

# 3. Hybrid Space

The previous chapter traced how social media practices circulate art and influence production by co-authorship and participatory modes. This chapter shifts the lens from art to space, examining how the social production of space has changed due to the introduction of digital technologies, in general, and social media, in particular. To do so, I refer to the term of Adriana de Souza e Silva, Hybrid Space, that names a condition in which digital and physical are no longer separable domains but coextensive arrangements: “a hybrid space occurs when one no longer needs to go out of physical space to get in touch with digital environments” (de Souza e Silva 2006: 264). I revisit this concept from a socio-spatial angle.

To develop this argument, the chapter differentiates among three analytical levels, each of which examines the differences between hybrid and non-hybrid spatial production. At the most fundamental level, **structural dynamics** describe how differently hybrid space is constituted through everyday practices. Building on this, **cultural grammars** highlight how people navigating hybrid spaces often behave similarly in ways observed in their navigation of digital spaces and social media, such as creating filter bubbles or promoting virality. Finally, **spatial logics**, drawing on Löw and Knoblauch’s theory of spatial figures, explain how hybrid production of space becomes spatialised within configurations or figures of networks, territories, and places (Knoblauch and Löw 2025). This threefold framework allows Hybrid Space to be approached as simultaneously produced, lived, and spatialised.

### 3.1 Genealogy & Terminology: From Cyberspace to Hybrid Space

We live in Hybrid Spaces. People carry connected devices, such as smartphones, watches, fitness trackers, Bluetooth tags, and other wearables, that facilitate everyday navigation and communication: checking bus times, arranging meetings with friends, avoiding traffic, and coordinating plans. Even without a device, most are within range of wireless networks.

Nearly two decades ago, Adriana de Souza e Silva introduced the term Hybrid Space, in *Space and Culture*, defining it as a social space created by mobile connectivity. Hybrid Spaces, she argued, are “mobile spaces, created by constant movement of users who carry portable devices continuously connected to the Internet and to other users” (2006, p. 262). With mobility, sociability, and connectivity converging, “the boundaries between digital and physical spaces no longer exist” (2006, p. 271). A hybrid space occurs “when one no longer needs to go out of physical space to get in touch with digital environments” (2006, p. 264).

This formulation directly contested early 2000s imaginaries of cyberspace as a distinct and separate domain. Popular accounts often described people as “entering” digital realms to socialize (Bell and Kennedy 2000), while critics feared that media use would detach individuals from their immediate surroundings (Katz and Aakhus 2006). Sympathetic explorations, such as Mizuko Ito’s notion of “tele-cocoons” and “camping” (2003), demonstrate how mobile media can simultaneously privatize and intensify public experiences, even while still tending to frame the digital as separate (Itō et al. 2006).

Early internet use still treated the physical and digital as distinct. The tethered desktop reinforced this divide: one had to “log off” the street to “log on” to the Net. With the arrival of mobile and locative media, this dualism began to collapse.

While de Souza e Silva highlighted that “a hybrid space is not constructed by technology” (2006, p. 266), but rather through social practices mediated by devices, much of the debate still leaned on a media-technological lineage (Campbell 2019; Akker 2018) intending that the hybrid space was brought about by the technological affordances of the time.

The genealogy of Hybrid Space reaches beyond this media-technical lineage. Other traditions emphasized how mediation has long produced space, as seen in postcards and novels in the nineteenth century, and in photography and cinema in the twentieth, each blurring the boundaries between presence and representation. Taken together, this genealogy shows that Hybrid Space is not simply a technical artifact of mobile devices. It is a socio-spatial condition, historically anticipated in earlier media, intensified through mobile and locative infrastructures.

The original concept, however, reflected the technological moment of its time: tiny screens, costly 2G data, call-and-text domination, and early GPS experiments. Since then, the ecosystem has expanded dramatically: smartphones with embedded location-awareness (from iPhone 3G onward), a myriad of social and locative apps (Foursquare, Grindr, Instagram, TikTok), AR games (Pokémon GO), navigation platforms, innovative infrastructure, and sensor-rich “smart” environments.

Crucially, de Souza e Silva (2006) framed Hybrid Space around three key elements, then highlighted in a more recent text (De Souza E Silva et al. 2025): mobility (the movement of people and information), connectivity (to social and informational networks), and sociability (communication between users).

De Souza and Silvia have published several articles recently, including an updated definition of Hybrid Space (De Souza E Silva et al. 2025). First, the triad has pluralized: mobilities (including immobilities and moorings), connectivities (across diverse portable and embedded systems), and sociabilities (from peer-

to-peer to institutionally structured interactions). Second, Hybrid Space must be recognized as a stratified and power-structured entity. Uneven access, awareness, and agency (or lack of it) shape who participates, how, and to whose benefit: from rural connectivity gaps to software-sorted urban life, from surveillance in the “sensor society”, to corporate scripting of movement and encounter (De Souza E Silva et al. 2025)

We now live in Hybrid Spaces, where digital connectivity and physical presence are deeply entangled. Nevertheless, this condition is unevenly distributed. Some people are hyperconnected, carrying multiple devices and seamlessly navigating between online and offline contexts (Parisi 2015). Others remain on the margins of this connectivity, excluded by the digital divide—whether due to economic barriers, lack of infrastructure, or limited digital literacy (Indaco and Manovich 2016). These inequalities are often spatialized: urban areas tend to concentrate the infrastructures, platforms, and practices that sustain hybrid spaces, while rural contexts may experience patchier or slower integration. Importantly, hybrid space is not reducible to social media alone. Although our present discussion focuses on social media as a central case, hybrid spaces encompass a broader range of applications and technologies that mediate everyday life. Hybrid Space must be understood as relational, multi-figural, and stratified—a hybrid soup in which the ingredients of physical and digital can no longer be disentangled, yet are distributed and contested unevenly.

To clarify the conceptual framework, it is helpful to distinguish between three levels at which hybrid space can be analysed. At the most fundamental level, **structural dynamics** describe how hybrid space is constituted through relational arrangements, platform rules, and algorithmic acceleration. Building on this, **cultural grammars** capture how hybrid space is inhabited and lived through practices such as self-curation, affective attachments, or the fear of missing out. Ultimately, **spatial logics elucidate** how hybrid spaces become spatialized

according to the logic of specific “figures,” or configurations, such as networks, territories, and places. This differentiation prevents conceptual slippage: structural dynamics explain the mechanisms of production, cultural regimes illuminate lived experience, and spatial logics show how these processes crystallize into recognizable forms of social organization.

### 3.2 Hybrid Space in Everyday Spatial Production and Its Structural Dynamics

Hybrid Space, as conceptualized by Adriana de Souza e Silva (2006), is intended as a social space (De Souza E Silva 2004). To develop this notion further, this book adopts a relational definition of space, in which space is understood as a set of dynamic relationships between people and objects. It is constituted through spacing, the positioning and relating of people and social goods (benches, façades, screens, apps), and synthesis, the integration of these relations into a coherent spatial arrangement in perception and practice (Löw 2016, 188). These processes are continuous and overlapping, encompassing perception, experience, and action as well as structuring and understanding. Spatial arrangements are thus not static but socially negotiated, tied to bodies of knowledge about appropriate behaviour, the meanings embedded in spaces, and the purposes they serve. Significantly, these arrangements are continually reshaped through perception, imagination, and memory, and mediated within broader social and technological contexts (Löw 2016). Both spacing and synthesis are therefore always shaped by shared and contested stocks of spatial knowledge.

As Castillo Ulloa et al. (2023) argue, spatial knowledge encompasses the ways individuals interpret and form connections to space, whether through enlivened experience or mediated representation via narratives, media, and platforms (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2023). This mediation is not unique to the social media era. The coexistence of physical space and mediated

representation has a long history. What has changed with Hybrid Space is the speed, intensity, and formatting of these circulations. Social media platforms not only disseminate spatial knowledge but also transform it in real-time, enabling interaction, commentary, and reconfiguration, and doing so according to algorithmic and aesthetic logics that privilege some practices while obscuring others.

To further elaborate on these concepts, I propose an example. Consider a teenager in Naples waiting for friends in a piazza while scrolling TikTok videos of an art installation in Paris. Three arrangements are synthesized at once: (i) the immediate piazza, with its cafés, passers-by, and waiting routines; (ii) the TikTok interface, with its filters, captions, and interaction norms; and (iii) the imagined installation in Paris, pieced together from short clips, commentary, and trending hashtags. A pose that circulates online as part of this installation may be amplified by TikTok's algorithms, gaining visibility among users with similar interests and becoming a recognizable part of a visitor's routine. When reenacted on site in Paris, however, the same gesture may clash with the expectations of co-present publics, prompting new negotiations of behaviour.

This hybrid synthesis blurs the distinction between “lived” and “mediated.” Once spatial practices circulate through chats, maps, reels, and memories, they can no longer be disentangled from originals. The metaphor of the hybrid soup captures this well: ingredients of spatial knowledge are mixed, accelerated, and recirculated in ways that make separation impossible. Even mundane practices—such as waiting in a piazza or riding the subway—are shaped by prior encounters with mediated information, including schedules, images, or viral trends, illustrating how hybrid space permeates everyday life.

What distinguishes contemporary Hybrid Space, then, is a set of **structural dynamics** that organize its everyday production:

+ **Multiplying.** Hybrid experience rarely rests on a single arrangement. People inhabit multiple spaces simultaneously—streets and screens, feeds, experienced in parallel rather than sequentially. The teenager in Naples does not simply wait in a piazza; they are inhabiting several spaces at once. Their attention alternates between the rhythms of the street, the streams of TikTok, and the imagined installation in Paris. These layers do not unfold sequentially but in parallel, creating an entangled experience in which the bustle of the piazza is interpreted alongside algorithmically curated images from afar.

+ **Hybrid negotiation.** Spatial meanings are never stable but continually renegotiated through on site and digital mediation. Tags, poses, and check-ins circulate across platforms, subtly reshaping spatial arrangements. The meaning of both the piazza and the Paris installation is continuously renegotiated through this mediated interaction. A pose seen repeatedly online becomes a suggested script for behaviour, but whether it is embraced, mocked, or ignored in Paris depends on the reactions of on-site negotiations.

+ **Stratified access.** Hybrid Space is not equally accessible. Differentials of literacy, connectivity, and algorithmic filtering generate uneven stocks of spatial knowledge. Not everyone in the piazza shares the same hybrid awareness. At the same time, one teenager scrolls through TikTok, while others without smartphones, data plans, or familiarity with the platform experience the space differently. For them, the art installation in Paris may not even enter their perceptual field. Hybrid Space here is layered but also stratified: some participants can draw on digitally mediated spatial knowledge, while others are excluded, reinforcing inequalities of participation.

### **+ Platform rules as structuring**

**agents.** Platforms act as infrastructures of visibility. Their aesthetics, interaction grammars, and metrics script what counts as legitimate, desirable, or valuable. TikTok's interface AI driven recommendation system and conventions subtly script what is visible and valuable. The teenager is not encountering a neutral record of the Paris installation but a highly curated feed of short clips, filters, and interaction grammars. These conventions determine not only how the installation is represented but also how it is imagined and possibly reenacted.

**+ Algorithmic acceleration.** Platform logics amplify and normalize spatial practices at high speed. What begins as a singular performance, such as a pose in front of an artwork, can quickly crystallize into a widely shared routine, naturalizing certain behaviors while erasing others. Once TikTok's algorithms amplify a gesture, it spreads quickly and acquires normative weight. A pose that might have been performed only once in Paris can be algorithmically highlighted, repeated by thousands, and sedimented as the "expected" way to engage with the installation. When the teenager in Naples later visits Paris, they may feel compelled to perform it, reproducing a routine that originated less from the museum itself than from its accelerated circulation online. However, this normativity is unstable: trends have a finite lifespan. By evening, a new filter may eclipse yesterday's pose; what seemed obligatory at noon is obsolete by night. Hybrid routines are therefore not only accelerated but also ephemeral, continually overwritten by the rhythms of updates, seasons, and shifting platform priorities.

### 3.3 Cultural Grammars of Hybrid Spaces

The previous section identified the structural dynamics of Hybrid Space. These describe how spatial production itself changes when digital and physical registers become entwined. How spacing and synthesis unfold simultaneously across streets and screens, how infrastructures and literacies stratify access, and how algorithmic acceleration reshapes the rhythms of circulation.

Alongside these dynamics, however, Hybrid Space is also shaped by a second layer: **cultural grammars**. These do not describe how space is produced, but rather how it is lived and experienced once it is produced. They capture the translation of online cultural practices, identity curation, algorithmic clustering, anticipation, and virality into spatial practices. What begins as patterns of participation within social media feeds becomes entangled with how people navigate, value, and contest urban environments.

In this sense, cultural grammars reveal how familiar digital phenomena, such as filter bubbles (Pariser 2011) or viral scripts, migrate into the spatial field, structuring the everyday experience of Hybrid Space.

✦ **Filter bubbles → Parochial publics.** Digital platforms group users into algorithmically defined clusters, reinforcing existing preferences and limiting exposure to differences (Pariser 2011). In Hybrid Space, this clustering spills into urban practice: people converge on venues and districts that are surfaced by their feeds, creating *parochial publics* (Lofland 1998). The result is a narrowing of encounters in public life, where even formally open spaces, such as squares, parks, or museums, are populated by segmented publics who share mediated stocks of knowledge but rarely intersect with others outside their algorithmic bubble.

✦ **Trends** → **Spatial scripts.** Trends are a digital logic in which formats replicate across platforms through repetition, imitation, and rapid circulation. In Hybrid Space, this logic materialises as *spatial scripts*. Infinity rooms, mirrored corridors, and immersive pop-ups are designed less as unique cultural forms than as replicable, shareable templates calibrated for circulation and consumption. Visitors, in turn, enter such spaces with expectations already shaped by images they have encountered online, reproducing poses and gestures as if following a script. The logic of the trend thus directly informs both spatial design and embodied practice.

✦ **Virality** → **Feedback loops of attendance.** Online, popularity is self-reinforcing: what is liked and shared becomes more visible, viral, which attracts further engagement. In Hybrid Space, this logic translates into patterns of attendance. A trending artwork or café attracts an initial wave of visitors whose posts generate additional visibility, drawing larger crowds and reinforcing the cycle. These feedback loops blur the boundary between digital attention and physical presence, and they are increasingly influencing cultural programming as institutions that adjust to what performs well online.

✦ **Self-curation and identity work.** On social media, users curate profiles and feeds to present carefully staged identities. In hybrid conditions, this practice extends into spatial experience. A selfie, geotag, or short video is not only documentation but an act of incorporation, weaving places into the narrative of self. Spaces are increasingly navigated with an eye toward how they can be appropriated for identity production, turning public settings into resources for self-performance. In this way, identity work and spatial practice intersect (Kozinets et al. 2017).

✦ **Logics of visibility and invisibility.** Online, visibility is structured by algorithmic surfacing and recommendation systems: some content is amplified while other content remains unseen. In hybrid conditions, this asymmetry is translated into the spatial field. Specific sites become hyper-visible through geotagging, hashtags, and recommendations, while others are rendered invisible, absent from feeds, maps, and searches. These uneven regimes of visibility do not simply reflect individual choices but reproduce wider power asymmetries, privileging sites and publics that align with platform logics while marginalising others. Hybrid Space is therefore not only shaped by what is seen but also by what remains unseen.

Taken together, these **cultural grammars** illustrate how the experiential layer of Hybrid Space is structured by the migration of online logics into urban practice.

### 3.4 Spatial Logics of Hybrid Space

Distinct spatial logics organize Hybrid Space. To capture this dimension, it is helpful to turn to the work of Martina Löw and Hubert Knoblauch, who describe contemporary society as undergoing a broad *refiguration of spaces*. Against the idea of globalisation, they propose refiguration, a restructuring in which multiple spatial orders overlap, collide, and coexist. Global trade routes, digital infrastructures, communication networks, and territorial produce a complex landscape of competing logics. Within this framework, Löw and Knoblauch propose four “spatial figures”—territory, network, trajectory, and place—as ideal types that make visible how different orders of space coexist..

✦ **Territorial space** emphasizes enclosure, boundedness, and exclusion, seen in entities such as borders, gated communities, or school districts.

- + **Network space** is structured around connections and flows, rather than contiguity, enabling relations across distance through infrastructures such as logistics systems.
- + **Trajectorial space** highlights mobility and sequencing, following the paths of bodies, goods, or signals across time and space.
- + **Place** is marked by situated co-presence and symbolic attachment, created through shared rituals and practices.

These figures are not mutually exclusive. They coexist, overlap, and often conflict with one another. Hybrid Space, with its digital-physical entanglements, is precisely a setting where these different logics interweave.

In its early formulations, Hybrid Space was typically understood as a manifestation of *network space*. De Souza e Silva (2006), for instance, described it as a mobile, networked environment in which users remain connected to each other and to digital platforms through location-aware devices. In this interpretation, the network is mobile, suggesting that Hybrid Space was enacted through the trajectories of digitally equipped bodies moving through the city, thereby bringing into play the spatial figure of the trajectorial space as well as digital equipped body moving.

However, reducing Hybrid Space to either a network or a trajectory risks oversimplification. Every day practices increasingly demonstrate that hybrid arrangements involve other spatial logics. A square that becomes visible through TikTok trends, a café labeled as “cozy” on Google Maps, or a co-working space recommended by an algorithm are not experienced as unbounded networks, but as *places*, emphasizing the place-making agency of spatial production in hybrid spaces (Parisi 2015). Mobile communication and social media imbue locations with symbolic and affective value, transforming

them into intimate environments of memory, identity, and attachment. A square in Naples becomes not just a meeting point but a setting charged with shared digital narratives; an art installation in Paris acquires meaning through viral poses and hashtags. Digital practices—such as tagging, sharing, and archiving—enhance the symbolic density of place, layering memory and recognition onto physical environments.

At the same time, information and preselection create an experience of space that is pre-filtered, de facto relating to the logic of *territory*.

**Mobile territories.** To capture these emergent conditions, I propose the notion of *mobile territories*: digitally mediated zones whose boundaries are drawn not by walls but by algorithms, ratings, and social cues. Unlike fixed enclosures, mobile territories are fluid, enacted in movement, and recalibrated as data streams shift. They are nonetheless powerful: they steer mobility and sort publics. AI Filtering or active pre-selection, whether through search engines, mapping services, or recommendation systems, translate into invisible thresholds of belonging and exclusion. A neighbourhood, café, or exhibition may thus be experienced as a personalized territory, curated by the logics of digital mediation. Often, territorial and place-based logics converge to produce what Lyn Lofland called *parochial spaces*—environments defined by familiarity, shared norms, and predictable social interaction (Lofland 1998). In hybrid conditions, parochiality is no longer tied to stable communities but emerges through digital curation. Hashtags, likes, and ratings guide the public toward bounded spaces where they can expect cultural alignment and minimize unpredictability. The result is a form of *digitally cultivated parochialism*: mobile-territories that feel safe, familiar, and homogeneous, even when situated within larger, heterogeneous urban settings.

Hybrid Space, then, cannot be reduced to a single spatial figure. It retains the connective potential of networks, enacted through trajectories of movement, while also incorporating the boundary-making tendencies of territory and the symbolic richness of place. The result is a spatial condition best understood as a *composite of spatial figures*, continuously reconfigured through the interplay of infrastructures, algorithms, and everyday practice.

### 3.5 Implications for Design and Architecture

If Hybrid Space is organized by the logics described above, what does this mean for the practice of design and architecture? Too often, the response has been limited to surface adaptations, treating hybrid conditions as an aesthetic trend rather than as a socio-spatial transformation that demands critical engagement.

**From Instagrammability to Design Logics:** A dominant response has been the pursuit of “Instagrammability,” where spaces are engineered for instant capture, circulation, and recognition. As Alexandra Lange observes, “the message has to be immediate, like a ready-made slogan” (Lange 2014). This imperative simplifies architecture for screen consumption, reducing complex environments to photogenic silhouettes and color-coded gestures. Tom Wilkinson critiques this tendency as flattening architecture into “selfie stage sets,” where visual props displace functional or experiential depth (Wilkinson 2015). Fiocco and Pistone extend this critique by reading such sleek attractions as neoliberal commodities, which are calibrated for circulation among paying publics while excluding those without the necessary resources, access, or digital literacy to participate (Fiocco and Pistone 2019).

In recent years, so-called *Instagram museums* have opened in many cities. Their interiors consist of brightly colored sets, each designed around a viral aesthetic: ball pits, neon slogans, and mirrored corridors. Visitors queue not for an exhibition

but for the chance to generate content, paying for timed entry slots. The site functions more as a monetized infrastructure for image production than as a cultural venue. Those unable to afford admission or unwilling to participate online are excluded entirely from participation. Such buildings are not museums in any traditional sense—they are architectural apparatuses for algorithmic visibility.

Designing with media in mind is not a new concept. Hugo's (1831) warning that "this will kill that," Venturi and Scott Brown's studies of the roadside "duck" (1972), and McLuhan's framing of media as environmental extensions (1974) all pointed to the ways design and communication intertwine. What distinguishes the current moment, however, is not the entanglement itself but the narrowness of its architectural translation. Instagrammability is too often pursued as an end in itself: a stylistic add-on that treats architecture as a commodity in the attention economy, stripped of depth, politics, or collectivity.

The challenge for design, then, is not to perfect the photogenic surface but to recognize Hybrid Space as an operational condition—one in which infrastructures, algorithms, and publics co-produce environments. Critical design practice must attend to how platforms pre-structure use and meaning, how infrastructures privilege some groups while excluding others, and how algorithmic filtering stratifies access to visibility and participation.

Design in Hybrid Space is not about staging images, but about exposing and resisting the power asymmetries embedded in contemporary spatial production. Until designers and architects confront these conditions directly, Hybrid Space will remain a playground for commodified visibility rather than a terrain for collective appropriation.

### 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has reframed Hybrid Space as more than a technical artifact of mobile media. By situating it in a socio-spatial perspective, I argued that Hybrid Space is produced through relational practices of spacing and synthesis, lived through cultural grammars that translate online logics into embodied routines, and organized through spatial figures that crystallize into networks, territories, trajectories, and places.

The implications are far from neutral. Hybrid Spaces intensify inequalities of access, channel publics through algorithmic filtering, and commodify visibility. The architectural response so far—designing for “Instagrammability”—has largely reproduced these dynamics, flattening spatial experience into a stage for circulation rather than cultivating spaces of collectivity or critique.

If Hybrid Space is to be understood critically, it must be approached not as a stylistic trend but as an operational condition. In this socio-technical environment, infrastructures, platforms, and publics co-produce meaning and negotiate power.

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