Introduction

How do you figure out how to travel somewhere that you’ve never been before? When I asked 108 people this question in 2015, 96 percent said that they used some sort of global positioning system (GPS) to help them find their way. Many of the respondents explained the process: you search for the address of a location and then type it into the search function on a mobile map or GPS-enabled device, and route options to your destination appear on the screen. You’re the blue dot or the red dot, and the device tracks your movement as the position of your avatar traverses across the map. The majority of participants described this process as convenient, easy, necessary, awesome, and a time (and life) saver. One participant responded to the question simply: “God bless Google Maps.”

Every day, millions of people turn to small, possibly handheld screens and location-aware devices to search for destinations or receive recommendations for places to visit and then dutifully follow the step-by-step instructions provided until the journey is complete. We don’t consciously reflect on these activities as they’re happening and probably don’t associate these practices with placemaking or constructing a sense of place. Most attempts to understand navigation behaviors construe them as digital processes that distract users from fully experiencing or knowing the places they travel through. Or computing one’s location is held up as an example worthy of critique or comparison to the good old days of paper maps, knowing directions by heart, or asking a friend or passerby for help. Although studies that focus on digital wayfinding might suggest otherwise, if we take account of the lived experiences, the practices of doing, and the ways in which digital wayfinding makes the world around us meaningful, then digital navigation is entirely about placemaking and placing oneself in space.

Notions that digital media dissociates users from place stem from frameworks employed by scholars and critics to understand media consumption in shared spaces. Early scholarship addressing human-
computer interactions with place tended to foreground human *versus* machine relationships. Public uses of media were understood as enacting processes of alienation, abstraction, and distraction and as spatially disembedding. All forms of media at one point or another have been categorized in this disparaging manner. Similar to the long-standing perspective that reading books or magazines on public transportation is a strategy for negotiating street sociability or limiting encounters with strangers, Shuhei Hosokawa referred to the “cassette recorder for headphone listening” (a.k.a., the Walkman) as an “urban strategy.” He noted that the listener “seems to cut the auditory contact with the outer world where he really lives” in order to revel in the “perfection of his individual zone of listening.” This impression of a “partial loss of touch with the here and now” was identified by Margaret Morse as a result of watching television, using freeways, or frequenting malls. Around the same time, Joshua Meyrowitz famously noted that electronic media refigured “situational geographies” of daily life and dissociated physical place from social place—until media users were left with “no sense of place.” A decade earlier geographers had been concerned with the flattening of place and place-based experience that media encouraged. Edward Relph argued that media transmitted “an inauthentic attitude toward places,” which encouraged a sense of “placelessness” that he described as “a weakening of the identity of places to the point where they not only look alike but feel alike and offer the same bland possibilities for experience.”

In more recent work on digital and mobile media technologies, scholarly perspectives have broadened to recognize more positive associations between digital media and experiences of place. Humans and machines are not as readily perceived as mutually exclusive categories and are not treated as separate considerations for designers of everyday experience as they once were. People are observed to work *with* technologies in order to move through and experience places. As Rowan Wilken notes, we use mobile media to negotiate our engagement with the places we inhabit, and Scott McQuire argues that the contemporary urban experience is uniquely defined by the pervasiveness of digital media within cities, which leads to new contexts for the production of public space. However, in discussions of distracted, disruptive, or poor negotiations of digital media, space and place are still evident. McQuire
also notes that digital media paradoxically both place and displace users. For example, Michael Bull has argued that MP3 players provide users with increased control and orchestration of their experience of time and space in urban environments. Through personal technologies such as the portable music player or mobile phone, users are able to create a “privatized auditory bubble” that encapsulates a personal, curated space composed of one’s own music collection. However, like the boom box, Walkman, and other preceding mobile media, the personal bubble that Bull describes has been interpreted by some critics as a dissociative enclave that allows users to “shut out everyone around you. . . . [The device is] a personal accessory that allows the oblivious to live in their own world.” These paradoxes of presence reverberate in scholarly literature in that technology users are popularly recognized as hyperconnected members of “lonely crowds” or exist “alone together.”

Other scholars and journalists have noted that digital media themselves are a distraction: from work, from social interaction, from our everyday conditions of existence, or from any space that is not behind a screen. The distracted glance has been described as the ontology of digital media. As Debra Benita Shaw notes, “cyberflaneur” has emerged as a term to describe a Web 2.0 or mobile media user who moves through space in a series of unfocused and circuitous movements with “a kind of detached inquisitiveness about fellow citizens and their social status.” This type of distracted and detached inquisitiveness produced by the intersections of media and urban space has also been read as inherently commercial. Robert Luke suggests that the ubiquitous “phoneur” fills city streets: a postmodern subject who is situated within the “space of flows” of commodity and desire and whose actions and identity are composed through the logic of mobile capital and mobile technologies and services.

In this book, I aim to illustrate and analyze the ways in which the exact opposite processes are observable: many different actors are actually using digital technologies and practices to re-embed themselves within urban space and to create a sense of place—or the recognition of a space as an individually or collectively meaningful location—for themselves and/or others. Although there are copious socially constructed technopanics, cautionary tales, and science fiction narratives around the potential for digital media to dissociate or liberate us from the confines
of physical locations, we’ve lacked careful attention to the ways people actually use digital media to become placemakers. Contrary to these scholarly and colloquial narratives of dissociation or distraction, creating and controlling a sense of place is still the primary way that we connect with our environments, interact with others, and express our identities. However, the tools and methods that people appropriate to produce and perform place are more plentiful, are more dependent on code, and may appear more diffuse, more fragmented, and potentially more difficult to recognize. As this book will illustrate, people from various sectors of society with distinct roles to play in the social and physical production of urban environments employ digital media in their personal and professional placemaking practices. The case studies analyzed in this text are entry points for disambiguating these digital placemaking practices and interpreting what it means to make place now.

The examples highlighted in this book are not gathered from obscure corners of the digital landscape. Rather, they comprise routine and seemingly unremarkable practices that will be familiar to readers of all digital backgrounds and literacies. Readers might live in or might have visited the cities mentioned on these pages, might have read or heard about some of these projects in major news outlets, might have used some of the applications and services mentioned, and might have participated in some of the activities analyzed in this book but have never thought about them as “placemaking” practices or as producing meanings of place and space. In fact, like many scholars, journalists, and cultural critics, readers of this book might have even entertained the opposite perspective.

*The Digital City* offers a new theoretical framework for thinking about our relationships to digital media by reconceptualizing common, mundane digital interactions as placemaking activities. This framework is expressed through two main arguments. First, I argue that by reading digital media through the lens of “place,” we gain a more holistic and nuanced understanding of digital media use and non-use, processes and decisions around their implementation and adoption, and our relationships to digital artifacts and infrastructures. Second, I argue that people consciously employ digital media (such as mobile phones, wireless and fiber-optic networks, ubiquitous computing and navigation technologies, and location-based social media) to take account of their social
and physical positions within urban space and to create and negotiate a new sense of place within rapidly changing media landscapes and socio-spatial relationships.

My interpretation of what place is and how place is experienced through digital media has been shaped by David Morley’s prompting in *Home Territories: Media, Mobility, and Identity*: “We must ask how, in a world of flux, forms of collective dwelling are sustained and re-invented.” Drawing on social constructionist as well as phenomenological approaches to place, I recognize that most urban places are experienced in flux. Places are perpetually coming into being as they are socially constructed and reconstructed by institutional and cultural forces. People and places are constantly moving and changing; their rhythms, circulations, and differential mobilities shape urban space, urban life, and their relationships to other places within global flows and networks of exchange. But the meaning and significance of places are not perpetually deferred. As David Harvey and many other geographers have noted, placemaking entails creating a deep, albeit temporary, sense of permanence, pause, or investment in fixity within the forces and scapes that shape spatiality. This book investigates the digital tools and situations embraced by urban populations for creating temporary permanence. The individual chapters of this book present representative cases of how different actors use digital media to exploit the possibilities for circulation and change while alleviating the challenges and risks of social, economic, and physical mobilities (from personal movement to globalization). These actors use digital media to negotiate creating stable places of belonging while being in flux. In all cases, the populations mentioned in this book attempt to shape emotional attachments with(in) urban environments by re-placeing the city as unique, desirable, familiar, or knowable through assorted digital media forms.

What I call “re-placeing the city” is the subjective, habitual practice of assessing and combining physical, social, and digital contexts in order to more fully understand one’s embeddedness within urban places and to reproduce a unique sense of place through the use of digital media affordances. By recognizing the intersecting conditions that shape urban development, mobilities, and the affective relationships that connect us to place, urban planners, government officials, corporations, developers, artists, and community activists—as well as urban residents and
travelers—reproduce layered, seemingly abstract urban environments as rooted, humanized places once more. People with disparate positions of social power, access to resources, and digital literacies engage digital media to turn the spaces in which they find themselves into the places in which they “dwell.”

The concept of re-placeing the city is not meant to signify that the city is being replaced, as in exchanged for something else. Instead, the practices of re-placeing highlighted and analyzed in this book are akin to the lived experiences and performances of what Anthony Giddens describes as “re-embedding.” Similar to re-embedding, re-placeing is a set of practices that manage the seemingly fragmented or overwhelming conditions that the networked urban subject experiences and routinely acts within, then re-embeds these conditions within meaningful spatial and temporal contexts. As other scholars have described, contemporary urban environments are intricate nodes and accumulations of local and global flows as well as shifting sites of development and renewal, and they have become spaces reconfigured by software and screens, digitized data repositories, algorithmic politics, and ambient information. The concept of re-placeing is not a disruptive break from previous understandings of how people use digital media to coordinate and express socio-spatial relations but an extension. Rather than locatability, findability, or perpetual contact, re-placeing prioritizes placemaking as an interpretive framework used to understand how and why actors negotiate and harness the discourse and affordances of digital technologies to adjust to changing principles and conditions of making and being in place. Digital practices, from installing broadband networks to taking selfies, can be understood as acts of re-placeing the city because of the ways that these activities seek to combine physical experiences and imaginative constructions of both place and digitality to create meaning, value, and attachments to socio-spatial geographies—situating oneself and others within rapidly changing urban environments through the meaning and implementation of digital technologies and practices.

Re-placeing the city emerges as a series of tactics and strategies to negotiate the pervasiveness of digital media in public space, with shifts in the situations, audiences, and conditions under which people experience and incorporate place into daily life. These activities occur at different scales and sites and are performed by diverse populations,
through the use of myriad digital media technologies. However, processes and practices that can be categorized as re-placeing share common characteristics. Most commonly, re-placeing can be recognized in the intention and/or perceived experience of digital media use. All forms of re-placeing the city aim to adjust the “situational geographies” of social life to reproduce space as a familiar, stable, or knowable place. Through digital media use, place becomes an inhabited and meaningful location where a person or community could potentially belong. The specific practices, artifacts, and outcomes of re-placeing the city differ drastically based on habitus, access and literacy with digital media, and socioeconomic experiences of place. Among some populations, the by-products of re-placeing may be photographs shared on a social network site or archived data collected through self-quantification software; in other cases, the outcomes might be a public art project or even the creation of an entire city. But the intention—harnessing digital media to create meaningful places and build emotional attachments to particular locations—remains the same.

Mobile technologies in particular have been thought to transform person-to-person and person-to-place relationships in a variety of ways. Throughout the 2000s, mediated activities beginning with prefixes like “geo-” or titles such as “locative” or “location-based” entered mainstream lexicons. Consumer markets offered a steady increase in prosumer GPS, cartography, sensor, and tracking technologies that privileged mediated visions of space and place. The rendering of people, goods, and services as more “locatable” became a technological reality and was discursively constructed as desirable as well. Slogans for portable GPS equipment encouraged potential customers to “Track what you love” and “Go everywhere, find everything.” Over the past ten years, consumers have been offered a plethora of digital tools to support a sense of geospatial empowerment that aided their interpretation and experience of increasingly complex and extroverted urban spaces.

For urban digital media users and non-users, these digital technologies are no longer ideologically or practically “new,” but mundane. In many urban environments some form of mobile media and/or digital infrastructure has been incorporated into the habits and rhythms of urban life. Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge’s code/space and coded spaces are routine and expected; people maintain intimate and collab-
orative relationships with and through these spaces—we keep coded objects close to our bodies and use them to manage our homes, to connect with loved ones, and to help us make decisions about where to go and what to do there.

Previous modes and tools for placemaking are indelibly linked to communication and media technologies that feel or appear intimate or personal as well. Printed artifacts for placemaking such as journals, scrapbooks, photo albums, and postcards as well as placemaking practices like decorating a room or a yard account for personal presence and taste but also tangibly and asynchronously communicate and archive the meaning of place for one or a few other people. Lee Humphreys has astutely analyzed the ways in which documenting everyday life on social media is similar to analog forms of media accounting. Comparable to the use of media accounting in the formation of Humphreys's qualified self, the places produced through digital media are representations of place that we create to be consumed. Although the forms of documentation (photographs, written accounts, videos) and motivations for making place are replicated and remediated in digital placemaking practices, the perceived affordances and uses of digital media intervene in the process and type of constituted place.

The sense of place constructed through these analog tools and modes of communication articulate individual or personal experiences, place attachments, and place identities as momentary pauses that are witnessed and subjectively described, reinforcing phenomenological theories that place is pause. In contrast, the sense of place produced through social media posts, real-time cartographies or check-ins, or routinely updated blogs reinforces a sense of place as mobile in its instantaneity, mutability, replicability, and cocreation. As Judith Butler suggests in regard to gender performativity, place also does not gain authenticity from intrinsic essential qualities alone but is a product of repeated and habitual actions, utterances, and behaviors. Nicky Gregson and Gillian Rose come to a similar conclusion, suggesting that space can be “citational, and itself iterative, unstable, and performative.” Expanding on this perspective, I argue that the citational, iterative, and flexible performativity of place is forefronted in practices of re-placeing as the affordances of digital media echo these qualities. The perceived affordances and discourses of digital media texts and technologies emphasize the performa-
tivity of place, as places are continually reproduced and recontextualized on distinct platforms and by multiple communities.

In her insightful study of expat communities, Erika Polson analyzes how transnational professionals engage in a combination of online and offline activities to create a flexible or “mobile sense of place” or an emotional attachment to the places in which they temporarily reside.\textsuperscript{19} In addition to a sense of place that is constituted through individual mobility, re-placeing reinforces a “mobile sense of place” in the circulation or mobility of articulations of place that are collaboratively constituted by people harnessing imaginations of networked flows and/or connecting through digital networks. The mobility in sense of place refers to the movement of people and devices across places but also to the movement of coded data and knowledge about place and the assumed speed and mobility of digital networks. Instead of pause, the places produced by all forms of re-placeing are restless and conditionally under construction. The uses and discourses that shape digital media texts and technologies as interactive and mutable, mobile and flexible, and as entities that are governed by and propel global flows encourage the perception of place as participatory and performative. In this way, the extroverted “global sense of place,” or place as a unique but open-ended constellation of social relations that Doreen B. Massey elaborated on in the 1990s (but whose existence, she noted, stretched centuries before), is the foundational condition for digital placemaking. Through practices of re-placeing the city—from creating smart cities to posting status updates—place becomes more evident as something that we do. Place becomes recognizable as a performative process.

Place as Performative

As Tim Cresswell argues, the theory of place that researchers adopt in their work is both ontological and epistemological; it shapes how they understand what exists and ways of seeing and knowing existents.\textsuperscript{20} To understand the meaning of place, I rely on theories from human geography and cultural studies primarily. While I draw on Yi-Fu Tuan’s disambiguation and general distinctions of place and space, I also refer to feminist and critical cultural geographers’ and cultural studies scholars’ engagement with place and place-based experiences throughout this
These theorists question connections between place as rooted or as bounded, focus on lived experiences of place, and complicate perceptions of “home” as they relate to meaning making, power, exclusion, and practice. At the heart of my arguments is an understanding that place is both always already there and always becoming.

Most notably, Tuan has circulated the idea that place and space are two distinct entities that are composed of idiosyncratic interactions and activities. “Space” is conceptualized as a plane of abstract mobilities and scientific rationality and as an arena of logistic economic flows where geometric and scientific analysis can be applied. “Place” concerns dwelling and the rootedness of lived experience and human reactions. Frequently, place is equated to home or to feeling at home in the world. Lynda H. Schneekloth and Robert G. Shibley utilize the term querencia to describe a place on the ground where one feels secure and draws one’s strength, “having and loving a place, not because it is abstractly or universally understood as unique, or even supportive, but because it is yours. It is intimate and known, cared for and argued about.”22 According to these interpretations, querencia derived from place does not emanate directly from its descriptive qualities or characteristics but comes from personal attachments and feelings of ownership or groundedness in particular locations. As the above quote implies, these powerful feelings of querencia or belonging in place are regarded as positive and are initiated by people who have generated their own meaning of place from the ground up. However, this is only part of the perspective on place and placemaking that I observe in the case studies that follow.

Practices of the social production of space are often segmented into two encompassing categories: productions initiated by those at the apex of social hierarchies and productions and practices initiated from below. For Michel de Certeau, these types of social-spatial practices are known as “strategies” and “tactics” respectively. Corporate, military, governmental, or scientific actors who possess both the will and the power to carve out a space of their own for logistical purposes implement strategies. Strategies are strategic in that these actors gain territory, a base, or a delimited place of its own power from which to interact with possibly subversive or targeted others. On the other hand, “the space of a tactic is the space of the other . . . an art of the weak.”23 Tactics play with the provided structures of place, often in creative, fluid, and sometimes
ephemeral ways and convert space as meaningful and purposeful within the everyday lives of ordinary people. Even as the concepts of place and space have been taken up in information and communication studies, media studies, and design, space as strategic and place as tactical echo these de Certeauian connotations and associations.

In general, the social construction and experience of place are regarded as somehow romantic and resistive as compared to the social construction or strategic experience of space. Making place is often linked to making home or making oneself feel at home, thus creating an intimate site from which we interpret and interact with the rest of the world. This connection is reasserted in studies of digital media too. “Placing,” as Dourish and Steve Harrison describe it, is fundamentally concerned with how humans make themselves at home with the use of technology. In this interpretation, the concept of place stands in for feelings of comfort, intimacy, and groundedness that are composed by familiar and repeated interactions over time, qualities that are reminiscent of how a sense of place is understood colloquially. Place is often reified as potentially and most likely evocative, poetic, and at the very least as Tuan’s “field of care.” A sense of place is reminiscent of other romanticized terms like local, homeland, intimate, and nostalgic. However, this is not where I begin.

Expanding on institutional concepts of placemaking, re-placeing is practiced by individuals as well as collectives and in ways that do not always work to augment social value and community pride in a place. Instead, re-placeing the city also includes economic, industrial, or strategic practices around making place and constructing “valued” places with digital media. Thus, re-placeing can occur in the hands of a pedestrian carrying a mobile phone across town as well as in the plans for expansive smart cities that are constructed over several years, and it may reveal implicit power hierarchies that govern placemaking and breed experiences of inequity as well as belonging.

Drawing on feminist geographers’ and cultural studies interpretations of place, I focus on the fact that emotional attachments and psychological connections to place and home can relate to negotiating difference or can even be traumatic or make one uneasy. The stories we know and tell about places can be stark and gut wrenching, awkward or uncomfortable. In our attempts to socially produce, to know, and to experience
place, we might be working to create a sense of place that is uniquely exclusive, specifically oppressive, commodified and branded, while also being inviting and domestic. In these cases, tactics are noted as tools used to cope, make do, or resist logics and experiences of place in the face of strategic social practices that might try to ignore, silence, or co-opt tactics and their productions.

Theories and practices of placemaking less frequently recognize the strategic in the production of place. Strategic practices are typically reserved for abstract, economic, or scientific space or social productions that tactical placemakers need to contend with, that tactics or use work to undo. This book brings attention to the ways that place is constructed both strategically and tactically by digitally connected people and places in motion. For example, gentrifiers, real estate developers, and municipalities rely on and rework preexisting meanings, collective experiences, and representations into highly visible reproductions of place. Placemaking or place remaking becomes strategic, economic, rationally organized, and purposely implemented in the service of redevelopment. In the case of re-placing, the strategic production of place may appear less violent in its totality and force but is equally an exercise of dominant power and knowledge. Strategic placemaking with digital media exclusively performs place in a way that resonates with and invites in those who are already networked and already recognized as politically and socially powerful.

While place is powerful, it is also constructed through power relations. In *In Place/Out of Place*, Cresswell recognizes that place identities are created by the powerful as well as those who resist or transgress established meanings of places and subvert expectations of places in contradictory and conflicting ways. The meaning of place is a constant terrain of struggle where power and polysemy based on situated knowledges, differential mobilities, identity, and difference (race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, etc.) are at play. As Cresswell’s approach suggests, there should be a concern for “the way place works in a world of social hierarchies.”²⁵ In other words, place is “social space,”²⁶ where constantly evolving relationships, exchanges, and disruptions call attention to the relations of power that construct and reconstruct these spaces over time. When places are interpreted as social spaces that are perpetually reproduced and debated and are potential sources of *querencia*, places and the
power to make place become akin to an event or process that can indicate one’s position in a social order. In addition, because of these connections to social and cultural capital, people have always been invested in the way that places are performed and practiced. My interpretation of place and placemaking are very closely related to these human geographers’ and urban theorists’ perspectives on place: that place is made concrete and meaningful through practice. However, I claim that digital media have become an integral part of this practice. Digital media technologies, discourses, and practices are new tools with which to construct locational capital or the social value derived from connecting oneself to certain places, which becomes embodied in spatial habitus.

As Pier Carlo Palermo and Davide Ponzini observe, placemaking, or efforts to create more livable places with meaningful connections for residents, has become increasingly prevalent in community organizing and professional discourses as these groups have seen the concept of place as depleted, threatened, or in need of regeneration or renewal. The speed and scale of globalization have been underscored as prime culprits that lead to spatial fragmentation, lack of community cohesion, and the creation of urban environments that lack a quality of life and the “spirit of place.” These perspectives imply that the augmented mobilities of Arjun Appadurai’s scapes have disrupted our collective sense of place and left people unsure of how to live within conditions and boundaries that seem more flexible and fluid. However, this perspective approaches place as container rather than as a process and eschews the power-geometries of place. These power-geometries, which emphasize that place is polysemic and that places accrue significance based on our social positionalities and interactions, are overtly performed through digital modes of communication. Through digital media people express not just where they go and what they do there but who they are.

The pervasiveness of digital platforms and networks in structuring social relations and communication has made individual and collective acts of placemaking more observable, conscious, and shareable. The identifiable artifacts, acts, and intentions for re-placing space can be understood as intersections of place and performativity: the collective and individual performances that compose places, the ways that place is used to perform identities (of people as well as locations, corporations, government entities, etc.), and place as the manifestation of social
practice. By seeing the world as a network of meaningful places, or by allocating place as a central lens or question in our inquiries about the world around us, we begin to understand lived experience as well as social hierarchies and topographies differently—and not always in a flattering light.

The intersections of performance and place through digital media draw attention to the poiesis, or active making, of place. Approaching place as a performative process investigates both the final work created and the process of construction: the crafting, guiding principles of composition, and a place’s “function, effects, and uses,” which might include economic systems, labor relations, and location within a larger culture. Poetics as poiesis, or “making,” have come to be understood as taking into account the critical and the creative without necessarily privileging one over the other. However, poiesis as “making” is often inseparably intertwined with and often obscured by “making sense of” in terms of the treatment of space and place in the humanities. Focusing on the making of place in terms of performance and performativity encourages an eye toward the minute yet perceptible movements and expressions of production as culturally significant factors in the way place is built, experienced, and interpreted. Just as the unphotographable polysemy of Clifford Geertz’s “wink” is derived from its acting out (its performance) and contextualization within webs of culture, so is the case with status updates and geo-coded texts, mobile phone and digital infrastructure use, and mobility tactics in place. All are in need of thick description to be understood, and all are communicative, cultural performances that express or make visible subjective experiences of participation, marginalization, and differential power in the social production of urban environments.

Re-placeing the City

Even before the “spatial turn,” it has been the responsibility of the humanities to make sense of place in representational and artistic texts, documented expressions and artifacts of lived experiences, and cultural geographies and migrations and their role in shaping identities, hierarchies, and texts. However, the study and activities of placemaking also reveal ways in which people manage and document human experience.
Making places, and the places produced, can be read as sites where the expression and documentation of human experience happen and are contested. These performances are creative and critical, controlling and resistive, symbolic and tangible, poetic and traumatic, and they are always about the inscriptions of power, bodies, and meaning within place. The practices and people that produce spaces and places are not singular, cohesive, or complementary, nor is there a unique essence or single “authenticity” of place to be uncovered.

Shaw recognizes performativity in connection with the city street as a site of posthuman urbanism, which is “a performance of everyday reality attuned to the potential for rearticulations of space which new techno-scientific ontological configurations ironically promise.” This “potential for rearticulations of space” and place—which is promised by and through digital media infrastructure, texts, exchanges, and use and the practices of doing and struggling with these rearticulations—is the focus of re-placeing the city. If we want to understand what particular places mean to people, as experienced through interfaces of digital media, we have to look at what people do within these places to make sense of them. As Etienne Wenger would argue, we would also have to understand what people experience in the doing. The intent of this book is not to discredit or further examine the assumption that postmodern society has produced “thinned out places” or the “disarray of place” but to identify and analyze how digital media are tools in the imaginative work that goes into making urban place and the processes and outcomes of this labor.

More recently the term “digital placemaking” has surfaced in popular, institutional, and scholarly literature. Digital placemaking has been generally understood as the intersection of placemaking practices with social media. The Project for Public Spaces created a Digital Placemaking program in 2010, which they define as “the integration of social media into Placemaking practices, which are community-centered, encouraging public participation, collaboration, and transparency.” In this model, social media becomes a way to listen to people and communities and to incorporate grassroots efforts and perspectives into conversations and initiatives about placemaking and place-based civic engagement. Other perspectives on digital placemaking have noted instances where digital media can encourage play, storytelling, place
discovery, and social engagement through shared and/or collocated experiences or memories. Games, 3-D modeling, and social media have been used in processes of participatory design and urban planning. Amid the integration of “big data” within all types of analyses along with data-driven placemaking, open-source placemaking, the understanding of the city as an application programming interface (API) or platform, and the automatic collection of data related to urban patterns and environments, a more quantitative conception of digital placemaking has emerged as well.

In response to these interpretations, the concept of re-placeing introduced in this book offers a more cohesive baseline of what digital placemaking means: the use of digital media in cultivating a sense of place for oneself and others. This framework for understanding processes of placemaking alongside imaginations and actual use of digital media recognizes that experiences and expressions of place guide the activities of digital media users and designers and allows for critiques of digital media use within ongoing processes of making place. The designed and perceived affordances of digital media, the politics of these systems, and familiarity with hardware and software become instrumental in the production and experience of re-placeing. Perhaps more importantly, one’s perceived relationship and lived experience in regard to these affordances, how they work or don’t work to one’s advantage, and how they are made relevant as meaningful forms of connectivity in everyday life are essential components in re-placeing processes. A study of re-placeing not only establishes the ways in which digital media act and are acted upon in the performance of place but also reveals diverse and contradictory comprehensions, negotiations, and productions of urban place. If the power of placemaking is derived from its “world-making” potential, then re-placeing is doubly powerful as it takes this potential into account as well as the politics and subjectivities produced through discourses of digital media technologies and empirical use.

“Re-placement,” “re-place-ing,” “re-placeing,” or related variations of this term appear in humanities and social science writings that do not focus on digital media in any way. These terms materialize in studies concerned with the location and relocation of people, activities, artifacts, monuments, and memories as well as the reinterpretation and
re-presentation of a city’s image or the meaning of a city in the public consciousness. Re-placeing has even been implied in previous literature on technology, space, and place. Harrison and Dourish famously suggest that researchers and designers should “re-place space” in digital media design and analyses of computer-supported cooperative work; instead of space, it should be a sense of “place” that frames interactive behavior. In another widely read study, Mizuko Ito uses the term “re-placement” in the title of her book chapter about mobile phone use among Japanese youth. These youth were not liberating themselves from the boundedness and stronghold of place or reveling in frictionless anytime, anywhere connectivity; rather, Ito points to ways in which the integrity of existing places and social identities were not eroded or bypassed but incorporated into and structured by the power-geometries of place. In these cases, re-placement refers to the persistence of place within digital and mobile media use, but they do not examine how processes of redoing or reproducing a sense of place through digital media manifest, who participates, why, and under what circumstances this participation might happen. What I aim to investigate through re-placeing the city are the discursive, cultural, and political practices of (re)doing place with digital media. The prefix, “re-,” recognizes the constant reproduction and remaking of place over time as well as the act of reproducing place as remediated through digital media.

While algorithms construct situations that might direct a sense of place such as “digiplace,” “software-sorted geographies,” “software-supported spatialities,” “the automatic production of space,” and “code/space,” this book focuses on the ways in which people engage with the representation of code through screens and experience digital infrastructure rather than study the software and engineering behind code. Re-placeing investigates digital media as interfaces, intermediaries, or “points of transition” and translation between place and placemaker as well as platforms upon which the processes, contexts, and performances of place are enacted and experienced. Re-placeing can be read as an opportunity to analyze the digital interfaces of placemaking that tend to be effaced in the service of ubiquitous computing and user friendliness and to critique the ideologies that are sutured to digital media by different actors in constructing a sense of place. In re-placeing the city, the habitual or strategic placemaking practices and forms of digital
media employed differ depending on the tensions, situations, and environments that a person is embedded within or trying to negotiate. The case studies and examples presented in this book focus on some of the ways in which people construct certain locations to be lived in in meaningful ways through mundane and professional digital practices—where encoding and decoding place meet binary code. The politics, discourses, and imaginations of digital media are engaged with on the levels of implementation processes, use and non-use, the construction and expression of locational capital, and the reproduction of the “city as platform” for digital services, technologies, and networks.

Methodologically, my selection of sites follows the tradition of multisited ethnographies and multiple-case-study design—where sites are defined by the human relations under analysis—as well as more recent interpretations of “fieldsite as network.” The selection of case studies was primarily driven by the types of practices and digital media employed in placemaking and, secondarily, by the particularities of the places themselves. Each chapter presents a different model of re-placing the city based on the impetus and media utilized: big data and the Internet of Things for an efficient city; fiber-optic infrastructure for a connected city; navigation technologies for a familiar city; locative and social media for a sense of belonging in the city; and the sidelining of digital media in the production of a creative city. To follow or “contour” re-placing as a cultural practice and to illustrate its breadth, I’ve selected global cities (major metropolitan areas), emerging cities (cities built from scratch), and understudied cities (secondary and small cities) as well as mobile and online practices and texts that are not fixed to a single physical location. The book begins with digital placemaking primarily shaped by global flows and ends with hyperlocal practices of creative placemaking and personal social media use.

Through five examples of digitally mediated urban life—smart cities in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe; digital infrastructure projects in large and midsize US cities; globally adopted locative media projects and platforms; digital navigation practices among US-based populations; and National Endowment for the Arts–funded “creative placemaking” initiatives—I show how various actors employ digital technologies to reproduce abstract urban spaces into inhabited places with deep meanings
and affective attachments. This book expands practical and theoretical understandings of how urban planners envision and plan cities with digital technologies in mind, the role of urban communities in shaping the affordances of digital urban networks, and the expressions and narratives that are produced by individuals through mobile phone and web-based projects and services.

Overview of the Book

The remainder of the book critiques practices of digital placemaking and the types of places and affective attachments that are produced, by and for whom, and at what cost. Each chapter in this book engages with concepts and practices of placemaking as re-placeing through different performances of place by actors from various positions within social hierarchies and scales of practice. Although placemaking, digital or otherwise, may involve myriad perspectives and activities, it has been continually connected to community empowerment and efficacy, fostering social interactions and exchanges, and strengthening place identity. Placemaking activities have also been related to cognitive mapping, or constructing images of cities in order to make certain cities or certain locations within cities more legible and uniquely recognizable from inside and outside those locations. They encourage play, discovery, and exploration within particular locations as well as improve spatial education and literacy in regard to planning processes and spatial practice. The chapters that follow analyze the ways in which these conceptions intersect with digital media and are experienced, augmented, or disrupted through practices of re-placeing.

To investigate lived relationships between urban places, people, and digital technologies, I consider the work of those who professionally program urban space (such as urban planners, architects, and public officials) as well as the experiences of those who live within it. By comparing top-down plans, regulations, and actions with bottom-up practices and texts, this book works toward a more informed understanding of the production of urban spaces within networked societies. The implementation of digital technologies has increasingly placed the power to reorganize or reproduce space into the hands of the public, who are increasingly routine technology users. While at times the practices of
these networked urban subjects mesh with the visions and designs of urban planners, architects, technology designers, and public officials, there are also perpetual tensions between everyday users’ understandings of their own mediated urban experiences and the plans of those who design connected spaces and technologies.

All the examples in this book involve interrogations and critiques of privilege, typically in terms of those who use digital media to produce and access a sense of place. Privilege in this case might manifest in regard to access, technological literacy, social and economic hierarchies, and relations of power and control of global, municipal, and local interactions. The case studies in this book also draw attention to the production of place despite access to or engagement with digital media—by those who choose to opt out or do not occupy advantageous positions within local and global power-geometries. Regrettably, research related to urban and community informatics and studies of infrastructure and digital cities too often ignore issues of non-use of digital technologies. Analyses of non-use or opting out of digital technology use, particularly in terms of navigation technologies, municipal Wi-Fi, and fiber-optic cable projects are intertwined with discussions of digital media participation. In this way, *The Digital City* extends understandings of the reasons behind non-use of digital media and digital infrastructure as well as what non-use can tell us about the social production and understanding of place in the digital era. In terms of power to produce a sense of place, this book interrogates examples where the meaning of place is generated from a variety of positions simultaneously: planners, architects, politicians, and developers as well as activists, artists, and populations with little or no consistent or convenient internet access.

Chapter 1 engages the process of re-placeing on a global scale, examining how top-down imaginations of the built environment are coupled with digital media to express particular paradigms and plans for urban forms and urban experiences. The chapter identifies and analyzes a global trend of planning, designing, and constructing “smart-from-the-start” cities. In this particular model of smart city, digital media technologies and infrastructures are planned in tandem with the buildings, roads, and other municipal services that will compose the urban environment. As a result, professionals are charged with the burden of having to construct these cities as “places” from scratch as well. Several
examples of this type of urban form have emerged over the past few decades, from Masdar City in the United Arab Emirates to PlanIT Valley in Portugal and South Korea’s extensive network of ubiquitous cities, or U-cities projects (cities that universally embed ubiquitous computing opportunities into the built environment). This chapter analyzes some of the ways in which planners, developers, municipal officials, and technology designers employ digital infrastructures and technologies to replace the city as a unique, inhabited, user-friendly urban place instead of an abstract space of advanced capitalism or “spatial fix.” Based on press releases, legal documents, and interviews conducted with smart-city executives, planners, technology developers, and residents, this chapter offers a humanities-centered analysis of the spatial inscriptions of strategic imaginations of urban futures and digital media.

In chapter 2, I analyze debates about re-placeing at the municipal scale. A key focus of this analysis is how different models of infrastructure deployment create visible geographies of digital inclusion and exclusion. I investigate the practice of re-placeing the city from the perspective of those who plan and implement digital infrastructure projects, municipal officials who oversee them, and the people who benefit from them as well as those who opt out of or are excluded from these efforts. Through the example of Google’s Fiber for Communities project in Kansas City, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri, I illustrate how processes of digital infrastructure implementation reveal polysemic experiences of the city as a place. Through interviews and participant observation of Google Fiber deployment and digital inclusion efforts in Kansas City, I offer an analysis of how infrastructure installation as urban renewal replaces the city and highlights conflicting affective experiences of infrastructure. This chapter investigates how digital connection is perceived as relevant among populations with differential mobilities and socioeconomic statuses and distinct experiences and attachments to home and the cities in which they live.

Through questionnaires with 210 navigation technology users (e.g., GPS, digital maps, and mobile navigation systems) and interviews with ten navigation technology users, chapter 3 identifies the ways that users understand their own spatial relations, conditions of and tactics for mobility, and embeddedness within urban space. One of the most common engagements with GPS is through online mapping tools and mobile
navigation technologies, yet we know very little about how these technologies are incorporated into everyday life, how they shape spatial relations, influence cognitive mappings of urban space, and contribute to the formation of a sense of place. Many scholars and critics have understood digital navigation technologies as enacting processes of alienation and abstraction and the disembedding or distancing of the digital media user from place. In contrast to popular assumptions about the distracted perception of space and place encouraged by digital navigation technologies, this chapter analyzes the ways in which navigation technology users are developing wayfinding strategies that reframe their image of the city, alter perceptions and practices of mobility, and re-embed themselves within urban environments.

Digital media texts, practices, and mobile technologies tend to represent and rescue the practice of “passing by” and particular ontologies or ways of being in the city. Chapter 4 examines how digital traces produced through locative media and geo-location technologies can be read as performative rather than precise and highlights some of the ways that cultural studies and humanities scholars can add value and insight to discussions of locative and location-based social media. Several of the projects discussed in this chapter make legible what is normally invisible, surface personal and/or collective memories and ontologies, and incorporate digital stories and situated knowledges into the practice of moving through the city. These examples evidence re-placing the city by urban residents or travelers at the scale of the street. The chapter begins with a brief examination of the ways in which people utilized early (and now defunct) locative media projects and continues with an analysis of more recent incarnations of location-based social media to examine shifts in digital storytelling and performances of place that are evident in these projects. Check-in and location-announcement services such as Foursquare and photographic social media such as Instagram are analyzed through participatory observation and textual and discourse analysis to understand how people imagine and express their sense of place through these services.

In the final case study, practices related to re-placing the city are investigated from the perspective of those who professionally program and fund placemaking activities in the United States as well as the locales that receive this funding and support. The chapter explores the role
and potential of digital technologies and practices in “creative placemaking” efforts. Through an investigation of organizations, artists, and cities that have undertaken creative placemaking projects, I evaluate the ways in which digital technologies and practices are imagined and implemented to “animate public and private spaces, rejuvenate structures and streetscapes, improve local business and public safety, and bring diverse people together to celebrate and inspire.” In addition, I offer reasons that digital technologies and practices are not being associated with and incorporated into creative placemaking endeavors.

Throughout these chapters I encourage the reader to consider digital placemaking in terms of how people employ digital technologies and practices in the performativity of place. I urge readers to reconsider their own mundane or professional uses of digital media in regard to placemaking and to directly reflect on the ways in which we become placemakers through our digital media use and non-use. In identifying and analyzing the power-geometries involved in re-placeing the city, this book suggests methods for investigating digital placemaking and moments when we should become more attuned to the places we create.