THE NEW URBAN SURREALISM - RESHAPING URBAN LANDSCAPES

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ABSTRACT

As emerging technologies become more and more present in our everyday life, the intersection of places and technology is reshaping the interaction with our surroundings and redefining what it means to live, work, and play in the modern world. From smart cities revolutionizing urban planning to augmented reality enhancing cultural heritage sites, the integration of technology into physical spaces creates opportunities and challenges. These advancements provoke critical questions: How do emerging technologies transform our sense of place? Do they enhance or erode human connection and identity tied to specific locations? Does this new state of things encourage and improve or degrade the way in which people interact in and with the urban public space? How do these changes influence the urban landscape? And most of all: how can we intervene in the flow of changes in order to shape joyful urban environments and places?

The emerging technologies are redefining public space, often blurring the limit between physical and digital experiences, and creating a new "surreality" breaking through at the disjunction between design and use of urban space. There is a certain area of research that, from our point of view, holds many answers in this regard, and that is the intersection between "the perceptible" and "the practicable". This area generates new critical situations between the practical and the imaginative, which can and should be used in the process of design and/or placemaking. It is this area that sheltered the ideal cities of Etienne-Louis Boullee and Claude-Nicolas Ledoux and all the other utopian ideas in the past, which now incubates a new way of viewing, organising, and using the space. But this junction point can be, at the same time, a messenger for the greatest drift or the most promising perspectives, a step into the culture of the new surrealism that emerged at the intertwining of urban space realm and technologies. It needs to be accompanied by a new way of critical thinking and tools, in order to engender quality places and joyful urban environments.

KEYWORDS _ *New place making, urban surreality, urban landscapes*

INTRODUCTION

Urban landscapes of today's cities are characterised by a plurality of overlapping dimensions. Traditionally, if we are to count only a few, there are the formal, the practical, the sensorial, and the temporal dimensions of space. As the emerging technologies are more and more present in our everyday life, a new, additional dimension has grown between the folds of urban landscapes, namely a generator of voluntary improbable spaces, of new territories, initiating new spatiality: the virtual dimension. As it unfolds in our cities, it's investing reality with supplementary qualities, amending our perception of space, neither is entirely fictional, nor merely real.

Today, our perception of space and place bears a shift from its traditional mechanisms, being influenced by the means and mechanisms of virtual perspective provided by digital instruments. As we come to perceive the urban landscape through the lens of virtual perspective, the physical boundaries of our environment become blurry, allowing for new multilayered exploration. The virtual perspective deepens the way we experience the city, but also inherently raises questions and even doubts regarding our perception of reality. From this point of view, it can be assumed that experiencing the city becomes a form of "urban surrealism", with uncertain boundaries and increasingly fluid and dynamic interactions between the observer and the environment that distort reality to a certain extent. A probable space adds to the usual pairing of lived space and perceived space experienced by the "users" of the city.

AN ADDITIONAL DIMENSION TO URBAN SPACE: THE URBAN SURREALISM

The integration of new technologies into everyday life, especially in the exploration of urban space, causes a "deformation" of reality, a temporary and partial separation from the known world, an excursion into the realm of the imaginary and the imagined. It is not just a disturbance, but an incursion, an immersion, a double-sided experience. It is just like an overlap between the real world and a duplicate, a human-created rendering, a mirror for reality, forged in the workshop of the imaginary.

The everyday use of new technologies to navigate public spaces shows intriguing parallels with how surrealists explored and depicted reality using their own unique methods, suggesting a need for further research. Everyday life and space are central notions to broader theories about society and urban landscapes, thus these notions are the starting point for researching the way new technologies change our perception and usage of public space.

In "*The Production of Space*" (1974) and in "*Critique of Everyday Life*" (1988), Henri Lefebvre explains the concept of everyday life as a socially constructed space in which people experience and engage with the world, and it is understood, to public space. In his vision, everyday life and the production of space are interconnected, as space is shaped by and through the everyday practices of individuals and groups. Everyday life is in turn the container of the production of space as a result of human activities (Lefebvre, 1974). It is a double-sided connection. The way people interact in urban public space shapes the urban space, and at the same time, the morphology of space influences the way it is perceived and used.

Lefebvre also considers that space consists of three interrelated dimensions: the perceived space, the conceived space, and the lived space. According to the author, the perceived space is the one that our senses experience and define, the conceived space is the abstract form that molds in the process of planning – it also carries a great deal of imaginary elements- and the lived space that refers to a subjective experience appendant to a cultural and social context. The perceived space and the lived space, as Lefebvre defines them, bear the direct impact of the emerging technologies tools that insinuate into the individual and collective experience, notably impacting the usage of the urban space and, as a result, taking part in urban landscapes modelling. For the purpose of this paper, these three dimensions of space will be used as reference.

Taking into consideration the three dimensions of space mentioned above, and having implied that there is a new dimension of space part of everyday life, namely the virtual dimension, and that it uses digital tools similarly to how surrealists used their techniques, an inquiry into the matter of the paralllel between surrealism and the new virtual dimension of urban public space, is required. Also, in order to establish that parallel, the relationship between the subconscious - as root of surrealism's "products" – and imagination – as catalyst for the new virtual dimension of space - should be part of the inquiry.

As scientific research shows, imagination is not a purely conscious act but is deeply intertwined with subconscious processes, providing both a source of creativity and a method for the subconscious to influence everyday life. In "The Poetics of Space" (1958), Gaston Bachelard conveys that imagination allows us to explore our experience with space in an emotional note, especially in the context of everyday spaces. He also implies that imagination is both the dynamic force and the transformative process that brings to life both conscious and unconscious experiences, enabling people to engage with their inner worlds and reshape their perceived space. Moreover, he considers imagination a bridge that connects the conscious and the unconscious. As we experience space, we project onto it and internalise it through our memories, our dreams – roorted in the subconscious- and we reshape it at once with our own way of symbolic meaning (Lacan, 1966), thus transforming it through our imagination in the tangible, lived space. The places we live in or visit are given meaning and emotional weight based on how we imagine them. Merleau-Ponty approached the idea phenomenologically, establishing a link between embodiment, perception, and the subconscious (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). He argued that imagination is not just a mental process but a bodily experience that shapes and is shaped by sensory perception. His phenomenological approach highlights how the subconscious mind affects our perception of the world, which in turn influences the ways we use our imagination. For Merleau-Ponty, the imagination arises from the lived bodily experience of the world and of space. Orientation, and distance and scale estimation are key elements to the bodily experience of space. Equally worthy of being taken into consideration concerning the matter of imagination, space, and everyday life is the concept of conceptual blending explored by Gérard Fauconnier and Mark Turner in their book "The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities". Conceptual blending or conceptual integration theory explains a cognitive process that creates meaning and solves problems by blending different concepts or mental spaces. The process of blending is inherently imaginative, as it requires individuals to create new combinations of ideas that may not resort to direct experience. In this sense, the imagination plays a central role in the process (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002). Gérard Fauconnier and Mark Turner refer to mental spaces as temporary cognitive structures that help organize information and experiences. In addition to Fauconnier and Turner's theories, in "Theories in Cognitive Psychology", Solso R. explores the cognitive processes that support imagination, treating it as a mental construct that interacts with other cognitive functions such as memory and perception (Solso, 1974). He emphasizes that imagination involves the reconstruction of memories, often using fragments of past experiences to create new and novel mental representations, linking it to the unconscious. Solso also discusses mental representations that can be thought of as mental constructs of space, containing visual memories or even abstract representations recomposed by the imagination, making the leap to the concepts of mental maps discussed by Kevin Lynch emphasising on urban space undestanding and usage, in his book "Image of the city"(1960).

The exponents of the surrealist movement, on the other hand, explored the subconscious bringing it into the lived space and using strings of it as lenses for the perception in everyday life. They employed a variety of instruments, techniques, and methods to resort to mental adventures and bypass the constraints of rational thought. These "instruments" were mostly experimental, like automatic drawing or automatic writing, collage, the exquisite corpse ("cadavre esquise"), photomontage, dream analysis, found objects (ready-made). They were bringing unconscious elements to the surface and spilling them into reality through their works. Surrealists generally considered that their exercise was

not meant to be just a form of artistic expression but a way of experiencing the mundane. In the "First Manifesto of Surrealism", André Breton suggests that the principles of surrealism should extend into everyday practice in order to have a more authentic, meaningful, spontaneous, liberated, and deep experience, stating that the subconscious is a gateway to a deeper understanding of life. Breton also highlighted the importance of chance and spontaneity in Surrealism, which could transform the ordinary into something extraordinary. By embracing chance, unexpected juxtapositions, and randomicity, Surrealists sought to uncover hidden meanings and truths that would not be visible through the lens of rational thought. Everyday life, in this view, could be a surreal experience if approached with the right tools and mindset. Breton's First Manifesto of Surrealism invites a radical reimagining of life, where the boundaries between the conscious and unconscious, the rational and irrational, dissolve, offering a framework for seeing the world through a new lens. The tools and techniques of the surrealists were never extensively used by the public, but only by a group of people who were part of the surrealist movement, and even fewer of those used those tools on an everyday basis. Moreover, the usage of those techniques and tools had the purpose of creating art or of embodying art into everyday life, and weren't utilitarian. Emerging technologies infiltrated everyday life with the primary purpose of being useful; for better mobility, better communication, better navigation, faster and better dissemination of useful information. These new tools are used on a large scale and are easily accessible. Although these new digital tools had the primary purpose of being useful, they ended up being surrealistic due to the way they appeal to the individual and collective imagination. They make invisible layers of reality visible; they overlap different dimensions of space, they distort scale, they blur the boundaries between palpable reality and imagination just like the exponents of the surrealist movement recommended in their own time. Moreover, there are interesting correlations between the surrealistic "instruments" and the emerging technologies used in public space today.

In conclusion, the Surrealists brought into the concrete and tangible world threads from the subconscious, an ambiguous layer, separate from reality but not completely dissociated from it, still belonging to the inner life and marked by subjectivity through their works of art. In a similar way, the usage of virtual instruments in everyday life brings an additional imaginative layer to the concrete. Moreover, these new instruments belong to the social landscape impacting the perceived space and lived space through collective usage, moving the subjective surrealist experience further. From the simple navigation apps that double spatiality of the physical world to the more complicated constructions meant to supplement the incomplete sensorial navigation of the disabled, today's everyday life virtual tools decisively influence perception, distance assessment, memory, the construction of mental maps, and finally the production of space in a melange between imagination and reality. The new dimension of 'Urban Surrealism' facilitates the transfer of informational strings from the virtual world, a world with a consistent imaginative component, into the concrete everyday life and into the urban public space, reshaping it.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES RESHAPING URBAN LANDSCAPES

Jeff Malpas tells us that the perception of space is directly correlated with a subject's ability to act, to orient themselves starting from the position of their body. Space is therefore understood/assimilated through movement, and movement is related to reference points that articulate space as a trajectory. Space can thus primarily be associated with the notion of dimensionality (Malpas 2018). Urban public space is an environment of activity, understanding, and appreciation of inherent distances. According to Malpas, movement, gesture, and orientation are essentially means of experiencing the purely spatial dimensionality, which, through their convergence, create a certain abstract representation of space. This is not about an orthogonal projection but rather a subjective representation of space resulting from direct experience. This idea is complemented by Kevin Lynch's observations regarding how space is understood and translated into a specific language depending on the activities it hosts, as well as the way mental maps are composed. Different urban contexts demand different activities

that generate a specific vocabulary. Kevin Lynch mentions concepts such as paths, nodes, districts, and landmarks (Lynch, 1960). These mark a shift in activity that calls for a way of assimilating space on a psychological level. These same notions find their correspondent in the language of new technologies used in public space. There is a specific language containing the concepts and notions mentioned above, which were assumed by and are inherent to the emerging technologies of today, facilitating the interaction between the users and the public space. In *"The Structure of Urban Space"*, G.T. Moore explores the dynamic relationship between urban space, public spaces, and mental maps, drawing on Kevin Lynch's theory of mental maps. He underscores how public spaces, as centers of social interaction, play a key role in shaping cognitive representations of the urban environment. These spaces, particularly when designed thoughtfully, help individuals orient themselves, navigate through the city, and form coherent mental maps. He explains that these cognitive representations are crucial for how individuals navigate the urban environment. Mental maps are not just about geographic or physical space, but are greatly influenced by emotional and social experiences, as interaction with public space contributes significantly to these representations(Moore, 2000). The way virtual tools contribute to the constitution of cognition, representations, and mental maps must be taken into consideration. There is a very intriguing three-sided relationship between the reshaping of phisical public space, virtual representations of it used by new technologies, and individual and collective mental representations of the same public space. Taking a step further, we must look over Rob Kitchin's research on the rise of big data, open data, and data infrastructures and how they influence public space perception and digital representations of space. Kitchin talks about how smart cities and urban data infrastructures use data to create real-time maps of urban spaces. These maps are real-time digital representations built from data generated by people's movements, behaviors, and interactions with the urban environment (Kitchin, 2014). In this sense, we can assume that as digital infrastructures became more embedded in urban everyday life, a new way of composing mental maps of urban space takes place, one that takes on a collective scale. These digital maps are very dynamic as they are constantly updated by real-time data. They are not static, they are not personal, and they influence perception and interaction with public space. As the perception of public space is no longer shaped only by bodily experience and the cognitive processes, but also by data-driven representations, mental maps of urban space become increasingly mediated by virtual tools. Nonetheless, as these digital models represent real-time patterns of human activity that directly influence how people navigate space and interact with it, we can make the assumption that they also make a great contribution to reshaping urban spaces.

In conclusion, inherent to the experience of public space in everyday life, there is a constant structuring of mental representation of space, a constant constitution of mental maps, an ongoing conceptual blending of perceived information, memories, and abstract representations, recomposed by imagination. As we explore urban space in our everyday practices, we perceive and live space in a new paradigm. We perceive space – a bodily experience - through our senses, wearing our own conscious and unconscious lenses (memory, dreams, wishes), and the new lens of emerging technologies that enables a simultaneous juxtaposition with an abstract, virtual, conceived space – the space of maps, digital infrastructures and augmented realities. We live space by spatial orientation and dimensionality, movement, gesture and acting accompanied and guided by that same virtual conceived space that alters our behaviour in public space, changes the way we navigate and interact with our environment, and inherent to that, takes part in the reshaping of space, as part of the two-way relationship between living space and reshaping it.

Interactive Virtual Applications in Public Space

Digital applications in everyday life have a profound effect on the construction of mental maps, the interaction with public space, and the reshaping of public space through usage patterns. By providing real-time data, social information, and interactive features, these technologies influence

how individuals perceive, engage with, and navigate urban landscapes. The digital tools actively transform the ways in which public space is used and understood, creating not only new social dynamics, perceptions, and mental representations of the city but in a more comprehensive way, a new dimension of urban space.

Table 1: Impact of digital applications on perception, mental mapping and usage of public space

Digital Application	Impact on Mental Maps	Impact on Public Space Interaction	Impact on Perception of Public Space
Navigation and Mapping Apps	- Shape dynamic mental maps - Narrow or extend users' mental maps by alternatives	- Influence decisions on the route - Alter the flow of pedestrians	- Make certain areas more salient - Perception of space as dynamic and flow-driven
Location-Based Services (LBS)	- Introduce new landmarks, nodes, and points of interest based on user ratings and reviews. - Highlight specific spaces, altering familiarity with areas.	- Encourage visits to highly-rated or trending public spaces, increasing foot traffic. - Shape behavioral patterns in public spaces by providing options	- Create socially constructed maps, changing the perceived value of space by means of collective imput. - Influence how public spaces are valued and symbolised
Social Media	- Shape mental maps by contributing to the visibility of specific public spaces - Highlight spaces creating virtual landmarks in public spaces.	- Influence where people choose to engage socially or culturally - Increase activity in popular spaces due to social media-driven visibility.	- Frame public spaces as more desirable or significant based on social media visibility. - Perception of public space as interesting, aesthetically driven, or linked to social status.
Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR)	- Add digital layers to physical space, reshaping mental maps through virtual content (e.g., games, historical data). - Alter understanding of the environment by creating new virtual overlays.	- Encourage exploration and engagement with public spaces in new ways, adding layers of digital interaction. - Shift the focus of public space usage toward virtual experiences.	- Blur the boundaries between physical and virtual reality, enhancing the appeal of public spaces. - Public spaces enriched with digital content become more engaging and dynamic.
Smart City Technologies	- Provide real-time data on various public space conditions (e.g., pollution, noise, crowd density), affecting users' mental maps. - Alter mental models of space based on environmental factors and sensor data.	- Change the behavior of users in public space based on environmental feedback - Enable more adaptive use of public spaces based on real-time conditions.	- Influence the perception of public spaces by enhancing or diminishing their appeal (e.g., low pollution, safety). - Data-driven perception of space.

Different types of digital applications shape our interactions with and perceptions of public spaces. These technologies integrate both real-time and socially constructed data (interactive navigation software, social media), creating a new imaginative and social layer grown between the ply of urban fabric. This new dimension is both an overcoat to dimensionality and a generator of gesture and movement, initiating new spatiality. It duplicates a space of social construct and interaction, and also reshapes the lived space. It challenges the perceived space by adding to the visual and auditory landscapes and enhances it by means of memory and imagination. This new dimension of the urban space has a great influence on mental representation, adding new elements that have to be integrated into the process of conceptual blending, extending individual and collective reality. It appeals to imagination, memory, and symbolic representation, not resorting to direct experience but creating a duplicate of it in some context.

A Surrealist Approach to the Urban Landscape

Although all digital insertions into the public space of cities and everyday life have a certain surrealistic component, pouring elements from the imaginary and putting them at the service of a new way of perceiving and using space, those that most closely resemble the traditional tools and effects of surrealism are the AR immersive ones and their subcategories. Surrealism sought to explore the unconscious mind, challenge conventional perceptions, and transform everyday reality into something extraordinary. When applied to urban public spaces through AR technologies, the surrealistic principles can create experiences that reshape how individuals perceive the urban landscape and interact with the public space. Dissolving the line between the real and the imagined, often through dreamlike or irrational juxtapositions, AR applications, similarly to surrealist original tools, create a hybrid space- being neither completely perceived space, nor purely lived space, and to some extent bearing the characteristics of conceptual space - where the real and virtual coexist, overlaying digital objects, narratives, and experiences onto the physical environment. It is an in-between space of latent possibility. Conceptual blending of imaginary and perceived environment elements, experiencing urban space assisted by AR tools, can disrupt one's ordinary perception of reality. Distorting familiar objects and landscapes is one of the central tenets of surrealism. For example, a familiar urban structure could be transformed into a surreal version of itself, allowing users to experience these spaces in ways they have never imagined before. Scale and perspective are easily manipulated, creating unconventional landscapes and realities. Cryptic symbols, hidden meanings, or dreamlike sequences arouse the imagination of the city dweller and tap into the individual unconscious and sometimes also address collective memory. By presenting disjointed views of the environment, combining different times, places, or elements, digital experiences fragment reality, breaking space and reassembling it in an imaginary, surprising, and sometimes disorienting way. Through the insertions of augmented reality into everyday life, Bodelaire's detached "flâneur" strolls could be transformed into the most thrilling urban surrealistic adventures. André Breton's claims from the "First Manifesto of Surrealism" have actually become reality. Surrealism has become, through today's emerging technologies, a way of approaching life; it has been extended to everyday practices. This additional surrealistic dimension of space has its own structure, nodes, and landmarks, and can intervene in reshaping urban public space. Within the heterogeneous fabric of contemporary cities, there exist disjunctive zones, voids, and areas of contact between urban tissues characterized by differing morphologies and patterns of life. These include forgotten spaces, residual areas, wastelands, nameless sites, and secondary elements of the urban environment. Although secondary in terms of scale or functional usage, they are nonetheless significant due to their role as latent reserves within the organic structure of the city. In these kinds of places, the surrealist dimension can make its way more prominent. It can punctually or temporarily reshape microspaces into landmarks, blur limits and disjunctions, ennoble voids with potentiality, giving back to the city spaces that were lost, disintegrated, or useless by adding layers of virtual reality to their physicality, investing symbolic meaning to their memory. By repositioning them in the mental representations of the users and through that changing the way they are used, these spaces will unavoidably be reshaped. Any change, be it even punctual, of a mental representation of a place will nevertheless change the whole mental map containing it, restructuring routes, investing landmarks, transforming the scale, and distorting distances.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, augmented reality does not merely add a digital layer to the physical world; it reconfigures the cognitive and emotional maps through which we navigate urban life. By infusing forgotten or marginal spaces with symbolic, affective, and narrative depth, AR becomes a contemporary tool for reimagining the city through a surrealist lens—disrupting the habitual, reactivating memory, and amplifying the imaginative potential of place. In doing so, it transforms both the perception and use

of public space, not only enriching the user's experience but also subtly rewriting the collective urban imaginary. Surrealism, once confined to canvases and manifestos, now finds its fullest expression in the dynamic, participatory fabric of the augmented city.

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