

# Open Minds

Internacional Journal

ISSN 2675-5157

vol. 2, n. 3, 2026

## ●●● ARTICLE 12

Acceptance date: 23/02/2026

# CYBERSPACE SUCKS ME IN, WHAT REMAINS OF THE PLACE IN ME? HYBRID SPACE AND THE SPECTATOR

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**Abstract:** This essay analyzes the reconfiguration of the “place” category in light of the emergence of hybrid spaces and the consolidation of the attention economy. Based on Yi-Fu Tuan’s (1983) perspective on experience and topophilia, it discusses how place, traditionally a center of value and affection, is intersected by digital infrastructures that transform sociality into a commodified resource. Through the concept of hybrid space (NUNES; COSTA, 2022), it is observed that the contemporary urban experience occurs at the interpenetration between the physical body and algorithmic mediation. The text argues that the culture of connectivity (VAN DIJCK, 2016) and the sale of personal data (SILVEIRA, 2017) promote a “suction” of attention, challenging the permanence and authenticity of place. It concludes that what “remains of place” within the subject— —depends on the resistance of affective and bodily relations against the behavioral modulation imposed by digital platforms.

**Keywords:** Place; Hybrid Space; Attention Economy; Topophilia; Cyberspace.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper reflects on the effects of cyberspace on individuals’ subjective relationship with physical places, based on the emerging concept of *cyberspace*. It starts from the concern: to what extent does immersion in cyberspace, on platforms such as social networks, forums, streaming, and online games, compromise face-to-face, political, and cultural affective ties with local space?

Advances in technology, science, and information (SANTOS, 2001) and the consolidation of network society (CAS-

TELLS, 1999) have imposed new challenges on geography, giving rise to hybrid spaces, especially with regard to the updating of its classic categories.

This work is justified by the need to think about the “displacement of place” in contemporary times, not as physical absence, but as a symbolic and existential displacement of the geographical subject, increasingly absorbed by digital experiences. The objective is to understand how cyberspace acts as a space of belonging and identity, while at the same time emptying the territorial and affective references of the individual’s concrete/material space.

The text is structured in two main parts: the first discusses the problematization and theoretical contributions, focusing the debate on hybrid space and digital presence in everyday life; the second discusses hyperconnectivity, the attention economy, and the subjective and territorial impacts of digital immersion, based on empirical observation and a critical review of the literature.

## Methodological Procedures

This work is theoretical, reflective, and essayistic in nature, anchored in a critical review of the literature and quantitative data obtained from research highlighting: users-spectators dispersed in cyberspace, empirical observations of everyday life, and analysis of common digital phenomena, such as hyperconnectivity and the replacement of local presence by digital presence. This is an exercise in bringing together Humanistic Geography and digital culture criticism, statistical application, or formal case study at this time.

## Hybrid space and the attention economy

Cyberspace (digital space) is thought of as being in symbiosis with concrete space, creating a hybrid space with two-way and feedback impacts, where codes interact with space, code/espace (KITCHIN; DOGDE, 2009), and digitality (ASH; KITCHIN; LESZCZYNSKI, 2018) dictates the rhythm of interactions with space and makes cities smart (MOURA; ABREU & SILVA, 2021), just as in informational territories and cyborg cities (LEMOS, 2007), overcoming the opposition of two separate realities.

Understanding contemporary cyberspace requires recognizing that the boundary between the “real” and the “virtual” is no longer a dividing line, but a zone of permanent interpenetration. The concept of hybrid space emerges to describe this reality in which the urban experience consists of simultaneous movement in physical and digital spaces. As discussed by Nunes and Costa (2022), hybrid space is shaped in everyday practice, such as in the use of geolocation games, where the subject’s body becomes the connecting link, producing a “geographicity” that expands the network of meanings of urban space through presence and movement.

However, this hybridization is not a neutral process; it occurs under the aegis of the attention economy. In this scenario, sociality is not only facilitated by networks, but also “coded” by platforms that transform human connections into marketable resources. According to Van Dijck (2016), we live in a “culture of connectivity” in which sociality is constructed by technocultural and socioeconomic structures that trans-

form connectivity into a strategic and monetizable resource.

The attention economy operates as the engine of this hybrid space, where every movement of the subject in the physical territory, now mediated by devices, is captured as data. Silveira (2017) warns of the “opacity of corporations” and how the information economy can result in the destruction of privacy rights, as everyday life becomes transparent to the companies that operate the digital infrastructure. The “place” ceases to be just a point of identity and becomes a node in a network of value extraction and behavior modulation (SILVEIRA, 2017).

When we ask “what remains of place in me,” we realize that hybrid space tends to redirect the individual’s attention to global data flows. As Ash, Kitchin, and Leszczynski (2018) observe, digital geographies have transformed the way we identify and socialize, with almost no aspect of human life remaining untouched by digital logic. The experience of place is thus mediated by interfaces that prioritize connectivity. In this sense, hybrid space is not just an expansion of geography, but a field where human attention is the main commodity, and the very notion of “being in a place” is redefined by the constant interaction between the physical body, the built environment, and the algorithmic infrastructure (MOURA; ABREU E SILVA, 2021).

## Hybridisms: From Place to Cyberspace – where are we?

The discussion about cyberspace and its implications for contemporary subjectivity fundamentally requires a return to the ontology of “place.” Unlike abstract space, place is a construction of value and mea-

ning, defined by experience and affection. As Tuan (1983) posits, place is a center of value, a focus of care and affection that is established as space becomes familiar through bodily and sensory experience. It is in this rootedness that the subject finds their identity and security, developing what is known as topophilia, the affective link between the person and the place or physical environment (TUAN, 1980).

This relationship of belonging is so profound that, in traditional contexts, place is seen as an extension of one's own being. Ferraz (2022) illustrates this resistance and connection in his analysis of farmers, where the expression "not even dead from my place" summarizes an existence in which memory and affection are inseparable from the physical territory. However, contemporary life introduces a disruptive variable: the digitization of everyday life. When we insert the body into networks that transcend the physical, the geographical experience undergoes a mutation.

As Souza and Girardi (2021) observe, the impossibility of fully enjoying the physical city, accentuated by periods of isolation and the increase in digital technologies, profoundly changes our bodily and cultural relationships with our surroundings.

The emergence of hybrid spaces, therefore, not only superimposes virtual networks on the material territory, but also reconfigures the very perception of "being present." If, for Tuan (1983), place required a pause and a time for the experience to mature, the economy of attention and cyberspace impose a constant flow that threatens this "stability of place." The central challenge of the essay "Cyberspace sucks, what remains of place in me?" lies precisely in understanding how topophilia and local identity survive in

a hybrid structure, where the physical place is constantly traversed by algorithmic demands that seek to divert the subject's attention beyond their immediate horizon. The introduction of this debate allows us to investigate whether hybridization expands the networks of meaning of place or, on the contrary, promotes an erosion of authentic geographical experience in favor of commodified connectivity.

The guiding question that runs through the text is: *what remains of the place in us when our attention, affections, and identities are captured by cyberspace?* In other words, can we still speak of "experiencing the place" when our experiences occur almost entirely in the digital universe? Although cyberspace produces bonds and senses of belonging, they are often dissociated from the physical space we inhabit, demobilizing affections and responsibilities towards our place of origin.

The young man who seeks to improve his character's skin in an online game, even if it is two stages away from where he is on the map and costs him five days; the young woman who eagerly awaits the kiss between the protagonists of her favorite drama, even if it only happens in the last episode of the fifth season; or the young man who longs for a response from his suitor who lives 2,000 kilometers away. Do these examples tend to gradually distance us from the place?

Geography has been challenged to reinterpret its categories in light of the digital age. The concept of technical-scientific-informational environment (SANTOS, 2001) allows us to understand how technologies reorganize geographical space and its dynamics. Castells (1999) introduces the notion of network society, in which

ch digital flows overlap traditional forms of territoriality.

With the advance of the virtualization of social relations, authors such as Turkle (2011) discuss the isolation of the subject in the digital realm, the *digital self*, while Byung-Chul Han (2010; 2018) denounces the loss of autonomy and subordination to the logic of image (a refuge), performance, and affective surveillance.

Pierre Lévy (1999) bases his understanding of cyberspace as a new dimension of existence, marked by real-time interactions. More recent authors such as Guites and Guarnaschell (2024) have proposed the concept of *geographical cybercategories*. Since the late 1990s, theorists such as Batty (1997) have been adapting classic categories to this new reality, including new forms of geographical reading of digital space, among them *cyberspace*.

This is defined here as: *Digital spatiality constructed through the interaction of subjects on online platforms, where symbolic, affective, and social bonds are created that shape a sense of belonging.*

## What are the immediate spatial impacts on the place?

The analysis points to a progressive shift from the experience of the material place to cyberspace, a movement that generates contradictory effects in the field of the geography of experience and identity. On the one hand, there is a real sense of belonging, identity, and community in the digital environment, expressed in affinity networks, forums of common interests, socialization practices in virtual communities, shared hobby apps, and even in the organization of online social movements.

In this sense, cyberspace is affectively constructed through interactions on platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Discord, YouTube, among others, allowing the emergence of symbolic and emotional forms of spatiality (digital place).

On the other hand, this same virtualization does not fully replace practices rooted in the material territory, but rather weakens or demobilizes them. The intensification of hyper-exposure to images, combined with the algorithmic logic of networks, tends to induce the subject to activity/passivity and to the constant consumption and production of representations, modifying their agency in concrete space. The result is the formation of a *user-spectator-reproducer*, someone who relates to the world through technical mediation, filtered by edited images and performative discourses, to the detriment of direct action on the territory they inhabit.

Recent data help illustrate this scenario. According to the Digital Report (2024), published by Canhoni (2024), Brazil ranks second in the world in average daily internet use, with an impressive 9 hours and 13 minutes per day, behind only South Africa (9 hours and 24 minutes). This data highlights the degree of digital immersion in Brazilian society, especially among the connected population.

According to the same source, the main social networks in terms of reach among people aged 16 to 64 are: WhatsApp (93.4%), Instagram (91.2%), and Facebook (83.3%). These figures not only demonstrate the massive penetration of these platforms in everyday life, but also indicate the main environments for the construction of contemporary cyberspace, to which indivi-

duals devote much of their attention, time, and affection.

In view of the above, it is reaffirmed that cyberspace does not eliminate the material place, but reconfigures its existential and geographical centrality. The coexistence between the physical and the virtual is not neutral: the more individuals live connected, the more they shift their attention away from the concrete problems, spaces, and communities that surround them, resulting in processes of territorial disengagement and weakening of localized citizen action.

Ultimately, the question that emerges is: how can I commit to the here, if my attention is not on the here? As the author's provocation summarizes:

*“If my attention is not here, with the here, the here ceases to matter.”* (EF)

The flowchart summarizes the central idea of the text, as more and more people tend to shift their attention from the physical world to cyberspace, inevitably weakening practices rooted in the physical world, in the space experienced in everyday life. What are the spatial consequences of this (re)configuration of affection, belonging, and attention between individuals and the new (geo)cyberspaces?

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This paper proposes a reflection on the effects of cyberspace on the geographical experience of place, based on the emerging concept of *cyberspace*. It concludes that, although digital environments offer new forms of belonging, they also impose a fragmentation of concrete and material

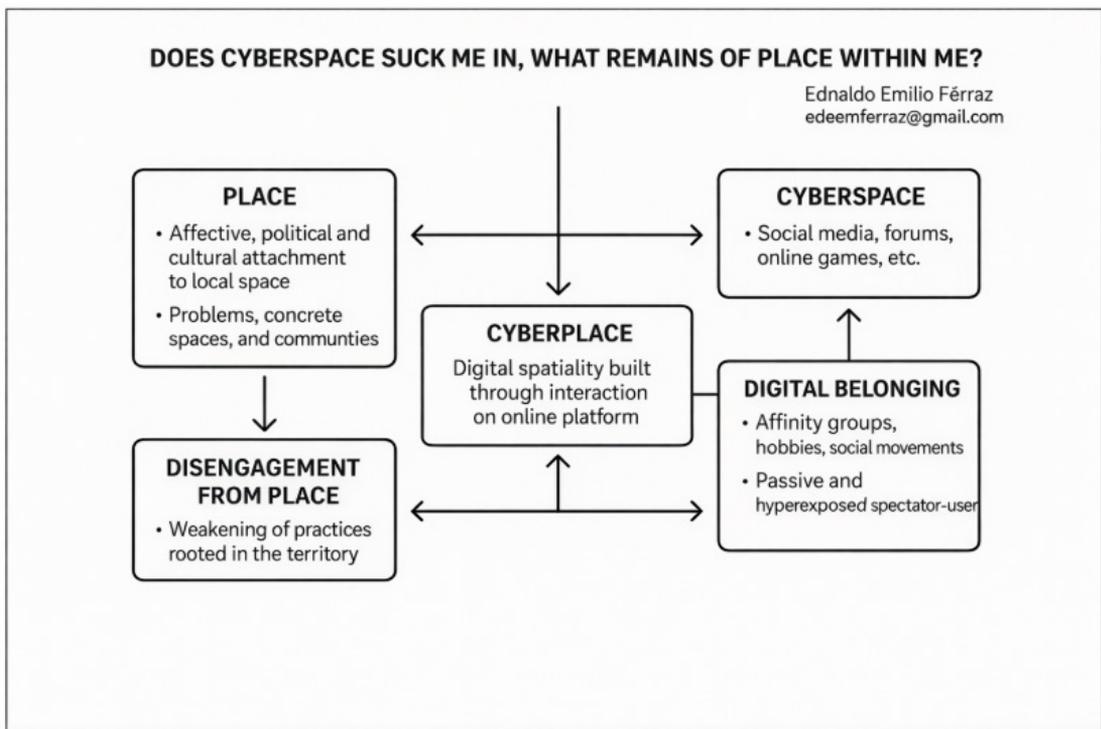


Figure 1 – Flow of attention from place to cyberspace

Source: Organized by the author (2025)

territorial experience, which can weaken the political, cultural, and affective action of subjects in their local spaces.

Geography must therefore continue to update its theoretical vocabulary to deal with the spatialities of the 21st century, which are inevitably geovirtual, critically incorporating digital dynamics without losing sight of the materiality of the territory and its contradictions.

This essay is initially dedicated to investigating the shift of the concept of place towards what we can call 'cyberplace', an environment where capturing attention is the main driver of engagement. However, it is essential to highlight that this transition does not reduce the individual to a condition of total passivity; the subject, although traversed by algorithmic logics, maintains agency in their interactions. Given the complexity of this dynamic, the specific forms of activity and resistance exercised through digital devices will be the subject of in-depth analysis in a future essay, allowing us to focus more on the infrastructure of attention and the hybridization of space here.

It should be clarified that the text does not seek to disregard cybercitizenship, cyberactivism, and other positive practices that are gaining scale in cyberspace; however, it is believed that these are carried out by a tiny percentage of cyberspace users on social networks or in other virtual environments.

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