Kosmoikos: The search for location in a networked age

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CHAPTER 1: MEDIATIZED LOCATION

1.1 Introduction: Dematerialization

Woe, when homesickness for the land overcomes you, as if there had been more freedom there—and there is no more "land"! (Nietzsche 2001, 124)

In 2012, the thirteenth edition of the documenta quinquennial contemporary art exhibition in Kassel Germany presented itself as taking "a spatial or, rather, 'locational turn', highlighting the significance of a physical place" (Christov-Bakagiev 2012, 2), implying that the concept of *place* had, somehow, diminished in significance—or perhaps even vanished altogether. Gathered under this theme a few exemplary projects included: the renovation of a derelict building using only reclaimed materials imbued with local history; a living sculpture located in a compost heap, its head constructed out of an active beehive; and a location-based video walk in which audience members used media players in order to follow a fictional narrative through a physical space laden with cultural meaning[1]—the latter piece bringing to mind another locational turn announced somewhat earlier in a small field of media art known as "locative media" (Tuters and Varnelis 2006).

While art history might trace this "locational turn" back to site-specific practices of 1960s and '70s (Kwon 2004), it could also be framed in terms of a critical response to a cultural diagnosis concerning the dematerializing effects of modernity on the very substance of place. In the field of media studies, the Canadian economic historian Harold Innis (1949), writing in the mid-twentieth century, may be thought to have inaugurated this diagnosis

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[1] The pieces mentioned here, in order, are Theaster Gates' *12 Ballads for the Huguenot House* (2012), Pierre Huyghe's *Untitled* (2012), and Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* (2012).

based on the argument that in order to understand a given culture one needed to study its dominant communication medium and its specific "bias of communication". Innis posited a deterministic relationship between the rise of empire and the destruction of local tradition in which innovations in durable communications media provided ruling elites with a technologically-enabled epistemological advantage, a "monopoly of knowledge" (1986, 22).

Though Innis himself wrote little on electronic media and focused primarily on cultural institutions, Marshall McLuhan applied Innis's insights to the effects of new media on human perception, arguing that media altered human "sense ratios" (McLuhan 1994, 18), so that "[t]he discarnate user of electric media bypasses all former spatial restrictions and is present in many places simultaneously as a disembodied intelligence" (1995, 362). Like Innis before him, McLuhan considered many of the significant changes wrought by media to be withdrawn from view, stating that "environments are invisible, their ground rules, pervasive structure and overall patterns elude easy perception" (McLuhan and Fiore 1967, 35). A literary theorist by training, McLuhan formulated aesthetics as a kind of remedy to his diagnosis, stating that "the task of art is to correct the bias of technological media" (1960, 22). In conceptualizing media in terms of autonomous forces with irreducible essences, this approach can be referred to as *substantivism*, a tradition in critical thought which perceives modernity as "an epistemological event that discloses the hidden secret of the essence of technology […] for increasing control and calculability" (Feenberg 1999, 3).

While Innis and McLuhan were politically conservative thinkers, whose primary contributions to the field also predated computation, postmodern theorists would go on to develop the radical consequence of substantivist media theory in relation to contemporary forms of networked media. Foremost amongst these thinkers is Paul Virilio, who, originally

in 1984, announced that with the arrival of the home computer, architecture's capacity in "defining a unity of time and place for activities now enters into open conflict with the structural capacities of mass communication" (Virilio 1991, 22). Virilio would go on to evoke the effect of networked technology as bringing about "an end of geography" (2005, 9), undermining the solidity of the built environment. As such, Virilio can be understood as offering an overarching critique of modernity that focuses on the effects of media on epistemology, typically framed through spatial and architectural metaphors.

Coming from a background of an avant-garde architectural practice in the 1960s (Armitage 2000, 32)—a subject to which I will return in subsequent chapters—the impact of Virilio's thought within the field of architecture theory has been characterized as diagnosing "a condition of 'post-architecture', whereby the way in which we engage with traditional constraints imposed by architectural elements such as walls has shifted as a result of advances in technology" (Leach 1999, 75), and in which "architectural regimes become computational" at a global scale (Bratton 2007, 8). In the mid-90s, Virilio heralded the innovation of a new consumer medium incorporating a Global Positioning System receiver, as the "event of the decade" (1995, 155), for its paradoxical ability to allow users to literally position themselves hyper-locally within a global-scale system. For Virilio, this curious device seemed to present itself, fallaciously, as resolving an age-old metaphysical dilemma— "you don't know where you are, but with this machine, you can know" (L. Wilson and Virilio 1994)—signifying the arrival of a new kind of epistemology, tied to changes in *the environment*, in which "media are at work replacing people with their addresses" (Kittler 1996, 724), in the words of another prominent substantivist at the time. But while substantivist media theory offers a useful starting point in diagnosing the locational turn, this problematic is, in fact, central to postmodern theory in general.

In the same year as Virilio first wrote about the dematerializing effects of networks on architecture, Fredric Jameson published his famous diagnosis of *late capitalism*, which he characterized as "the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (1984b, 84). Jameson's influential text built on Guy Debord's claim that "the whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles" (Debord 1995, 12), itself a naked allusion to Karl Marx's observation that "[t]he wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an 'immense collection of commodities'" (Marx 1992, 125). Like Virilio, Jameson identified increased mediation with a kind of diminution in authentic embodied experience, seemingly leading inevitably towards a state of *derealisation*—to borrow a term from psychopathology, when the external world comes to seems unreal (American Psychiatric Association 2013, 291). Jameson however tied his diagnosis to a Marxist world systems meta-narrative which treated this derealization as symptomatic of the fact that the economic base of late capitalism had outstripped the normal phenomenological capacity for people to make sense of their place in its world of production.

Weaving together a complex argument from elements of cultural Marxist theory, Jameson argued that transformations in material culture had confounded the normative basis for the formation of class consciousness. One of the most famous aspects of his argument—in fact, "on the evidence of citation, the most memorable single exercise in all the literature on postmodernism" (Anderson 1998, 58)—involved an analysis of the confusing layout of a particular architectural space that he identified as a kind of spatial analogy to his epistemological diagnosis of derealisation. At the same period that Jameson developed his

theory, the concept of postmodernism was closely identified with a vernacular style of architecture that sought to divorce form from its underlying program, an approach which Jameson considered symptomatic of late capitalism in general. Jameson thus presented himself as a kind of diagnostician or detective investigating the ersatz aesthetics of postmodern culture in order to reveal a hidden world system with particular attention to the built environment—since he claimed that architecture was "closest constitutively to the economic" (1984b, 56).

Diagnosing a kind of epistemological impoverishment that severed the subject from an authentic relation to the underlying conditions of economic production leaving them stranded amongst commodities and lost in "hyperspace" (Jameson 1984b, 80), Jameson conceptualized a specific remedy that he described as "a whole new technology, which is itself a reflection, or way to deal with a whole new economic world" (ibid, 58), that he termed *cognitive mapping*. Frequently cited by subsequent scholars as a key moment in the so-called *spatial turn* in social theory (Soja 1989, 62-64; Dear 2000, 47-69; Kitchin and Dodge 2011, 66-71; Warf and Arias 2008, 1-6) Jameson's "spatial dialectic," as he has come to call it (2009, 66), and in particular his notion of cognitive mapping, provide a kind of anchor point in relation to which this dissertation will explore a number of concepts, over the course of five chapters, each in turn offering a different perspective on the locational turn. Before, however, providing a brief overview of these concepts and perspectives, I will first introduce my general approach, which might simply be understood as an intellectual history, or, to be more precise, "an element in a genealogy" (Foucault 1995, 29) of ideas and practices relating to the concept of what I call *mediatized location*.

1.2 Approach: Media Genealogy

Only that which has no history is definable (Nietzsche 1989, 80)

What seems natural to us is probably just something familiar in a long tradition that has forgotten the unfamiliar source from which it arose. And yet this unfamiliar source once struck man as strange and caused him to think and to wonder. (Heidegger 1993, 150)

As the most widely cited author in the humanities (Staff 2007), Michel Foucault's thinking is considered central to the spatial turn in social theory (Crampton and Elden 2012). Before proceeding to a discussion of aspects of Foucault's method and how they may be adapted to the field of media theory, let us begin briefly here by considering how his genealogical approach to the writing of history arguably problematizes the search for location in a networked age. In addition to his well-known discussion of the architectural plans of the panoptic prison (Foucault 1995, 200), Foucault identified Europe in the latter part of the eighteenth century with "the birth of a sort of thinking about space that […] extends far beyond the limits of urbanism and architecture" (2001, 353), in which "[i]t was not architects but engineers […] who thought out space" (ibid, 354). Together with innovation in new economic processes that would gradually come to spread throughout the world over the course of the next two centuries, Foucault also identifies this period with "one of the great discoveries of political thought […] the idea of society," whose effective governance "not only has to deal with a territory […] but […] with a complex and independent reality that has its own laws" (ibid, 352). Broadly speaking, Foucault's approach here sought to account for how, with the emergence of a new economic rationality, the target of governance underwent a historical shift from the medieval notion of territory, associated with the sovereign principality, towards a probabilistic concept of *populations*, which itself was made possible

through innovations in new techniques of calculation. Whereas location is traditionally

conceptualized by architects as a bounded physical site, I will draw on Foucault's historical

account of the emergence of liberal techniques of governance (2008) in order to identify a

variety of historical precursors to the concept of mediatized location, and to address the latent

question behind the locational turn: where are we and in relation to which scale?

While, in the field of media studies, the phrase mediatization is very generally used to

refer to the process in which communications media are thought to shape society, by offering

the term mediatized location as the title for this opening chapter, my intention is also to

suggest a historical relationship between the concept of location and that of governance, in

partial reference to an alternate usage of the term. In the history of European governance,

mediatization is also a term of art used by scholars of the early nineteenth century in order to

refer to the process through which formerly ecclesiastical German principalities were forcibly

secularized and annexed into larger territorial agglomerations leaving the dispossessed

sovereign in the role of symbolic figurehead—whose sovereignty thus stood in for, or

mediatized, that of a higher secular authority (Cämmerer 1814). As will be explored in

greater detail in Chapter 2, by drawing on Foucault's genealogy of governmentality we can

thus arguably trace a transformation in the substance of location back to the very dawn of

European modernity—a change that Foucault would argue was made possible through the

invention of the economy as designating a new "level of reality" (1991, 93).

Foucault's thinking is frequently associated with the idea of the paradigm shift,

according to which the dominant modes of thought in one historical period are definitively

differentiated from those of another. In his earlier work, concerning how knowledge systems

form invisible constraints on the capacity for human thought, Foucault introduced the concept

of the *episteme* (Foucault 2005, xxiii) as a conceptual device intended to unearth the particular historical framework that determined the limits of thought in a given era. In defining an episteme in terms of "the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice" (ibid, 183), Foucault may be understood to have historicized Immanuel Kant's concept of the *a priori* categories necessary for cognition (Kant 1855, 2)—though Foucault however sought to highlight their contingency, whereas Kant sought to establish the universality. Written in the same period, and in a manner somewhat comparable to McLuhan's notion of invisible media environments, the earlier Foucault sought to reveal the contours of knowledge in a given time and how they might be understood as conditioning what could justifiably be thought at all, so as—in the words of one commentator—to apprehend "the world as it might have existed before human consciousness appeared in it [… since] Foucault views the mind's capacity to order the data of experience as a hindrance to a proper appreciation of the way things really are" (White 1985, 233). In this regard, Foucault was not particularly concerned with the conscious knowledge of an individual, what in French is called *connaissance*, as he was with the underlying structures of knowledge, or *savoir* (Foucault 1998, 261). In attempting to uncover the underlying "sedimentary strata" (Foucault 1972, 3) of conceptual systems, Foucault referred to this approach as *archaeological*, and it can be understood as an essentially structural method primarily engaged with the task of describing systems of thought without much concern for the reasons regarding their transformation from one episteme into another.

Building on the concept of the epistemological rupture developed initially by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, and later by Foucault's teacher Louis Althusser, archaeology posited the existence of unthought structures immanent to knowledge itself, episteme being

Plato's words for knowledge, although the pre-Socratics preferred the term *gnosis*—a concept to which I will return later in order to discuss the ways in which new media spaces and interface have sought to address the metaphysics of location. Referring to an episteme as a "fundamental network defining the implicit but inevitable unity of knowledge" (Foucault 2005, 83) Foucault argued that Western history has undergone a number of epistemological ruptures, which he successively demarcated into epistemes. While they were organized chronologically, what really distinguished one episteme from another for Foucault was the different networks of wording strategies through which they delimited the epistemological horizon, or what was in fact *knowable*. Drawing on Bachelard, Foucault developed a *longue durée* type of historicism, which saw individuals as epiphenomenal to particular arrangements of knowledge—claiming, for example, in a discussion of the seventeenth century so-called 'Classical' episteme, that is was, in fact, the "network that made possible the individuals we term Hobbes, Berkeley, Hume, or Condillac" (ibid, 70). For Foucault, a shift from one episteme to another thus constituted a transformation in the entire object of study at the centre of the human sciences, thus explaining his claim that "man – the study of whom is supposed by the naïve to be the oldest investigation since Socrates – is probably no more than a kind of rift in the order of things" (ibid, xxv). As opposed to an ahistorical fact of nature, Foucault thus considered *man* as a manufactured concept, one that had been developed within the past two centuries—prior to which there had, in fact, been no single object through which to unite the social sciences—and which he predicted might in the near future become "erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (ibid, 422).

This approach of periodizing epistemological ruptures has become deeply identified with social theory—as implicitly implied, for instance, by the very phrase postmodern. By

de-privileging man as the core concern of the social sciences, Foucault's early structuralism may also be seen to have had a significant and continuing impact on post-humanist thought in media theory (Hayles 2008), as well as on a particular form of historicism known as *media archaeology*, though this approach is itself subject to a number of interpretations (Parikka 2011, 52-56). Although having expressed some reservations concerning the term (Armitage 2006, 32), Friedrich Kittler is nevertheless frequently cited as a figure of particular significance to media archaeology (Parikka 2013, 61-89). Combining substantivist media theory with structuralist historicism, Kittler, for example, identifies Nietzsche's comment on the typewriter, that "[o]ur writing materials contribute their part to our thinking" (Nietzsche in Kittler 1992, 196), as signifying "a Foucauldian caesura or a break of huge magnitude" (Kittler in Armitage 2006, 32). In contrast to Kittler's notorious pronouncement that "media determine our situation" (Kittler 1999, xxxix), an alternate approach to media archaeology— what might be called the 'soft' option, in which "[t]he effects of 'hard' technology are considered secondary" (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011, 8)—focuses instead on how new media temporarily manifest persisting cultural traditions (Huhtamo 2011, 27-47). While perhaps lacking a single stable definition, the appeal of media archaeology may nevertheless be said to lie in how it brings Foucauldian methods into conversation with the objects and concepts of media theory, a field with which Foucault himself very rarely engaged. In relation to a distinction however made by Foucault himself, as well as for reasons of terminological clarity, in lieu of media archaeology I prefer to think of the approach that I take in this dissertation in terms of *media genealogy*.

A number of methodological criticisms have been levelled at Foucault's archaeological project, in its attempt to reveal the hidden structures that constrain thought in ways of which people are unaware. It has, for example been noted that as a metaphor,

archaeology seems to misleadingly imply that one might actually be able to reach back into the past from the perspective of the present as opposed to merely observing its surface effects (Gutting 2005, 33). Moreover, as Foucault himself acknowledged, the approach does not really address the causes that give rise to epistemological ruptures, writing in a posthumous foreword to the book in which he first developed this method: "I left the problem of causes to one side; I chose instead to confine myself to describing the transformations themselves" (Foucault 2005, xiv). Having thus himself become dissatisfied with his earlier archaeological approach, Foucault went on to develop an alternative method that he referred to as *genealogy*, which has been described as "a historical causal explanation that is material, multiple and corporeal" (Gutting 2005, 47). As opposed to the conventional understanding of genealogy in terms of an ancestral evolutionary tree, the way that Foucault developed genealogy was explicitly concerned with following the descent of events in all their contingent complexity including "the accidents, the minute derivations—or conversely, the complete reversals" in order to portray an image of "the present as produced by a series of shifts, changes, traces" (Foucault 1984, 81). As such, Foucault's genealogical approach can be understood to problematize the extent to which the historical contingency surrounding a particular event could ever fully be summed-up by the concept of an episteme. With this caveat in mind, Foucault's earlier concept of an episteme nevertheless remains an essential tool for periodization, a technique that he continued to practice with his genealogical approach.

Foucault's genealogical approach is based on Nietzsche's original formulation of the concept in terms of a repudiation of the hunt for origins (Nietzsche 1989, 28), rejecting the totalizing perspective on history that tries to unify different historical events into a linear progression as methodologically flawed. In place of a belief in ahistorical absolutes, Foucault advocates for a contingent historiography that pays special attention to "divergence and

marginal elements" (Foucault 1984, 87). Describing genealogy as a "history of the present" (1995, 31), Foucault framed the objective of this approach as *problematization*, the latter of which he defined in terms of acquiring a kind of critical distance: "it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals" (1994, 117). Providing "startling, perspective-altering reversals and inversions of what passes as given and is unquestioned" (Prado 2000, 156), Foucault's genealogical historiography has been described in terms of "alternative accounts to epics" (ibid, 40) that "function to undermine the exclusivity of traditional essentialist" historical narrative (ibid, 47), thereby constituting a kind of "guerrilla history" (ibid, 166). Through tracing a genealogy's "complex course of descent" (Foucault 1984, 81), it is axiomatic that this method presumes neither to offer a definitive origin story, nor a complete alternative history. Furthermore, the alternative accounts offered by genealogy can not logically be seen as rivalling the established account, since Foucault has rejected the totalizing perspective on history upon which such a claim would be founded (Prado 2000, 167). Genealogy can thus be understood as a tactical form of knowledge intended to challenge dominant accounts as opposed to replacing them. Dispensing with the idea that ahistorical absolutes underpin human history, such a contingent approach to historiography may be understood as a forthright recognition that "events are *made* into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others" (White 1985, 84, emphasis original), that the narrative techniques that one might expect to find in fiction can also be found in historical accounts, and that these accounts can in fact be "emplotted in a number of different ways, so as to provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them with different meanings" (White 1985, 85). Foucault did not however see either the partiality or the quasi-fictional status as his genealogies as diminishing from their veracity, stating:

> I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions. I do not mean to say, however, that truth is therefore absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or manufactures something that does not as yet exist, that is, fictions it. One fictions history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one fictions a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth (1980, 193).

In distinction to archaeology, genealogy allowed Foucault to explain why changes occurred from one episteme to another; how gradual accumulations of local practices could eventually contribute to the emergence of new modes of knowledge and of power. Whereas archaeology focused primarily, although not exclusively, on language, genealogy was particularly concerned with various practices and their impacts on the human body, with special attention given to architectural arrangement of spaces. In contrast to his earlier work in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995), for example—a historical analysis concerning a variety of modern Western reform movements, originally published in 1975— Foucault developed an alternate approach to how social, economic and political *change* could be thought to occur at the level of small technical innovations taking place in totally independent physical locations, in spite of which they could retrospectively be understood collectively as the multiple causes of an epistemological rupture. By focusing in particular on how specific material *apparatuses* constrained and afforded actions as opposed to epistemic wording strategies, Foucault's genealogical approach could at once analyze how power was articulated at both an empirical as well as theoretical level, without presenting itself as a universal theory of power as such.[2]

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[2] While it has been claimed that *Discipline and Punish* is "the only clear and sustained use of the genealogical method in Foucault's writings" (Gutting 2005, 44), though they remained largely unpublished for many years, Foucault also frequently described the

But while Foucault scholarship has treated genealogy "almost exclusively as an intellectual event […] as the result of the methodological failure of archaeology," (Paras 2006, 69) it has been suggested that Foucault's genealogical turn might also be understood in the context of his biography, in particular "Foucault's concrete situation of being a practicing philosopher and social activist in post-'68 France" (ibid, 69). After the genealogical turn in Foucault's thought, the concept of power seems omnipresent in all social relations, even at the most intimate and egalitarian levels, a position that Foucault demonstrated, for example, in a famous debate with the linguist and political activist Noam Chomsky on the topic of human nature. Whereas Chomsky conceptualized political power as operating in a more-or-less top-down manner that he identified with the State, Foucault sought to distinguish his stance from that of his interlocutor by emphasizing that his approach sought to expose how:

> political power also exercises itself through the mediation of a certain number of institutions which look as if they have nothing in common with the political power, and as if they are independent of it, while they are not […] It seems to me that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions, which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them (Foucault and Chomsky 2006, 40-41).

From Foucault's perspective then, it seemed that one was, in fact, "never 'outside'" of power (Foucault 1980, 83). The seeming inescapable aspect of Foucault's description of power has led some of his critics to claim that following his genealogical turn, Foucault became preoccupied with "writing about the victory of power" (Saïd 2014, 208), and in so doing leaving little room for any meaningful conception of political resistance, with the objection

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approach that he took in his Collège de France lectures in terms of genealogy, aspects of which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

being: "what could conceivably protest against this condition, given that all subjectivity is merely the effect of power in the first place?" (Eagleton 1991, 47). It should, however, be noted, that, in contrast to his early archaeological approach, Foucault expressly considered his genealogies as possessing a kind of practical value for tactical means, responding to the question of what motivated their production by stating that "a genealogy should be seen as a kind of attempt to emancipate historical knowledges from that subjection, to render them, that is, capable of opposition and of struggle" (1980, 85).

If the archaeological method had sought to expose how systems of thought came to dominate individuals through their institutionalization, then genealogy sought to extend and politicize this approach in order to evaluate and discredit the unjustified claims by which those institutions claim authority over us. Conceptualizing power in terms of a network of relations, as opposed to something that necessarily oppresses from above, Foucault was instead concerned with "analyz[ing] power within the concrete and historical framework of its operation" (Foucault 1978, 90). For this reason, his approach has been described in terms of an "interpretive analytics of power" as opposed to a general theory (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 104-125)—as is evident in his straightforward assertion that "the question 'What is power?' is obviously a theoretical question that would provide an answer to everything, which is just what I don't want to do" (Foucault 2003, 13). With all this emphasis on the local contingent conditions concerning the historical production of truth and subjectivity, it should therefore be clear that, as opposed to Marxist historicism, in Foucault's case "[t]he search for a general theory of history is not on his agenda" (Rabinow in Foucault 1984, 13).

While Foucault's own early strong intellectual attachment to Marxism—he was a member of the French Communist Party for a very brief period (Gutting 2005, 24)—was

arguably reinvigorated to some extent by his brief engagement, in the early 1970s, "with the French far left and its causes" (Paras 2006, 69), he nevertheless disparaged the universalism of Marxist historicism, ultimately attempting to position himself, in relation to the latter, as a kind of skeptical but intrigued onlooker (Foucault 1994, 115). Foucault's conceptualization of power in terms of a "capillary" network of relations (Foucault 1995, 209) has however been subject to criticism by staunch defenders of Marxism. Slavoj Žižek, for instance, attacks Foucault for his "abandoning of the problematic of ideology" (Žižek 1994, 13), as formulated by his former teacher Louis Althusser, and in so doing contributing to a "slick 'postmodern' solution," which replaces the former with a "plurality of discursive universes, never 'reality'" (ibid, 17). While there are a great many variants of Marxism, they all essentially share the same basic assumption that, as Althusser famously put it, paraphrasing Friedrich Engels: "the economy is determinant […] in the last instance" (2005, 112). Foucault was however unwilling to accept this diagnosis, on the grounds that it was simply too abstract. In its place, he sought to focus on how particular and contingent arrangements of ideas and material devices came together, often in a similar manner, but not as a general rule, in order to produce forms of subjectivity. In place of the concept of ideology then, the later Foucault developed the concept of apparatus (*dispositif*), his term for "the system of relations that can be established between […] a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions" (Foucault 1980, 194). The choice to deploy such a seemingly vague and general concept in place of the more definitive concept of ideology was a strategic move on Foucault's part, ironically intended to ground his approach more solidly in the material conditions of specific situations—as the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben writes "[a]pparatuses are, in point of fact, what take the place of the universals in the Foucauldian strategy" (Agamben 2009b, 7).

While this seeming turn towards abstraction can be understood from the perspective of a politics that sought, for example, to question the existence of any essential political identities such as class, it has been critiqued by those who remain more faithful to Marx's original analysis as contributing to a fragmentation of the left by advocating a kind of epistemological relativism (Gilbert 2008, 50-53). Although the Foucauldian and Marxist perspectives may appear to share common cause from the perspective of critics on the political right, it may be observed that a fault line nevertheless separates them into differing camps. Though the admixtures created by various strains of contemporary cultural theory may at times blur such distinctions, as I will explore in this thesis, what ultimately distinguishes these perspectives has to do with where they position themselves in relation to the concept of absolutes, and of totality. In relation to the problematics of Marxist critique, Foucault once claimed to be "neither an adversary nor a partisan" seeking rather to question the discourse in terms of how it theorized those "experiences that ask questions of it" (Foucault 1994, 115). Following Foucault, I envision my own approach in this dissertation as interrogating a number of different discourses—figured in terms of Foucault, Jameson and Latour—on how they respond to questions posed to them by the *search for location in a networked age*.

1.3 Overview: Following the Actors

[A]ll the philosophies that men have learned or devised are, in our opinion, so many plays produced and performed which have created false and fictitious worlds (Bacon 2000, 42).

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes)
(Whitman 2005, 103).

While my initial interest in the concept of mediatized location can be traced back a decade hence to a *locative media* art practice (Tuters and Kalnins 2002), this dissertation rethinks the concept of location at the base of that practice by staging an exchange across multiple disciplines, each with their own take on the search for location in a networked age. This is not, however, an empirically driven study, and I do not purport to offer new facts. My intention is rather to synthesize knowledge across a wide array of fields—including media studies, cultural geography, and science studies, as well as architectural, computational and countercultural history—in order to develop an intellectual history of how these fields conceptualize the search for location, and in the process to provide a few new concepts through which to discuss mediatized location. In researching this thesis my intention has thus been, in as much as possible, to allow the various perspectives to speak for themselves, and to diagram the ways in which they describe themselves and their own objects of study. To that end, I have attempted to preserve and convey the multiple contexts out of which these different perspectives emerge.

Interdisciplinarity has been described as "the borrowing of a question, a methodological perspective, an object or a particular field of study, from another discipline, and the integrating of this into your own work or subject area," as opposed to a foolhardy

"accumulation of the complete set of skills, procedures and competences of another discipline" (Bal 2002, 41). With this proviso in mind, my overall approach could perhaps be framed by the conventions of the film noir detective genre, in which I would be cast in the role of the detective whose job it is to solve the question of *what happened to place*? While it was locative media that initially drew me into the case, like some femme fatale in a film noir, in the course of my investigation I developed a hypothesis in which a mysterious entity appeared as the prime suspect: *the networked age*. According to the genre conventions, one approach to solving the mystery would of course be to pinpoint the moment at which the crime took place, when *place*, that is, first went missing. As we will see, while the key "informants" do have answers, their well developed theories often bring up more questions, and their stories are not, in any case, necessarily consistent with each other. In relation to this apparent dilemma, perhaps some perspective can be achieved by recalling a famous anecdote from the history of film noir itself. In shooting *The Big Sleep* (1946), based on a story by Raymond Chandler, the film's director Howard Hawks and its screenwriter William Faulkner contacted the original author concerning an apparent inconsistency in the plot (Capra and Schickel 1975, 114). Upon learning that Chandler had not in fact noticed the discrepancy when writing the story himself, Hawks and Faulkner decided to leave it unresolved, ultimately attributing the film's enduring success as having less to do with its fidelity to the objective facts than to how well the story composed the conventions of the genre.

If, as we have already seen, the genealogical approach to the writing of history repudiates the hunt for origins in favour of tracing a "complex course of descent" (Foucault 1984, 81), it arguably bears comparison with a technique employed in researching this dissertation that I will associate here with the work of Bruno Latour. Echoing Foucault's claim that "the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth" (Foucault 1980, 193), the

aforementioned anecdote from the history of film noir also resonates with Latour's concept of *compositionism*, his term for an approach to social theory that "takes up the task of searching for universality but without believing that this universality is already there, waiting to be unveiled and discovered" (Latour 2010b, 474). Compositionism argues for a reorientation of social theory away from the archaeological metaphor of discovery "toward the crucial difference between what is well or badly constructed, well or badly composed" (ibid, 474). Although this dissertation could not properly be called Latourian on the whole, my own research process can be understood in relation with some of the methodological axioms of *actor-network theory*, for example to "follow the actors" (Latour 2005b, 12), that "everything is data" (ibid, 133), and a research method that Latour calls "the second notebook" used to organize one's data in such a way that they can be moved around "in as many arrangements as possible" (ibid, 134) without spoiling their original integrity. According to Latour's programmatic statements concerning the implementation of the actor-network approach "analysts are allowed to possess only some infra-language whose role is simply to help them become attentive to the actors' own fully developed meta-language" (ibid, 49). I accomplished this by collecting citations from my readings across a great number of fields all into a single relational database which I then encoded with the actors' own *meta-language* as it appeared in the texts themselves, and where necessary with my own *infra-language* in order to create connections across the corpus as a whole—a methodology that Latour refers to as creating "catwalks that allow [concepts] to go from one reference frame to another while modifying their own viewpoints as little as possible" (1996a, 179). In total I collected over a million words of citations that I annotated and cross referenced with over five thousand unique descriptors. Latour refers to his approach in terms of *agnosticism*, in which "[t]he rule is to reconstruct the perspectives and projects of one and all without taking sides" (Akrich, Callon, and Latour 2002, 191). Not however religious in my own agnosticism, this

final written account of my research may be seen to deviate significantly from Latour's

program in terms of the lack of an empirical dataset at its the foundation (outside, that is, of

my second notebook), in terms of the relative significance that I have ultimately assigned to

my own infra-language in the process of composing this final written account, and insofar as

I remain intrigued by the claims and methods of *critique* while, as we will see, Latour himself

advocates for "an entirely different attitude than the critical one" (2004a, 246).

The term *critical* or critique typically designates a political position on the spectrum

of *theory*—the latter being the preferred nomenclature for the various forms of

interdisciplinary "studies" departments that have emerged in Anglo American academia since

the 1980s (Jameson 1984a, 193)—one in which it has been disparaged that, since about the

mid '90s, "the hard Left is the only respectable place to be found" (Harman 2014, 13). Within

leftist cultural theory there is however a long-standing tradition developed of self-criticism

concerning the tendency of economic determinist variants, so called "vulgar Marxism"

(Korsch 2008, 53), to diminish the significance of culture by fetishizing a form of materiality

associated exclusively with underlying economic matters (Williams 2005, 31-49).

Paradoxically, it has in fact been argued that this dualistic worldview enacts an idealistic

form of metaphysics (Harman 2009, 74)—ironic given the fact that *materialism* is often a

kind of code word for Marxism (Galloway 2010, 14)—as well as normally being considered

the gold standard of philosophical realism. Within contemporary discussions in continental

philosophy, it is perhaps Latour who is most closely associated with this line of criticism—

particularly as interpreted in philosopher Graham Harman's commentaries on Latour's

philosophy and political theory (2009; 2014)—although Latour himself acknowledges

"Marx's own definition of material explanation [as] being infinitely more subtle than what

his successors made of it" (Latour 2007c, 138). Latour, in dialogue with Harman, has argued

that the language of critique has passed its sell-by-date, that is has effectively "run out of steam" (Latour 2004a, 255). In what has come to be known as "the critique of critique" (Noys 2010, n.p.), Latour claims that the critical attitude typically implements one of two flawed epistemologies, either trying to "show that what the naive believers are doing with objects is simply a projection of their wishes onto a material entity that does nothing at all by itself" (Latour 2004a, 237), or else claiming that "behavior is entirely determined by the action of powerful causalities coming from objective reality they don't see" (ibid, 239). In either case, the fundamental flaw, as Latour sees it, is that critique fails to acknowledge the indeterminacy of the objects themselves. To this end, Latour rejects the conceptualization of objects and materials as dead entities, and settled *facts*, stating:

> [r]eality is not defined by matters of fact. Matters of fact are not all that is given in experience. Matters of fact are only very partial and, I would argue, very polemical, very political renderings of matters of concern (ibid, 232).

In order to address this problem, Latour envisions a variety of means by which mute objects might somehow be made expressive of their underlying metaphysical realities that he conceptualizes in terms of actor-networks, which perform their own interconnecting relations. One of the principle practical means by which to accomplish this normative end is through tracing actors' relative *proximity* to their particular sets of issues "without imposing on them an a priori definition of their world-building capacities" (Law and Hassard 1999, 20). To that end, digital mapping represents a major epistemological innovation in the social sciences for Latour, for the simple reason that it makes it possible to show the aggregate and the individual in a single synoptic view (Latour et al. 2012). A kind of scale-free approach to sociology, that aims to follow the spread of ideas back and forth between macro

anthropological and micro psychological levels—part of a project which can, in fact, be

traced back to the nineteenth century (Latour and Lépinay 2009)—as I will explore in

Chapter 4, Latour's thought has profound consequences on the search for place in a

networked age. While the critique of critique may be understood as an attempt to correct

metaphysical reductionism, one of the *critiques of the critique of critique*, so to speak, is that

the former effectively dismantles the grounds for normative standards of assessment, thereby

descending the enterprise of cultural theory into "a form of apolitical and amoral relativism,

leaving us able to describe heterogeneous technological outcomes, but unable to say anything

critical about them" (Barney 2013, 43)—even leading some to even identify Latour as a

dreaded neoliberal (Brassier 2011, 53). Furthermore, it is argued that in focusing "on that

which is constantly becoming [… i]t is almost as if everything always starts anew" (Asdal

and Moser 2012, 295), thereby making it difficult to develop much in the way of a historical

perspective—insofar, however, as they are both concerned with describing how networks

form around actors, in the abstract, actor-network theory can nevertheless be understood as

methodologically consistent with the insights of the aforementioned genealogical approach.

Although self-described postmodernist theory has fallen out of fashion, its basic

periodization gambit—concerning an epistemological rupture in what Marx referred to as the

"capitalist mode of production" (1992, 125) as having taken place in the West in

approximately the late '60s—remains a favourite amongst cultural theorists today (Graeber

2008). As originally formulated by one of the foremost proponents of this periodization

narrative:

> [l]ate capitalism can therefore be described as the moment in which the last vestiges
> of Nature which survived on into classical capitalism are at length eliminated […]

The 60s will then have been the momentous transformational period in which this systemic restructuring takes place on a global scale (Jameson 1984a, 207).

In a discursive tradition that can be traced back to the Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács, Jameson offers a comprehensive critique of the phenomenon of "second nature" (ibid, 188), a concept described as "the point where [culture] has become virtually coextensive with the economy itself" (Anderson 1998, 55). While Latour's thought is far, both philosophically and politically, from this tradition, in regards to the pressing political issue of climate change, he actually seems to concur with Jameson's claim "that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism" (Jameson 2005, 76), identifying second nature with "boundless possibilities coupled with a total indifference for their long-term consequences" (Latour 2014a, 3). In a manner similar to Foucault however, Latour warns against the universalism implicit in this type of discourse, claiming that Marxists tend "to replace some object pertaining to nature by another one pertaining to society" (Latour 2000, 109). For his part then, Latour consistently argues against what he thinks of as "the premature unification provided by 'nature'" (Latour 2005b, 117), or other a priori concepts that refer to the aggregate whole of reality, in favour of a process that he describes in terms of "the progressive composition of one common world" (ibid, 254). In the abstract, the objectives of this latter approach can be understood in tactical terms as seeking to bring critique down to earth through attention to local practice. While these different approaches provide quite differing perspectives, as will become clear in this thesis, they nevertheless serve to rethink place in terms of network topologies.

Proceeding through the work of Foucault, Jameson and Latour, the argumentation in this dissertation might be thought to move from skepticism through utopianism to pragmatism. Following this first introductory chapter, Chapter 2 begins by historicizing

mediatized location and the search for place, beginning with a discussion of how avant-garde

architecture from the early '70s addressed the impact of networks on space. From there I go

on to discuss how innovations in technology-enabled geo-epistemology can be understood as

bound-up with socio-political innovations, an argument that I then further develop through a

discussion of environmental governmentality, or *environmentality*, in relation to Foucault's

genealogy of economic liberalism. The remainder of the chapter proceeds as a genealogy of a

contemporary media object, Google Glass, discussed in relation to elements of computational

and countercultural history, in which concepts of environmental media both past and present

are seen as bound together with ideas concerning the production of new forms of subjectivity.

From Georg Lukács through the Situationists to contemporary practices of "critical and

dissident cartography" (Holmes 2009, 52), Chapter 3 presents a brief history of the

sometimes fraught relationship between aesthetics and Marxist metaphysics that culminates

in Jameson's call to develop an aesthetic by which to position the individual subject in what

he enigmatically describes as an "imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium"

(Jameson 1984b, 80), which I refer to as *global positionality*. Chapter 4 changes metaphysics,

as it were, turning to Latour in order to question philosophical assumptions underpinning

epistemology and to rethink the search for place as methodologically flawed. Instead of

seeing mediation as antagonistic to authentic place and embodied experience, according to

this argument "[t]he more instruments proliferate, the more the arrangement is artificial, the

more capable we become of registering worlds" (Latour 2004d, 85). If global positionality

looks to cut away the obstructions of an underlying reality, then what I refer to here as *non-local proximity* looks instead to build up reality by tracing the contingent connections

between things. Returning to experimental architectural practices of the early '70s, the final

Chapter 5 discusses how global technological governance has been imagined as the solution

to the environmental crisis, why it is inadequate and how a form of post-environmentalism

might address these concerns by extending Latour's idea of representation—simultaneously in the aesthetic, political and scientific sense—into nature. The dissertation concludes by speculating on how the extension of *addressability* to all qualified forms of life might paradoxically constitute a kind of substrate out of which we might compose a global dwelling, a *kosmoikos*, a collective storyspace, at the scale of the planet, narrated through the grammar of mediatized location.