagram communities from all over the world countries participated in meetups on or close to the same date, which happened to fall within the same month as the exhibit.

During this particular trip to Seattle, I visited Zeitgeist on two separate days, once in the

afternoon and the other later in the day until closing time. During these visits, in contrast to the opening nights of each *Darkroom Series* show, the photographs displayed along the interior were more of a backdrop for the everyday activities of patrons going about their daily routines, social visits and coffee breaks, than the main attraction of the cafe. Conversations, homework and meetings were taking place alongside the photos, and as far as I could observe, most patrons were not necessarily conscious or even aware of them. In the daytime, this space served more like the café in its name than an art gallery.

But once in a while, someone would step away from their table and make their way over to the walls to read the exhibit brief and take a closer look and contemplate the images being shown. While I was there, I had informal conversations with patrons and staff about the photos displayed. I observed patrons in their ordinary, everyday environment, doing ordinary, mundane things. I also observed individuals and couples heading over to look over the images on at least 8 occasions. Sometimes they would comment on the photos to each other. There was a man who leaned in towards the wall to read the artists' statements for at least five minutes before he started walking over to the photographs themselves for a closer look, where he perused each photo, moving slowly from one frame to the next. There were two women who started looking together, then, maybe because of the limited space, separated out, each to an adjacent wall. About ten minutes later, I overheard one murmur to the other, "Yeah, this was taken on a phone."

This comment highlights one of the main points of significance of this exhibit in this project: the show was on its surface indistinguishable from any other conventional photography exhibit. But it was the very fact that these images were taken on a phone that underscores its interest. While Juxt's primary concern was the "mobile" art form, why had they repeatedly been organizing these traditional photo shows for the past two years? After thirteen exhibits, it could

be said that the practice of exhibiting camera-phone photos in this manner had emerged as a regular *local* practice associated with camera-phone photography in the regional community. And as observed, the show certainly garnered the attention and interest of the public, of local people and visitors who expressed curiosity and maybe even a little wonder at the fact that these images were truly shot and produced on an iPhone.

#NWisbest. I asked one of the organizers of this exhibit to comment on the theme of this particular show. Bridgette explained, “[t]here’s something laid back about the Northwest, and the people here are like that...It’s just a feeling. It has to do with the water and the sky and the atmosphere together as well” (personal communication, February 7, 2015). They wanted to showcase the images people were posting about the Pacific Northwest, that were representative of the feeling conveyed in images carrying that hashtag. One of the photographers featured in the show, Christina Marie, who is friends with the person credited with creating the #northwestisbest hashtag, elaborated that “Ben wanted to distinguish Instagram pictures in another part of the country from the many pictures from the east that had a New York urban sense.” She adds:

Coming from New York, there, the images are urban, featuring buildings, skyscrapers and more street photography. Whereas here, in the Northwest, the photographs I see have more nature, trees, natural formations, more open. (personal communication, February 2, 2015)

In addition to the physical distinctions that characterize the images from the east and west coasts, she also notes that the pace of life is faster and busier in New York and that this busy-ness, in part, made her personally consider moving to the Pacific Northwest. After her relocation to the west coast, her Instagram feed soon accumulated images of the environs around her new city of residence. In both her still life and landscape shots, an awareness of spatiality and a sense of

“open” pervades throughout.

Another photographer from the show, Brenna Marie, speaking elsewhere about the regional natural landscapes that inspire her photographs, describes the region thus:

The Pacific Northwest feels like a dream most days. From the snow covering its mountains to its evergreens blanketing the forests to the fog that weaves in and out of the trees, this place is a natural playground (and that’s not even mentioning the rainforests, warm desert or sprawling coastline). Growing up in Washington, I’ve been embraced by these natural surroundings and have spent much of my time roaming these lands.

...While the city has its perks—an abundance of restaurants, entertainment and social scenes—I can’t help but find myself daydreaming about escaping to Mount Rainier, its majestic 13,211-foot white and blue peak visible from the concrete peaks downtown.

(Wall Street Journal Viewfinders, 2014)

Her photograph from the *Darkroom* show is a black-and-white image, featuring the majestic ridges of the Cascade Mountains, while a person sits gazing out across the peaks. One Instagrammer comments that the photo “is straight up Ansel Adams!” (brennamarie, 2013).

Thus, the organizers and some of the artists from the show have described the Pacific Northwest both in terms of its physical and natural features, as well as the atmosphere or feeling of being relaxed, of being “laid back”, as well as its distinctness from an east-coast based urban sense. The specific environment here serves both as the space in which people taking pictures are situated, as well as the subject of their photographs, through which particular visions of #NWisbest are shared to the public.

In Cresswell’s discussion of place, mentioned in Chapter 2, he comments that “naming is one of the ways space can be given meaning and become place” (2004, p.9). While the creation

of a particular hashtag to represent an idea of place is in itself a powerful act, it is within the social network that people are enabled and empowered to select and add that tag to their own photos and thus add them to what is a massive public collection of visual expressions of an idea of a particular place. It is interesting that in this case, the hashtag and its imagined associations move seamlessly between virtual and real worlds: it is in itself a virtual creation – a tag to be added to media created on a smartphone – arising out of a mobile phone-enabled network, that is being used in the real-world, through this exhibit, to symbolize and represent a specific vision of place.

Photos in situ: Instagram. From its origins, Juxt was very closely tied with Instagram. All of the Juxt founding members were active on Instagram, and one of them, together with a small group of friends, established the Seattle Instagram community (Gonzalez, 2012). The photos for all of the *Darkroom Series*' exhibits, as mentioned, were selected from Instagram.

Instagram was launched in October 2010 as an iPhone app by two developers, Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. Initially, the two developers had envisioned a locative tracking app called Burbn, where users could check in at specific places and post pictures and foster social appointments. While it garnered some following and downloads, it was not as successful as they had hoped. Analysis of the app showed that users were not favourably using the location “check-in” service on the app, but they were “posting and sharing photos like crazy” (Sawyer, 2013, p. 22). So they tweaked and revised the bones of Burbn into a new app, that, while retaining location functionality, centred around the photo-sharing aspect, and thus Instagram was launched in October 2010 as an iPhone app. It quickly caught on, with 25,000 downloads within the first 24 hours of launch, and within a month, there were one million downloads (Krieger, 2015). By April 2012, they developed a version of the app for Android phones, expanding the reach of their

app to a much wider user base of mobile phone users, and five years after launch, there were 400 million users uploading 80 million photos per day (Instagram, 2015).

Each media that is shared is called a post. Users can take a photo, and now video, on the native device camera and upload it to Instagram to be shared, or take a picture within the Instagram app itself. By its design, Instagram not only makes possible instantaneous uploads by users, it also includes a public chronological archive of all media uploaded by each user, provided that the user has not deleted them.

Prior to sharing a photo in Instagram, users can add contextual information to the image. This can be done by adding a hashtag, which became a common tool to manage social conversations once Twitter exploded onto the scene. On Twitter's development blog, hashtags are described as "a way to participate in global conversations" (Twitter, 2011). On Instagram's Help Center blog, advice to users on using hashtags are listed under the heading of "Connecting with Others" (Instagram, n.d.).

Other ways of annotating photos include adding text comments, emoticons, and symbols - that is, anything the phone's keyboard will output - and/or adding the photo's location, automatically or manually via a location search function included in-app. Furthermore, any other Instagram user can view, like and comment upon the photo, and all such interactions are preserved in the archive. If the photo includes a geo-locative or place tag, users can also view all their and other users' photos on a map that shows in-app. While Instagram has a web interface through which photos, user profiles and archives can be viewed, photos can only be uploaded in the mobile app, making the mobile device the primary device of user interaction.

After attending the exhibit, I visited each of the ten featured photographers' Instagram feeds and spent time with each user's photo archive. While my main interest was in the specific

featured photos from the *Darkroom* show, I also wanted to see the photos within the context of the broad body of work of each artist as reflected in their public archives on Instagram, especially since they had been selected for the show for the quality of being representative of the Pacific Northwest.

On six of the Instagram accounts, the majority of photos were of nature scenes and landscapes, mostly around the Pacific Northwest, but from time to time, of other places as well. Only one Instagrammer featured primarily Seattle urban cityscapes as the focus of his Instagram archive. The other three Instagram accounts included nature photographs, but they were mixed within a presentation of lifestyle, portraits and fashion photos. From this last group, the dominant impression or theme throughout the photos is that of light and space.

“Conversations” on Instagram. For the specific photos featured in the show, each of the photos from the exhibit had between 280 and 3000 “likes.” That means that between 280 and 3000 other Instagram users to date had not only viewed the specific image but had consciously “liked” it. Liking an image implies a more intentional engagement with a photo than merely seeing it, as you can simply scroll past images to see them, but liking an image means pausing on it and clicking the heart button or double-tapping upon on the photo. These figures serve as indicators that there were quite a number of people viewing and engaging with these images featured in the *Darkroom* exhibit through the Instagram app on their mobile devices. A scan of the profiles of the Instagram users who commented upon or liked the photos indicated that while the majority of viewers seemed to be from the United States, there was also activity from Instagram users from all around the world, for example from Spain, Great Britain, Japan and Australia. Thus, these images of local places were being seen globally, extending beyond a regional or American audience.

Among the ten photos, the comments broadly fell into four categories. Most of the comments had to do with the praising the image, making specific reference to the particular angle of a shot; its light and colours – “Can’t get over the colour of that water”; the perspective of a capture; or the skill of the photographer - “how did you get such rich tone? Your work is stunning!” Many Instagram comments were very brief - one or two words such as “Awesome!” or “Just stunning,” and there was the liberal use of emoticons (thumbs up, hands clapping and a heart were the most common ones) signifying appreciation of the photo or of the photographer. However, some comments were more detailed: “Reminds me of Ansel Adams - spectacular!” The strong majority of comments attached to the artists’ individual photos have to do with praising the photo or the photographer, even expressing their own reaction to the image: “You're work makes me emotional...might be me.”

Some viewers asked or commented about the location of a particular shot, since not all the images included the location tag: “Is all of this basically where you live? Looks like a dream.” Others just noted the beauty of the specific place or scene. Most such comments were brief, such as “Breathtaking view,” and “Gorgeous lush green!” in reference to a sunlit forest. Another photo had the comment, “This is where I want to be”, where the commenter added another’s username into the dialogue, calling their attention to the particular photo and inviting them into the conversation. Thus, the image and the location presented therein were not only seen and experienced by one viewer - it was also shared and extended to another Instagram user who had not yet seen it. In this instance, a dialogue opened up on the image post between two people (not the artist) that resulted in an appointment to visit this locale later together. This encounter depicts place discovery and social interaction arising out of people looking at a particular post.

A third category of comments had to do with how a particular look or style of a photo was achieved, how the photo was edited, and questions about other apps, since Instagram allows the import of pictures from the phone in addition to the option of shooting directly with Instagram. In a couple of instances, people expressed their doubt that the image was shot on a camera-phone: “This was taken on an iPhone?” In another case, a commenter even argued with the photographer:

A: Your photos can't be taken with an iPhone

B: @A oh they very much are (;

A: @B Well that's kind of hard to believe. :)

A fourth group of comments had to do with the socialization between the commenters and the artist. A number of comments implied or indicated a prior acquaintance or friendship between the viewer and the artist, sometimes indicated by banter or conversation between the artist and the commenter, with the use of the wink or smile or fist bump emoticon. Time to time, one would call another “friend” and there were comments on four of the photos addressing future plans to get together with the artists. All but one of the ten artists acknowledged some or most of the comments with a thank you, emoticon, or longer note. These nine Instagrammers were conversant and engaged, taking time to respond individually to as many as 35 users who left comments on their post.

Comments sometimes indicated that viewers seemed to be familiar with the body of work of a photographer, not just the single image: “Love your feed man one of my favourites for sure!”, “Favourite photo you’ve taken, so damn good” and a few artists had comments referring to loving their entire archive. While some of the viewers were local and able to attend the exhibit in person, as evidenced by comments confirming that they would be or that they had been

present at the *Darkroom* show, some even sharing their own photos of the show taken during opening night or a later visit to *Zeitgeist*, the greater number of Instagram users who had liked or commented on the photos likely did not attend the *Darkroom* show. Some users shared on the artists' or Juxt's Instagram feeds their regret in missing the exhibit.

On these posts, people's engagements can be characterized as falling into three categories: with the image itself, with the Instagram user who posted the image, and with other users. Some of these engagements appear to solidify social connections as well as highlight people's awareness of the places depicted within the image. What should be noted here is that mobile communication forms taking place through Instagram implicate the locations of users, situated in and moving through one place while their communicative engagements take place elsewhere. Thus even just by entering into these conversations, both the commenters and responders are marking or emphasizing their locales, adding to the flows of digital information and content moving in and through them. These ideas will be further explored in the discussion about photos related to the photowalk below.

Taking an Instagram picture V3.0. I asked Christina about the origins of her image that was featured in the show. She responded by sharing her recollection of a November day:

It was Thanksgiving weekend and two friends and I decided to go and just do something. We were just driving east. We didn't have a specific destination, we were going for a drive. We were passing this area and took a pause to stretch our legs. I stepped out of the car, and was faced with this wide-open space... gorgeous fall shades. (personal communication, February 2, 2015)

She snapped the photo with her iPhone, edited it slightly and posted it to Instagram. The

photo for her captures the beauty of that spot at that moment on that day, evoking the memory of that shared experience in the wild.

It was a spontaneous capture that she was able to take in the momentary pause, she emphasizes, made possible by stopping the car and walking outside. She notes that “pace and ability to slow down affects what you see.”

Asked to elaborate, she comments:

Moving through space at the pace of your foot is fitting to the pace of taking a photo. I understand light when I’m on foot. ...Shadows, light, mood can’t be experienced at 60m miles an hour. When I’m on foot, I go in ways I normally wouldn’t when I drive or by bus. (personal communication, February 2, 2015)

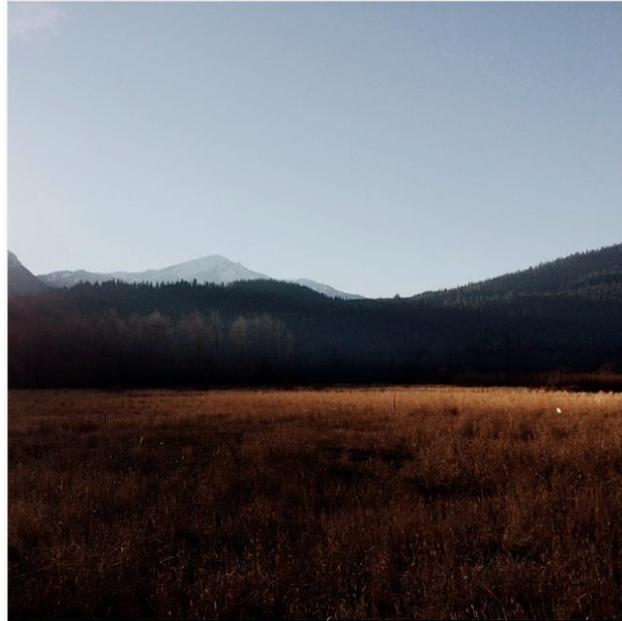


Figure 3: Upland Meadows, 2013

Photo courtesy of @xt_marie

This impression of travelling by foot pervades many of the other images in this

Darkroom show. Some of the locations you could only access on foot: a sandy beach in Oregon, a cliff top, the top of a mountain ridge. This aspect of movement, of exploring place on foot that is implied or is expressed through the Instagram image recurs among the *Darkroom Series*' shows photos and Instameet photos. On the other hand, movement or mobility is always implied, obvious or not, in a photo taken on a mobile phone – after all, the device only goes where the user goes. The captures of things and places in the photos are only possible because the photographer has moved towards or within them.

Christina attributes her ability to take certain kinds of pictures to the camera embedded in a mobile phone, that “enables me to frame, shoot, edit, and publish my photos immediately or a short time later, using just the one device.” On her blog, she elaborates that the “instantaneity of this type of creative process has been energizing to me as a photographer, affording me mobility” and that without having to focus on the apparatus, “I feel more free to notice the environment around me, and ultimately shoot more. This simple medium has opened up to me a world of photography that's become my go-to medium for the majority of my personal work” (Hicks, n.d.).

Christina also mentioned that Instagram has contributed richly to an increasing visuality in the world. She shares that through mobile phones and Instagram, “photography is so democratized, you're removing the boundaries for people who haven't learned to take photos.” While she acknowledges that certainly, Instagram is a network known for the masses of images that are a cliché - for example, the shot looking down at the photographer's shoes, she affirms that for her, it also is a place where there are genuinely amazing and creative original works, and she gravitates towards those users whose photographs resonate with her: “When I come across a striking and beautiful photograph, it sparks a personal desire to continue to make gorgeous

images, to challenge myself to be more creative and make beautiful photographs.” (personal communication, February 2, 2015)

Origins: *Darkroom Series V1.0*

In 2011, people everywhere, including in Seattle, were just discovering and starting to experiment with the kinds of creative and interesting photographs that could be made on and through the mobile phone. The first notable event organized by Juxt was the initial *Darkroom Series*' show in early 2012, featuring 30 images selected from ten mobile photographers active on Instagram in the Seattle and Puget Sound region. Regarding the genesis of the first *Darkroom* show, one of the Juxt founders notes that "we thought, you know, this Instagram community has a lot going for it and what would happen if we provided a platform for these artists to come together?" (WeAreJuxt, 2012b).

The response to this inaugural exhibit was tremendous. Opening night was well attended and successfully generated a buzz on social media, on King5 News, the local news channel, and in other local arts blogs and communities. The show also took part in First Thursday, a civic event in many North American cities, where on specific Thursdays throughout the year, many art galleries and museums offer reduced or free admission and extend their hours, sometimes offering tours, to encourage public participation and exposure to the arts. Videos and photos from the exhibit show a crowded room, people mingling close together, leaning in towards the wall to look closely at the displayed photos, taking pictures of the display and of each other, talking together while pointing at an image on the wall, walking around, sipping on drinks and sharing conversation together. There was music spun by DJ Spinja all evening, which set the backdrop for a lively opening night, and "the place was packed and the vibe was electric" (shaun_s, 2012).

What was emphasized in the media that circulated at launch and afterwards was that this photography exhibit featured only images shot by locals on mobile phones and that "most of the

photographers who contributed to the exhibit have limited photography experience. They first started taking pictures with their iPhones" (Fryer, 2013).

Bridgette, who had three photographs featured in this first exhibit, commented that people "who think that just taking a photo on a phone, it's you know, really...not really a real photograph, but it is. Seeing it blown up to 8"x8" with great quality... it's just a mind-blowing experience" (WeAreJuxt, 2012b). The Instagram photo did not really register for many as a "real" photo. The interest in the square photo format was revitalized in popular culture with the emergence of the iPhone and the popularity of Instagram, but the image "existed" as a digital image experienced through the screen of a mobile phones. In 2012, it was not easy to find a consumer photo shop that would print square photos. At the show, the display of enlarged, tangible photographs under plexiglass frames was enthusiastically received. Quite a few people openly wondered about the printing and hanging methods employed for the exhibited photos. This curiosity was addressed by one of the featured photographers on his Instagram post about opening night: "For continuity, everyone's pieces were printed at a local Kitz Camera, on matte photo paper at 8x8. The framing was done by the curators (Juxt). They were under plexiglass, held together with metal clips and then direct mounted to the brick" (dankhole, 2012). There was marked interest in the physicality of the printed square images. In addition to the photos displayed on the wall, the organizers also printed event "cards" featuring 15 of the images featured in the show that people were able to take with them. The images were thus accessible to viewers in various forms that night: as a print on the wall, as a print on card that could be touched and taken home, and as a digital image on Instagram. In addition, many people took their own pictures of the event and the wall of images, thus creating another reproduction, one of their own making, of the event and of the displayed pictures.



Figure 4: “What an amazing night...,” 2012

Photo courtesy of @offwhitephotos

One photographer featured in the show shared that she never would have imagined that her iPhone photos would be shown as part of a formal art exhibit open to the public. One of her strongest feelings about being involved in the show was a sense of being part “of something that is so new and up-and-coming” (WeAreJuxt, 2012b). In her Instagram post, featured above, she shares that she is “grateful to be included among such talented iPhoneographers” (offwhitephotos, 2012).

This sense of “new and up-and-coming” resonates with Juxt’s assertion and description of mobile phone photography, that “the art form is young and already so advanced” (WeAreJuxt, 2012a). Another photographer from this first show attributes the development of his own photographic skills to seeing other’s photographs on Instagram and being inspired by what was being achieved:

I guess when I first started taking pictures on a phone, I, uh it was kind of more for the for the narcissistic Facebook posts like this [indicates doing a selfie], and I started seeing [on Instagram] what other people could do with an iPhone and it blew my mind and it started challenging me to figure out how are they doing that. (WeAreJuxt, 2012b)

While the technological aspects of the art form was clearly centre stage, the other prominent element of the night, and, as it turns out, an ongoing aspect of the community was that of tremendous sociality. Wonder and appreciation of “being part of” a movement celebrating an emerging photography form with similarly interested local people was expressed. One of the show organizers shared that while the photos had shown really well, the bigger picture was “about the connection; it’s about the social network. All this stuff is so unexpected and it’s kind of taken on a life of its own...we're going to run with it” (WeAreJuxt, 2012b).

This opening night and that of the second *Darkroom Series* show, held one year later in January 2013, were well documented in photos and videos from members of the Instagram community and the general public. As a participant in Seattle’s First Thursday Art Walk, the shows drew interest from more than the Instagram crowd. One attendee of the first show commented that it was “the biggest first Thursday attendance I've ever seen! Amazing night!” (gwenweinberg, 2012). As indicated by Instagram posts and comments circulating about opening night, there were visitors from Paris, Belgium and other unspecified European cities in attendance for the first *Darkroom Series* exhibit opening night.

As a part of the *Darkroom Series*, this evening was notable as being the first and one of the key face-to-face events associated with the exhibit. Here, at this Seattle gallery, people met together, walking and talking at a designated location, looking at photos taken all over the Puget Sound, engaging with the images, each other and the space in what can be considered a series of

sensory encounters encompassing vision, touch, movement and sound. Furthermore, this event was shared and experienced online, both by people who were present on opening night and by those who only experienced the show on Instagram. Many of those present at the event moved between real-life and online spaces, engaging *both* in person and in-app with others to talk about the show and its photos. People both within and from outside Seattle (and even America) participated in and took part of the viewing of images on opening night. Regarding tourists taking part in place-making activities, Crouch (2002) refers to the sensual, mental and imaginative performances in which they engage. These interactions in the gallery may be similarly characterized, as the viewers and artists encounter (and re-encounter, in some cases) the physical and material images and objects of place, as well as the imaginative and mental concepts that arise and linger from these encounters. Meyrowitz (2005) refers to the role that images play in helping “to shape the imagined elsewhere from which each person’s somewhere is conceived” (p. 24). In this case, people were physically situated within the “imagined elsewhere” and were experiencing the photographers’ own articulations of place, in some cases together with the photographers.

Taking an Instagram picture V1.0. Regarding her personal photographic process, Bridgette says “I see photography as a personal sharing...my images are a reflection of where I’ve been and of moments in time in and around Seattle. It’s not only about sharing slices of my life, but about bringing other people in and connecting with others.” (personal communication, February 7, 2015). Regarding one of her photos that was featured in the first *Darkroom Series* exhibit, Bridgette shares that it was taken from a downtown Seattle vantage point called the Skybridge that runs between Pacific Place and Nordstrom. She was out with a friend, shopping,

and as they paused on their way between buildings, she “got lucky over the weekend to snap these,” three black and white photos peering down upon the Seattle streets through the windows of the bridge. For this particular shot, she used an app called Hipstamatic, using the “John S” lens and “Rock BW-11” film combination. Her process? “All I did was heighten the contrast with Snapseed a few notches and straightened it a tad.”



Figure 5: Through the window series {1/3}, 2012

Photo courtesy of @bridgette.xo

Instameet. Any conversation I had about mobile phone photography in Seattle inevitably came around to the topic of the local Instagram community. The central feature of Instagram communities is the Instameet, defined on Instagram’s blog as “a group of Instagrammers meeting up to take photos and videos together” especially “with other community members in your area” (Instagram, 2013). In many cities, motivated Instagram users formalize such groups, creating a community profile on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook and/or a hashtag to identify them. The

community username normally includes the city - IgersSeattle, IgersSaoPaulo, IgersToronto, as noted in a voluntary directory of such communities at the blog, Instagramers (<http://instagramers.com>).¹ The Instagramers Seattle meetup group, called @Igers_Seattle, initially organized by four local Instagrammers, has flourished into an ongoing social gathering, with a core of regular members over the years, and a broader fluid group of visitors who drop in to the various meetings usually held once every month or two. Events are announced on the @Igers_Seattle's Instagram and Facebook feeds and community members will also repost the announcement post to their own feeds, spreading word of the time, date and designated hashtag for that particular meetup.

During an Instameet, there is usually a brief greeting by the organizers, after which people are encouraged to branch out and snap away. If the gathering is large, people often end up breaking off into smaller groups or pairs as they make their way through the area. As they walk, the participants socialize - catch up with acquaintances or get to know lesser-known or new users; discuss photographic techniques; and enjoy and admire the immediate locale. Participants shoot photos and comment on each other's shots, usually over the mobile phone screen, held up and viewed together. Participants may upload them immediately, often with a designated meetup hashtag or tags. Oftentimes, users also include their own contextual hashtags. If the user permits geo-location tags to be assigned, the images are tagged to their location on a map that can be viewed in-app or on an associated website. All these activities are taking place in real time, as the participants walk around in the designated location for the meetup. Sometimes, the organizers provide a map of the walk area to orient participants.

¹ The official Instagram site refers to "Instagrammers". However, some groups and websites have used "Instagramers" when naming themselves. Both spellings are included according to how the word is being used.

Walking around together in a given location with the meetup is an essential feature of an Instameet. Valeriy, one of current the co-managers of @Igers_Seattle notes that one of the values of an Instameet is that it gives participants “the opportunity to experience beautiful locations” around a region, and that a sense of outdoor adventure of exploring a new place is key to inspiration when it comes to photography (personal communication, April 17, 2015). One Instagrammer featured in the first *Darkroom Series*’ exhibit exhorts the public: “the environment around Seattle is just stunning and we have such an incredible resource available to us! Get outside people, go outside, get out of the buildings, run free and take pictures!” (WeAreJuxt, 2012b).

For the first two *Darkroom Series*’ shows, the closing of the exhibits coincided with a co-hosted Juxt and @Igers_Seattle photowalk in Pioneer Square. What follows is a discussion about the findings from the photos from the first *Darkroom Series*’ Instameet.

Photos in movement: the #bemobile photowalk. On January 28, 2012, as part of the closing night of the *Darkroom Series* first show, Juxt, Trover and @Igers_Seattle hosted a photowalk in Pioneer Square, where people met, talked and took pictures together while walking around the few neighbourhood blocks, to finally arrive at Zeitgeist Coffee for a question-and-answer session with the artists from the show. As part of the walk, the hosts were holding a photo contest that included as prizes an Olloclip, a type of iPhone lens; gift cards for CanvasPop, an app service that prints iPhone photos; and a hardbound commemorative book of the *Darkroom Series*’ photographs.

There were 106 photos from 26 different Instagram users that were examined from this photowalk. Over half of the photos featured buildings - both from a wide-angle perspective and

close up, more detailed shots. Additionally, another quarter of the photos were close-up details of features on or of the building. These were specifically urban features: brick details, streets, alleys, metal piping, neon and storefront signs, street lamps and manholes. This is not that surprising, given that the walk was situated in a downtown neighbourhood. A human figure appeared as the main subject in only two photos. In the other 14 pictures that had people, they were mainly background figures or were just part of the general scene. The photos from this meetup are generally focused on the physical environment around and containing the participants of the photowalk, and thus, just by looking at the photos, the immediate locale of Pioneer Square emerged as the primary and dominant subject of this collection of images. Also immediately noticeable is that all but one, that is 105 photos from the entire set, were noticeably altered with visual effects so that they looked processed, and even overprocessed.

Regarding textual content, 19 of the 106 photos had the #bemobile tag and some with the user's own caption but no other conversations or interactions occurred on these posts. The largest category of comments had to do with complimenting a photo or the one who posted it and saying thanks, using words or the combination of words and emoticons (a heart, smile, fist bump, hands in prayer, and hand clapping were used). Further categorization of comments revealed that while many of what I grouped as social comments took place between two individuals, there were also many interactions that drew in or involved a larger number of people, either by using a hashtag or @username or making specific reference to @wearejuxt or @igers_seattle directly in the post. Some of these comments involved personal anecdotes. Posts that were considered under self-expression were those where the user shared, for example, snippets of song lyrics or a quote. There were also many comments referring to or discussing the style or a visual aspect of the image - a full quarter of the photos had comments and sometimes threads of conversation on the

topic of editing and processing techniques. In addition, there were comments and conversations relating to location and place, expressed in a variety of ways in the posts.

The close attention paid to their surroundings by the participants of the walk was obvious from the images themselves, as well as the degree to which there was bodily engagement in the environment. In order to have captured a specific angle or close-up, the Instagrammer would have had to walk around until they reached the specific location or site, and they would have had to bend, stretch, reach, or lay down before snapping the picture. The images reveal that people were willing to engage their bodies in pursuit of “that shot,” in spite of the rainy day.

Many pictures depicted the same subject - a building, a work of art, a particular store sign, in one case ten photos by different people of the same sculpture. One would expect multiple images, as participants are encountering the same objects or landmarks within a temporarily limited space, bounded by the parameters of the walk. The repeated posts of iconic art and architectural features of Pioneer Square throughout the collection reinforces the impression that at least in terms of what was revealed visually, the primary interest and focus of the participants in this particular Instameet was the physical environment around them.

In the following section, I explicate what specific camera-phone practices the photo posts revealed and how those practices relate to the expression of and making of place.

Telling stories together. One of the two pictures of people from the Instameet, and the only direct portrait, was a black and white close-up shot of a dreadlocked man sitting on a bench, with the focus on his streetwise face and warm eyes. The photographer’s caption for the photo reads:

..meet kerry...so during the #bemobile walk...had the chance to split off from the

scavenger hunt with [others] and shoot some street stuff with them...Kerry is a street vendor who sells his drawings...he said to me, "my name is Kerry, like 'carry' your ass over here and buy some of my stuff, then carry you're ass to your friends and have them carry their ass over here and carry some more of my stuff around the world. what do you think? a good sales pitch or what?"...

There were 95 comments to this post, the longest set of annotations amongst the collected photos, both from people at the meet and those who hadn't been present. One of them reads: "Nice street portrait B. The extra effort with the info you provided makes this image so much more interesting, I wish more people would help connect to the amazing faces they capture with the story from being there." In response, the photographer writes: "big thanks bro...I agree that's what makes people shots for me is not only the photo but the interaction with the people...maybe just me...sounds like you too!!! I wish it too..." Here, the photographer encountered and listened to and shared Kerry's picture and words "live" as he was walking through the neighborhood, where others present at the meet could also engage with the image and the story. Conversation about this photo apparently continued face-to-face during the walk, as well as after the meetup during the debrief at Zeitgeist.

The images and the posts themselves contain stories - told through the photo or revealed in the text associated with the photo. Sometimes, the stories are not obvious in the image itself. Consider this post: a vignettted, black and white photo of the Fallen Firefighters Memorial. The associated comments read:

S: Through Macrina's Eyes 3 - The Fallen Fire Fighter Memorial in Pioneer Square. This is a straight blend of 2 of my 7yr old's #bw #hipstamatic shots. No further editing was done.

C: Well done! Great #collab with your very talented daughter. BTW, she has an awesome name!!

S: @C named after Saint Macrina, baker of communion bread, and hence a bakery of the same name. :) Thank you so much, friend!

C: Yup, Macrina has been on my now-old list of places to visit in Seattle on my next visit. Been too long, 2001 to be exact. I also like the bakery's description of St. Macrina on their Web site. :)

The black and white photo alone, depicting a historic Seattle memorial, has no indicators of the significance of the picture to the photographer. Nor does it have anything to do with a bakery, but the subsequent exchange on the post implies associations with the daughter, as well as with Seattle's famous Macrina bakery, for the two people involved in the conversation. It is even more interesting that in this instance, one of the parties was not a resident of Seattle. Thus, this particular post contains within it one person's long-stoked desire to visit a particular pastry shop, that has nothing to do with the visual content of the image.

Additionally, sometimes the stories are not contained in either the posts or the images directly, but rather exist solely in the memory of the person or people involved in sharing the photo, who then make the story known only in its telling outloud, shared with others. Bridgette, who took part in this photowalk, shared that the stories told by individual camera-phone photographers are what comprise the majority of the content on the Juxt blog. She tells of an article on the blog about the romance that developed between two Seattle residents who knew of each others' photos on their Instagram feeds, but who did not meet in person until they both attended the same Seattle Instameet (Shima, 2014). The two people involved took pictures at the Instameet, but the particular narrative about their meeting and romance is not directly obvious in

the images – only in their telling.

Bridgette further notes that what happens at Instameets is part of something that they aim to highlight on the Juxt blog:

For [Juxt], the heart of our community is about stories. We are intentional and careful about what goes on there. A lot of the focus is about the stories people have. We found that the readership comes to us for the stories, and that is our strength. (personal communication, February 7, 2015)

One of the Juxt founders who also took part in this photowalk has stated that, “we [at Juxt] are trying to bring back the idea of storytelling. While I can interpret a photograph in some way, I also need you to explain it to me. It’s your story, also.” (Huang, 2012)

The examples from these photos highlight the shared narratives that occur at the meetups and that are embedded in the image posts. This sharing of stories with and about and often through a photo happens locally, in real-time and real-life - whether in a small group of friends or at a larger Instameet. It also happens online, both with people who were “there” and part of the walk, and with people remotely looking upon the post. Furthermore, because these interactions involve a shared moment, anecdote or story associated with a location-specific gathering or photo, the tie to place is reinforced both personally (the significance to the individual user) and publicly. The posted photos in turn interweave participants’ own stories and mobile experiences of place and connection into a larger collection of visual narratives on the web associated with that location.

Creative expression. A notable feature of these 106 photos is that all but one were processed with strong visual effects. While photos are visual representations, they are also personal communications that can be considered acts of self-expression (Van House, 2011). These shared posts may be characterized as such an act, as the user behind the post individually selects, edits and alters the photo before sharing the image publicly. Edits were applied with a heavy hand, making the colours of the photos exaggerated, rendering a lens blur to the image, sometimes washing out the colours, fading the contrast in the photo, even superimposing two snapshots into one in some cases. Sometimes the edit was automatically applied by a particular app, adding post-imaging “darkroom” effects, as Juxt would say. Instagram itself allows users to add frames and filters and many of the participants used them. A popular app that was used by three participants who contributed 19 photos to the set was Hipstamatic, which allowed users to



Figure 6: #bemobile photowalk #purehipstamatic 2012

Photo courtesy of @bridgette.xo

select from various in-app “lens” and “films” to create various effects. Bridgette herself is a fan of the app, especially its black and white effects. Her featured photos from the exhibit were taken with the Hipstamatic app and then shared on Instagram. Her photo of the Fallen Firefighters Memorial from the photowalk, on the preceding page, was also shot with Hipstamatic.

Not only were the effects and alterations visually apparent, but surprisingly (to me), there were more comments and conversations attached to #bemobile photos that had to do with photographic and editing styles and techniques than any other substantive topic.

Examples of this include, “amazing texture and contrast,” “killer framing!,” “loved the softness,” “gothic,” “oh, I have a shot from that angle,” and “nice juxtaposition!”

Sometimes questions about certain effects and explication were provided. In one black and white post, the comments include:

D: Fantastic edit!!!!!!

S @D thank you! I used filterstorm and in blending the double exposure I used the “darken” mode, so it took the dark text and only laid it over the lightest point in the image. It took forever for my processor to process the images but it turned out well

One of the Juxt founders and *Darkroom* show organizers has shared that his experimentation with what could be done on a camera-phone bloomed once he connected with people on the network:

When I first started, the artistry and the support for pushing out good work was strong and very communal...Pointers, critiques, app recommendations...all of it came from folks who I started “hanging” out with. When I first started, I loved to “blow up” my photos through Dynamic HDR. Overblown colors, unreal sunsets, overexposed highlights...all of it, I loved it. My compadre...and I would just share techniques and got

to the point where we tried to emulate the scenes we shot. (Gonzalez, 2012)

This aesthetic of overprocessed effects was characteristic of the photos featured in the first and second *Darkroom Series*' shows. Some of the participants of the photowalk were featured artists in the show, so their images from the photowalk echo the look of their images portrayed in the exhibit. But other participants of the Instameet also reflected this similar aesthetic in their photos. People used filters and apps to modify their photos consistently. While it is possible that participants of this photowalk wanted to emulate the particular visual style of the photos displayed in an exhibit that highlighted the iPhone's capability of allowing users to creatively edit and modify plain pictures, a scan of public Instagram photos from 2011 and early 2012 reveals that generally, this is just what people did with their iPhones and Instagram back then.

Christina Marie, who attended three Instameets, including one at Pioneer Square, says that for her, while an Instameet is a great way to connect with others, "the drawback is the large numbers of people, that there is a competitive aspect of taking the shot. When there are too many people, creativity can be shared, or diluted." She is referring to the fact that for example, ten images of the same object may emerge from a photowalk, or many people may apply the same filter. She continues: "...but a larger influx of content doesn't mean that there won't be great images from there. You just have to work to distinguish your own individual style in a photo (personal communication, February 2, 2015).

Regarding this topic, Bridgette says that, "we [Juxt] are careful not to say what is or isn't art. It's not really part of the discussion...We try not to elevate this as what is "art" but as part of people's personal creative activities, and more about the storytelling, though the images are key to the stories" (personal communication, February 7, 2015). While Juxt has never set out to

define what is art – they rather foster and encourage personal creativity in whatever mobile form – it would be difficult to say that they didn’t have an influence on local photography practices. There were particular styles and a “feel” of camera-phones photos that were displayed on Juxt’s media feeds, on their websites, and at the events that they hosted. Looking at the collection of this and the following year’s *Darkroom Series*’ photowalk images, it appears that people adopted the visual styles and practices of shooting and doing creative phone photography in a way that normalized a particular “look”, which here, at this time, included the alteration of the image through filter and effects processing. This observation illustrates the earlier mention of amateur photography clubs and their roles in establishing certain pictorial or aesthetic styles as norms or conventions that is then taken up by the members of the club (Schwarz, 1987).

In the photos from *Darkroom Series V3.0* two years later, this aesthetic from the #bemobile photos and first and second *Darkroom* exhibits is completely absent. People still edited photos – as the interviewees have attested – but how they edited them has changed. Both Valeriy from @Igers_Seattle and Christina prefer an app whose filters are intended to provide “a minimally processed look” that the developers state “sets itself apart from the overly processed filters seen in many of today’s apps” (VSCO, 2012). This practice of “less” editing was also later adopted more widely amongst local camera-phone users, as a scan of photos from Instameets after 2014 and the #NWisbest feed will show, and the photos from the 2014 exhibit thus display a different visual aesthetic that is directly related to certain camera-phone photography practices that emerged two years later, here being editing practices, that became a part of doing local phone photography. The point for this section is that through the collective phone photography practices of various participants, the pictures that were circulating at that time presented a distinctive “look” that was associated with photos taken in and being shared from the Seattle and

Puget Sound.

Social life and community. With the #bemobile photos, the largest group of comments attached to photos had to do with the social aspects of the gathering. Both individual encounters – “so glad to finally meet you!” and “It was nice meeting you and your daughter today” – and references to meeting with the larger community appear in the posts. On a post depicting a heavily altered, framed photo of a brick wall and post, the comment is:

This is crazy! Loved the community get together. I’m sorry didn’t get to meet you. My girlfriend and a friend of mine (all instagramers) were there for the gathering. Perhaps we can meet up for a coffee sometime and talk photography.

Throughout the entire collection of photos, the tags #seattle, #igersseattle, #igers_seattle, #juxt, #wearejuxt, #bemobile were used the most, internally encouraging a forging of links between the people on the ground posting their photos from the meetup, as well as connecting them to those who were not present but regularly looked at those hashtags. An example of a community post, added by a user onto @Igers_Seattle’s own post about the meetup was:

Thanks so much to @igers_seattle, @wearejuxt and the whole Seattle mobile photography community! The bemobile photowalk was such a great way to get out and enjoy the city around us. Already anticipating another walk! Thanks again!

These posts are examples of shared photos in a social network that are the “visible trace” of people’s “personal networks of belonging” (Scifio, 2009, p. 189). The network in this case is @Igers_Seattle. While absent from the #bemobile meetup, normally #Igers_Seattle Instameets have at least a few group photos, attendees clustered together brandishing their phones and other cameras. It may be because this was one of the early Instameets and perhaps the group photo became a convention in the later history of the community.

Notably, the shared photo posts reinforce place experience because the associations of belonging, reinforced through interactions in real and virtual environments, are tied to a specific locale. As mentioned earlier, because of the significance given to the meanings assigned by participants in these shared activities, the sense of connection and association with place is reinforced.

Valeriy, a current @Igers_Seattle manager, talking about his own involvement in Instameets, says,

I found [@Igers_Seattle's] feed on Instagram and really enjoyed the involvement with the community. I was inspired and got involved in any way I could. Being a part of their challenges, communicating with others from the community being supportive and getting involved during instameets is what helped me go from member to leader... Instameets are a fantastic way to get the community involved spending time with others who share the same interests. Not only does it give you the opportunity to experience beautiful locations but it also gives others the chance of connecting with so many other people who share the same interests." (personal communication, April 17, 2015)

What "same interests"? He means the love of taking pictures and exploring new places. What he and Bridgette emphasize is the value of the live, face-to-face connections with others that occurs at these meetups. In the year after the #bemobile photowalk, Ravi Vora, a Los Angeles based Instagrammer who has been active in Instameets since 2012, was interviewed by Juxt about a documentary he made about Instagram. He states:

Each meetup is memorable in its own way, from the locations we visit to the people I go with. My favorite kind of meetups are when we arrive somewhere and either the weather or an idea or something magical happens that changes our expectations and we walk

away with amazing photos to commemorate our adventure. (Tardio, 2013)

Thus, not only do participants have the chance to experience a location, but at that place, social connections are created and deepened. The connection with others is usually noted as the most memorable feature of a meetup. While some participants already know each other in real life, there is a delight when an online connection is translated into a real life acquaintance. Even members of Juxt expressed delight in meeting people whose photos they'd been admiring – and some of these connections resulted in Instameet participants being invited as featured photographers in future *Darkroom* exhibits.

In the #bemobile meetup, the connection with each other was certainly there in the shared Instagram posts, but it was more obvious in the textual conversations and notes – “Good to meet you!” and “had fun taking pictures with you!” - rather than conveyed in the images. To restate, only two of the 106 photos had a human as the main subject. The focus on people and meeting each other is more apparent in the images from Instameets after this first one. In the following year's *Darkroom Series*' photowalk in 2013, 25 out of 125 photos feature people as the main subject, including group photos where participants are featured talking or taking pictures together on the streets, and in 2014, with the world-wide Instameet gathering in Seattle that coincided with the *Darkroom Series V3.0*, 48 out of 126 photos featured people, of which 39 were direct portraits, many of which had accompanying text which talked about the experience of meeting the person featured in the photograph.

Thus, the Instagram meetup serves as an avenue for not only place discovery, but also social discovery, that serves to help cement social relationships, enabling the growth of a local community that exists both online and offline. Regardless of where these Instameets take place, the main activities of the meetups are the same: walking and taking pictures, at a particular

location, together in a group. Participants are engaging in practices of photography occurring “in movement” (Pink, 2011a), both as individuals and collectively as part of the larger @Igers_Seattle community. Walking and sensing are considered to be mobile, embodied practices that are central to how we engage with and experience the world and, as Cresswell and Merriman state, “[o]ur mobilities create spaces and stories - spatial stories” (2011, p. 5). These spatial, shared stories, embedded in Instagram posts, become part of place in both personal and public ways.

Orienting place through pictures. Location and place were referred to directly in multiple ways in the collected Instagram posts. First, the image in the photo depicted a specific site, object, or location. From the #bemobile photos, identifiable places include King Street Station, Central Saloon, “that park with a waterfall”, Caffe Verona, Cadillac Hotel, and Merchant Cafe. There were often multiple photos of the same object or view posted by different people. In this case, there were eight photos of Smith Tower, a notable high-rise in the neighbourhood, seven of a distinctive totem pole in Pioneer Square and ten images of the iconic Fallen Firefighters Memorial, a tribute to the thirty-one firefighters that died in the line of duty since the Seattle’s Fire Department was established in 1889. Each post represents an individual’s own view and encounter with the material things or people within that particular space.

Second, some photos had the geo-tag assigned that is indicated in the post and results in their picture showing up on Instagram’s in-app map, along with all other pictures taken in the same area.

Third, users often added a short comment about the place, or talk about the place in detail, either as the one uploading, or as a commenter to a photo: “A mobile photog takes on Occidental Park at the #bemobilephotowalk. This is fun” or “The firefighter’s memorial - my old

office is about 200 steps to your right. Places were often just simply named, but as seen in the previous comment, sometimes contextual information was added that personalized the location (200 steps from “my old office”) or oriented the user or commenter to the locale. For example, in response to a picture of Caffè Umbria, another user posted: “This may be my favourite cafe in Seattle.” Not only is a tidbit of personal information being shared from one person to another, but now that location, as embedded in that Instagram photo, is assigned a personal meaning that is made known to both the commenter and the receiver of the comment, and indeed, anyone else who reads the post.

Some of the posts had to do with place discovery. In a close-up photo depicting the neon sign of Central Saloon, captioned “#Seattle's oldest #saloon,” one user added, “I was too chicken to go in. We were on a photowalk and I hate going into places and not buying anything. Lame, I know. I need to go back and check it out.” This kind of live discovery occurred repeatedly in the Instameet posts, and sometimes, one user would walk over to other person and join them in the newly discovered locale.

Finally, many users assigned hashtags to their photos, a more explicit naming process. #smithtower, #pioneersquare, and #CentralSaloon are some of the ones used. Using a hashtag is different from just a text annotation, because hashtags are used in Instagram to collate posts, effectively creating public “collections” of photos that may be accessed by any other Instagram user.

The hashtag #pioneersquare appeared repeatedly on the #bemobile photos. With Instameets, it is almost a convention to add the neighbourhood hashtag, if it is not already named in the photowalk. For example, in 2014, there was the #ballardinstameet in Seattle’s Ballard district. Other meets may have a neutral hashtag assigned, for example the Be Mobile: End of

Summer Instameet that took place on September 7, 2013 was hashtagged #bemobile_k5, but it was referred to in conversation and in posts as the sculpture park meetup, referring to Olympic Sculpture Park on the ocean where the meet took place. Thus, at least for @Igers_Seattle meetups, the association with location is always at the forefront.

This group of Instagrammers were well-versed and comfortable in using hashtags, even suggesting others add this or that hashtag to their post. In a close-up photo of the neon “Loans” sign that recurred through this and the following year’s photowalks, one user commented that the photo “[b]elongs in #igsignage!” The selection and addition of tags can be seen as personal articulations of belongings that people purposefully assign to their images, a way for individuals to explicitly express their personal associations to events, to groups and to places. As mentioned earlier, hashtags can also be assigned to places and events by groups to distinguish a particular occasion or experience, as was the case with Seattle Instameets. By utilizing hashtags, people assign visual mementos to that locale in a way that is accessible at a later point in time.

Ultimately, the entire meet is about walking together, exploring the local landscape, as Christina put it, “exploring the space at the pace of our foot” (personal communication, February 2, 2015) in ensemble. The activities of walking in and through a location, experiencing that locale with others, pausing to enjoy a particular moment, then capturing the moment in a photo and viewing it together, are enacted and performed in the movement that are integral to the “perceptual and experiential activity” of place (Pink, 2011a, p. 94). Such images are produced through a sensual encounter between body and eye and camera with the earth and terrain underfoot, and the posted images reflect how place was traversed and viewed and captured through the eyes of individuals. As Lee (2010) concluded in a study about private urban digital photography intended for a Korean social network, if walking can be seen as people’s resistance

to imposed routes (De Certeau, 1984), then the camera can be seen as a tool for users walking in those locales to enunciate those spaces. Hashtags, then, can be seen as a tool for making associations with locales public.

In turn, those photos attached to locations include all the personal annotations and conversations. Such information is integrated with that particular place as the photos are included in a larger stream of images with those same tags, becoming part of the conversations about that place and contributing to the public spatial information, history and discourse about a place.

The Seattle Setting

As the research inquiry progressed, it became more apparent just how entwined the Juxt and Instagram communities were with local camera-phone activities. I could not undertake the study of regional camera-phone photography in the Puget Sound without noticing and acknowledging the roles of both Juxt and @Igers_Seattle in shaping how local camera-phone photography practices enacted place.

It was quite innovative in 2011 for the Juxt team to take up the then-tentative suggestion of showcasing phone photographs and nurture it to life. The display of phone-shot Instagram photos, blown up off the mobile devices, printed on fine photographic paper, brought to life in enlarged, mounted formats, and shown in a known Seattle gallery space with opening night taking place as part of Seattle First Thursday Art Walk - these things boldly asserted the advent of mobile phone photography as a creative form of expression that was now in the public eye.

Through the initiatives of Juxt, camera-phone photography became integrated into the local arts scene. Through its efforts in partnering with other organizations to host photography exhibits at existing and new galleries throughout Seattle and the Puget Sound, in mobile photography exhibits' inclusions into Seattle's First Thursdays, and by individual Juxt members' branching out to teach mobile phone photography at local community and private colleges, Juxt connected camera-phone photography to existing cultural and civic institutions. In doing so, camera-phone photography was inserted into local discourses about art and culture, which specifically touch upon regional place identity. Thus, in addition to encouraging a relatively new and emerging amateur activity, they also helped give voice to camera-phone photography within the existing local arts community.

Furthermore, Juxt participated in camera-phone activities outside of the region, taking part in exhibits out of state, in Ohio and New York, and even out-of-country, in Mexico. The Juxt blog featured stories and news about mobile phone photographers all over the world, becoming part of a global community that celebrated an emerging mobile art form, simultaneously contributing to a growing body of organizations, blogs and voices entering a public dialogue about camera-phone photography as “real” photography (Jeffries, 2013; Ritchie, Rubino, Michaluk & Nickinson, 2013).

At the same time, with the emergence of @Igers_Seattle, these two groups’ activities help put the Pacific Northwest on the map as a hub for vibrant, mobile phone photography activities. In conjunction with the rise in popularity of Instagram, especially with its acquisition by Facebook in 2012, and the release of a few well-received iPhone photography and video apps by local developers, and also through coverage by a few mobile phone photography bloggers, the Pacific Northwest started to be known as a place for such activities and #northwestisbest started to be known.

In its early years, @Igers_Seattle and Juxt were very closely entwined in their activities and community outreach events. As noted earlier, Juxt was renamed in 2014 to Gryyo, at the same time shifting its practical core from Juxt’s strongly Seattle-based activities to storytelling, with contributors from the global community of mobile phone photographers. Their current site (<http://gryyo.com>) has a much different feel and focus than its prior iteration as Juxt, now featuring a steady stream of rich mobile phone images and stories from around the world. While individual Gryyo members are still actively promoting mobile arts within the community, Gryyo itself does not usually facilitate community events, such as mobile photo exhibits, workshops, photowalks and contests. To a large extent, @Igers_Seattle has taken on that role and is now the

primary voice of Seattle's mobile phone photography community, online and offline. One can surmise that online, this is because Instagram is the most known social network so people interested in Seattle photowalks and meetings can easily find look them up. In the corporeal world, the @Igers_Seattle Instameet features as one of the key activities enabling the social life of the mobile phone photography community. Whereas many other Instagramer communities have lapsed for various reasons, @Igers_Seattle remains vibrant and well attended, and regular meetups have persisted to this day.

While the leadership and makeup of @IGers_Seattle has shifted since its inception, neither the enthusiasm nor the reach of the community's activities and influence have abated. According to Bridgette, the group has collaborated with various Seattle cultural organizations and groups over the years – including FoodLifeline, a local charity, local microbrewery New Belgium Beer, and Microsoft - and sometimes integrated them into an actual meetup, or jointly hosted events of interest. Since 2012, originating with the first generation of @IGers_Seattle's organizers, the community has had a very good relationship with Seattle's main media organization, King5 News, and have often run contests together with @king5seattle on Instagram. Since 2016, Valeriy and the other co-manager of @Igers_Seattle have been guests on the live televised King5 New Day Northwest morning news segment to talk tips and developments in mobile phone photography. In many ways, @Igers_Seattle is the public face of mobile phone photography in the Seattle and Puget Sound regions. Also, by connecting with other associations and organizations in the area, they've furthermore intertwined what they do – camera-phone photography – into various facets of society, reaching across more than the phone-photography crowd.

At the same time that @Igers_Seattle and Juxt were established, in 2011 and 2012, there

were Instagrammers in Calgary who were attempting to create an Instagram meetup. For reasons unknown, there was very lukewarm reception from the community and a regular meetup did not form. Since then, an @IgersCalgary meetup was established and registered on the Instagramers site, but it has not thrived. Mobile phone photography is active in Calgary, having been featured in the past as part of Exposure Festival, an annual month-long city-wide photography event, and the hashtag #igerscalgary is used actively by individual Instagrammers taking pictures of Calgary but an @Igers gathering did not gel. This is not to critique Calgary but only to point out that whatever combination of factors have given rise to an active, thriving camera-phone community in Seattle is not universal.

Thus, both Juxt and @Igers_Seattle were instrumental in encouraging meetups and formal art shows, through which locals could become exposed to, develop and further engage in camera-phone photography. Along with the stunning geographical setting in which Seattle is situated, these organizations helped foster an environment which enabled camera-phone practices to develop and flourish. Furthermore, the sustained integration of the “mobile artform” into local arts discourse can be attributed to Juxt’s active advocacy within and external to the community.

Taking an Instagram picture: an Igers_Seattle community member. Valeriy, who did not attend the 2012 photowalk, but who has been present at innumerable other Instameets as both a participant and since 2014, as an organizer, always has place-tags attached to his shared Instagram photos, which are almost always about a specific locale in the Pacific Northwest.

When asked which is his favorite shared photo, he said “my favorite photo ever taken would have to be the one of the North Head Lighthouse, the first time I went, the sunset was perfect as well as the timing of the adventure!”



Figure 7: North Head Lighthouse, 2014

Photo courtesy of @mrvalography

Regarding his mobile photography process, he shares:

For the longest time I was an iPhone only shooter; I’m thankful for that experience because it taught me that gear wasn’t as important as having a passion and a desire for photography. By having less I was able to focus more on unique techniques and overcome creative challenges. (Photogrist, 2016)

While he finally purchased a DSLR camera back in June 2015, about 90 percent of his Instagram feed contains photos he took on his iPhone. He elaborates that “mobile photography is fantastic

because it provides an instant ability to capture the perfect shot as well as the opportunity to edit your photo and share within moments of capturing the perfect shot” (personal communication, April 17, 2015).

The @IGers_Seattle co-manager is known for his stunning mobile phone photographs about the Pacific Northwest. When I asked about his affinity with the region, he replied:

Being from the Pacific Northwest my photos are typically very moody and often times full of colour...Seattle is the center of so much beauty in the Pacific Northwest. Just three hours in either direction you get a wide variety of landscapes: Canada, dry deserted landscape, mountains, rainforest, volcanoes, the ocean and the city. With all of this right at your fingertips it's impossible not to want to pull out your phone and capture every moment... Living in this region has given me the opportunity to explore many different locations and still not run out new experiences. The Pacific Northwest has so much to offer and the beauty that surrounds me has been an inspiration to my mobile photography work. (personal communication, April 17, 2015)

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

Making Place

In Chapter 2, photography was noted as a “distinctive and pervasive form of geographical image-making, in the construction of landscape and identity” (Schwarz & Ryan, 2003, p. 5). It was also noted that practices, understood within the framework presented by Pink (2011a) and Crang (1997), comprise and constitute lived experience in the world. It is the combination of various practices performed in particular contexts and moments that give specificity to place, that imbue space with meaning - thus making it place (Cresswell, 2004, 2009). If photography is conceived as a part of everyday practice (Pink, 2011a), then camera-phone photography is directly implicated in the experience and configuration of place.

In the previous chapter, I have attempted to illustrate how people’s camera-phone photography practices, enacted through a set of public events, centered around the *Darkroom Series*’ exhibits, both on- and offline, take part in collective representations of local identity that are a part of the constitution of place. The photos produced throughout these events, shot on a mobile phone and shared at different sites – online, in-app, during an Instameet over the shared screen of the phone, or printed and posted on a brick wall - interweave people’s own stories of place and connection into a larger collection of visual narratives online collated under specific hashtags in Instagram. Throughout this research, at the sites of the *Darkroom Series*’ events, various articulations of "small-p" place emerged – that is, specific localized identities of place - for example, #pioneersquare, #zeitgeistcoffee, and #nwisbest, articulated by the people involved in the picture-taking and sharing activities at those moments. Taken collectively, these individual places are all part of a larger vision of Pacific Northwest as conveyed through the images seen

throughout the various events of this project. Because of the *Darkroom Series*' context in which these images exist, they are further embedded into local arts discourse, which directly links with existing dialogue about regional identity.

Most of the discussion about the interactions people have had with Instagram posts has been around the practices related to the taking of pictures. But if we understand contemporary camera-phone photography to be a set of practices that take into account the implications of extended communication and networked mobility that includes the “afterlife” of photos (Larsen, 2014), then we should also pay attention to people’s viewing practices. Throughout these events, the images were seen in a variety of formats - as digital bits on an inches-wide screen, blown up and printed onto photo paper and viewed under glass or plexiglass as tangible works, in a book where viewing the images meant flipping paper pages, sometimes on the web in a browser – across various on- and offline sites, some of it happening while people walked around at specific locales. People who did not take pictures but only viewed the images - who saw and commented on Instagram posts and who attended the exhibits and interacted with the displayed photos - are also included amongst those who engaged with the photos. The gallery experiences – including my own solitary viewing, and that of the coffee shop patrons for whom the displayed pictures were an afterthought to their everyday routines, as well as that of the first *Darkroom* show’s packed opening night – contribute to the process of people forming impressions and interacting with photos, engaging with their material forms and contents. All these various viewing activities take part in what Pink would call ‘the production and consumption of images as happening in movement, and consider them as components of configurations of place’ (2011b, p.4). They are also practices that inform the individual and collective imaginations of people, which in turn contribute to the making of place.

Massey (1993) refers to the specificity of place that is produced out of “a particular constellation of relations articulated together at a particular locus” (p.66). The *Darkroom Series*’ shows and their attendant events represent points where online and offline articulations of local place have converged in the real world. This project has revealed and emphasized some of these relations: interactions with the structural elements that gird and form place (the buildings and local sculptures, the mountains and lakes, the brick walls of the gallery space, for example) and make possible the practices that are enacted therein, the flow of images that we see moving in and through both virtual and real-life spaces, mediated expressions of local photo practices and the social interactions and connections with people in real life and in-app. Taking into account information and communication technologies (ICT) and mobility in our everyday lives, there are also the invisible digital flows that are a part of engaging with social media on mobile phones, even as the ICTs introduce new practices for users (for example, the creation and application of hashtags). These invisible flows include the injection of the remote and global - in this case, specifically the traces of those who have interacted with the particular photos and connected socially from afar - into the local. Other invisible flows would include visions of contemporary camera-phone photography entwining with existing city arts discourses regarding place identity. Finally, images with geo-locative data tags assigned mark their location in both online and real world spaces, examples of media that “converge various cartographies across spatial, social and electronic terrains” (Hjorth & Pink, 2012, p.4). These various relations were articulated and gathered together in a series of moments over the month-long periods during which the *Darkroom Series*’ exhibits and associated events occurred, each instance of which articulating specific place.

These “invisible flows” and digital traces that accompany our engagements with and through mobile media are part of what differentiates place as it has been presented in this project from that arising out of prior forms of photography. It was noted earlier that the distinguishing factor of the current smartphone is its pervasive and networked nature. Not only has it become entwined with so many facets of our everyday lives, but through its capacity to connect us to information, people and the internet, we leave digital traces everywhere that we act and move with our mobile devices, especially if we engage in picture-sharing or conversational engagements on social networks. These traces – unseen to our eyes but embedded in our interactions and photos, and onto maps and in apps - are now part of place.

In Cresswell’s articulation of place (2009), while three elements – materiality, meaning and practice – are implicated in how place is configured, what is emphasized is practice, as it is through practice that various meanings of place can be established, or sometimes contested and challenged. In other words, competing and different meanings of place are not unusual. Thus, in this case, the different visions of the Pacific Northwest emerging from the exhibits – the landscape-based images of #NWisbest in 2014 and the more urban-based images from the first two *Darkrooms Series*’ shows - are equally “valid” expressions of place, differentiated by changes to practices, in particular, the practices related to capturing and editing photos. While the theme of an exhibit is directly influenced by the decisions and motivations of its organizers, in this case, we have seen that the “look” of the larger body of photos in the public in 2012 and 2014 and those in the respective shows were broadly comparable. We can surmise that the changes were brought about in part by improvements to phone camera technologies, shifts in pictorial standards of what makes a good phone photo, and Instagrammers’ desires to be distinguished from the main stream of overly filtered Instagram posts by producing photos that

looked less processed and more natural. But while the individual practices changed, what was consistent over the years was that the images, arising out of the activities of individuals gathered together, shared collectively at specific junctures in time, are representative of their interpretive, creative visions of place made public at those moments, which in turn contribute to expressions of the Pacific Northwest.

The differences between 2012 and 2014 illustrate how a practice-based perspective helps us understand how alternative meanings or challenges to existing notions (of an event or thing or place or identity) can emerge. In this project, the most noticeable articulation of “alternative” was realized primarily in relation to the representational aspects seen in the photos over the two years. Developers created, and some Instagram users adopted certain apps to create “a minimally processed” aesthetic in purposeful contrast to the overly processed looks that emerged in the early wave of Instagram postings (VSCO, 2012). Two of my interviewees expressed wanting to distinguish their images from the mainstream photos of place that were being circulated on Instagram and thus adopted a different practice of working with their images, articulating their own enunciations of space and producing their own “individual trajectories and spatial stories” (Lee, 2010, p. 268) through their shared photos.

Beyond the context of aesthetic representations of place, the project makes us aware of the potential for a practice-based approach to provide a more critical lens on place as considered through camera-phone photography. While only hinted at in this research, for example in the posts from the downtown #pioneersquare Instameet and the one single portrait telling the story of the man making his living selling wares on the street, there have been other instances outside of the scope of this project where Juxt members have used Instagram to share photos capturing

particular aspects of life in Seattle.² The practices that produced these Instagram posts constituted versions of place that are very different from those that emerged out of the *Darkroom Series*' events.

Practices are capable of producing these different, multiple versions of place because, according to Massey, what is important is the *particular* mix of individuals and the social and other (i.e. digital, technological) relations performed and intersecting at a given time and locale that articulate specific place, that Cresswell would say give it its meaning. Therefore, images produced out of some of the same kinds of camera-phone practices seen in this project performed in a different setting may reveal a very different kind of place. For example, other Instagrammers who have been featured on the Juxt/Grryo blog have used the platform on their phones to share stories that depict specific social issues in their own cities (for example, see Behroozi, 2016; Wylie, 2014), producing powerful accounts of place that are more attune to and prompt consideration of various socio-economic and political issues in specific locales. These accounts can be distinguished from those shared through prior iterations of photography in that they are immediately disseminated, viewed first on personal devices in one's hand, and through the social platform on which they are shared, they can foster instant engagement from viewers all over the world. With the rise of media creation and consumption through our mobile devices, and with the proliferation of social networks around the world enabled by increasing global adoption of smartphones, there is certainly the potential to explore issues of local place-making and regional identity-creation through the examination of mobile visual media practices.

² For example, the Instagram images from this Juxt member, <https://www.instagram.com/bradpuet/>, posted between 2012 and 2014, focus on life as seen from the streets of Seattle. These posts – in both image and text - depict urban Seattle as a place that is multicultural, eclectic and politically active. They produce a powerful representation of place that is quite different from the depictions of place arising out of the images reviewed in this project.

One of this project's most notable findings and strongest carry-overs from earlier forms of photography that was revealed in the instances of camera-phone photography that I examined was the prominence and importance of people's stories. Stories were highlighted and mentioned repeatedly amongst the participants' recollections and texts accompanying the posted images. While some aspects of story-telling with the image may have shifted with camera-phone photography - from a focus on memory-marker to that of a shared live experience, from a print-in-hand to a digital image seen on the phone screen, and from sharing among intimates to sharing immediately and widely to co-present, socially networked friends – the persistence of the story's importance, embedded in or with the photo post was made apparent in the review of local practices. This emphasis on story-sharing highlights the human element – aspects of affect, memory, personal identity and lived experience – that in this case, also has bearing on the configuring of place, to which all these various “spatial stories” richly contribute. Perhaps it is in part because of these stories and personal associations that locals demonstrated were an important part of their experience of place, that the mediated aspects of interacting and engaging with images and others on mobile phones were not seen in this case to distance people from local place. On the contrary, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, camera-phone photography in Seattle is associated with Instagram, which in turn is linked for many to Instameets. The activities of the *Darkroom Series* in particular appear to have made people more aware and appreciative of the distinctiveness of #NWisbest and “here”; they certainly deepened people's sense and attachments to local place.

Looking Back

While not a primary focus of this paper, it should be mentioned that just as some social practices arising out of earlier forms of photography have persisted with camera-phone photography, so also have some activities of early photography clubs, including amateur exhibitions, excursions, and the sharing and adoption of certain pictorial conventions, similarly been taken up in Juxt and @Igers_Seattle.

Other elements of these clubs, however, for example, the distinction between those focused on aesthetics and those interested in the development of technical skill, and the class-based characterizations of different clubs discussed by Bourdieu (1996) were not apparent in this investigation. This may be in part due to the fact that while editing and shooting techniques were certainly of interest to many Instagrammers, their development was not seen by the organizers or participants as the primary purpose of the two communities I looked at nor was it a focus of the events associated with the *Darkroom Series*.³ While Juxt is strongly interested in “mobile artistry”, it was noted earlier that the organizers did not attempt to define such artistry and that rather, they strongly encouraged individual creative expression and experimentation.

Furthermore, this research very lightly touched upon the notion of the democratization of photography encouraged by mobile phone photography, as expressed by one of this project’s interviewees – meaning both that everyone has access to it, and that everyone can learn to do it.

While amateur photography itself was not the main concern of this project, this research highlights the potential for a more critical and sustained examination of the claims of aesthetic

³ This is in contrast, for example, with the Flickr Seattle photography community, active since 2005. While the purpose of this community’s meetups is still social, there is a clear educational element to their gatherings, which regularly focus on technical aspects of shooting, with pre-planned topics covered at their meetups, such as lenses, apertures, development and framing practices, and pieces of camera gear that would be suitable for specific events, as listed on their main website at <https://www.meetup.com/SeattleFlickr/>.

tendencies of amateurs towards fine art and pictorialism in the context of camera-phone photography, and the examination of how the traditions of amateur photography clubs that presage how certain digital photography and current camera-phone practices have developed and emerged in Instagram photography. Also, while all the photographers in the *Darkroom* shows were selected for their mobile phone photography, a notable number of the group in the most recent show were “professional” photographers, in the conventional sense of shooting and being paid for their creative work. Their inclusion in the exhibit raises the question of the “professional” when it comes to mobile phone photography, especially with current iterations of mobile phones with advanced technologies that make it possible to produce enlarged photo prints of high quality from images taken on phones. Thus, this project furthermore highlights the possibility that cultural understandings and conventional categories of what constitutes amateur photography may be reconsidered or challenged in the face of the changing nature of photographic practices.

Moving Ahead

Something that became increasingly notable through the research process and emerged as a prominent aspect of local phone photography practices was the mobile, bodily engagements of those involved in this project. While my early literature review touched upon embodiment, as part of tourist practice and performance (Crang, 1997; Larsen, 2005), and as an element of sensory knowledge-making (Pink, 2011a), this research project revealed multiple instances of mobility and embodiment of Seattle Instagrammers throughout the various events examined. As discussed in the previous chapter, people in individual and Instameet settings revealed picture-taking practices involving walking, hiking, stretching and laying down on the ground, in a few

cases. In the photo viewings experiences, people's full bodies participated, not just their eyes. At Instameets, people clustered together, bending down to huddle over the screen of someone's held-out phone to view a particular shot; at Zeitgeist, people milled around, walking within the space of the gallery, moving closely towards the wall to peer at the featured images in a sensory-rich environment of sound (conversations and music) and scent (roast coffee).

As part of my approach to this project, I had taken on a perspective from being emplaced in the research contexts to be able to engage with and understand the subjects of this project in movement and in the locales where they performed their activities (Pink, 2008). Being sensitive to this emplacement made me aware of my own mobility and proprioception, "an active, embodied engagement with the world through vision" (Crang, 1997, p. 365). In other words, my investigations in the sites of my project would involve more than just looking; it would incorporate images and activities "linked through the embodied motion of the observer" (p. 365) as part of the process of gaining knowledge. As I set out to Zeitgeist to experience the exhibit, and as I explored the sites of specific Instameets - Pioneer Square #bemobile, Olympic Sculpture Park #bemobilek5 and Ballard #ballardinstameet, I forged my own paths on foot and took my own pictures in the same locations attended by local Instagrammers. By being there, being present in those places, getting to know them, and engaging in my own camera-phone practices, I was able to bodily take part in local practices and acquire corporeally a sense of some of the local context. This project has highlighted the sensory elements of movement and bodily engagement as part of people's everyday practices of marking and being in place, especially in reference to how they use their phones to take pictures and stay connected with others. This research suggests that exploring place and mobile phone media – including audio and visual media - from a sensory ethnographic perspective may produce a fruitful study of place-making.

While the previous paragraphs mention mobility specifically in terms of the physical movements of people connected to their camera-phone practices, a broader consideration of mobilities runs through this project. In this investigation, I attempted to trace and follow photography practices relating to place-making, spanning across different sites both online and offline. The dispersed nature of these practices and the movement of photos across different sites characterize this research as a project of mobilities. Mobilities studies consider the connections arising from the multiple technologies of travel and communications that move objects, people, ideas and images across distances (Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006). This project contributes to a growing body of research in this area. Finally, this investigation also joins the body of work exploring the impact of mobile technologies in the way we communicate, experience and engage with the world around us. In particular, this project was inspired by and contributes to research addressing mobile phone photography already laid down by scholars such as Hjorth, Larsen, and Pink in the fields of communication, media and geography.

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