URBAN ASSEMBLAGE: THE CITY AS ARCHITECTURE, MEDIA, AI AND BIG DATA.

• Paper / Proposal Title:

The architecture student as cyberflâneur: compositional, social and technological modalities in representing the urban experience

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• University or Company Affiliation:

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• Abstract (300 words):

This paper aims to discuss the role of computers in architectural representation and how augmented reality influences our experience of the city. The project is premised on the idea that there are complex interactions of people, place and data when this information is mediated by a “machine”. The machine in this scenario is the smart phone and how it has the capacity to generate, analyse and distribute data. While the focus of the project is the analysis of visual material produced by the device to highlight a universal synchrony, it could be argued that these methods of capturing data on buildings and cities also alter the way that we conceptualise and live in cities.

The project was conducted with architecture students at the Tshwane University of Technology in Pretoria, South Africa. Thirty students were assigned the role of the cyberflâneur; a flâneur being defined as someone experiencing urban space on their own terms, “cyber” referring to the flâneur’s smart phone. The students were asked to choose one building in central Pretoria or Johannesburg from a list based on one urban
typology built either in 1920 or 1970, and present personal readings of it using only the
camera and the “Apps” on their smart phones.

The outcomes of the project were presented in an exhibition in 2019, a physical
representation of an Instagram gallery normally exhibited on a smart phone screen. This
paper reflects on the exhibition and the observations include the influence of the social;
that is the background of the students, the technological; or the machine used to
capture the information, and the compositional qualities of the images generated of the
buildings. The paper concludes with how the similarity of both the dated architecture
and its contemporary representation reflect a certain “spirit of the time”.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Pieter Greyvensteyn is a Senior Lecturer in Architecture at the Tshwane University of
Technology. He teaches design, theory and history set within the layered urban
environment, and focuses on the filmic quality of the architectural experience. He has
done a series of small-scale community upliftment projects with his students. He has
published in international journals. His is currently registered for a doctoral thesis that
propagates time as a major contributor to architectural expression by tracing global
synchrony. He has practiced as an architect for twenty-five years. He is an artist and has
participated in various group exhibitions.