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**Kosmoikos: The search for location in a networked age**

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## SUMMARY

### Kosmoikos: The Search for Location in a Networked Age

The dissertation begins by theorizing the locational turn in contemporary art in terms of a response to the dematerialization of place, according to a substantivist tradition in media theory, which claims that “media determine our situation” (Kittler 1999, xxxix) and which posits an inverse relationship between networked media and local culture. In this tradition, Marshall McLuhan saw media as enveloping us in environments, whose invisible biases art rendered visible. Describing himself as an “art critic of technology” (Virilio in Armitage 2001, 25), Paul Virilio reads the introduction of GPS location-aware consumer technology—which made locative media possible—as providing a technological solution to the age-old metaphysical dilemma of determining one’s correct position in the scheme of things. Virilio’s perspective compares with Fredric Jameson’s cognitive mapping proposal as a means by which to negotiate a situation in which the economic base of late capitalism is thought to have outstripped phenomenological comprehension of place, thereby confounding the normative basis for Marxist politics. As with McLuhan, his approach—considered “the most memorable single exercise in all the literature on postmodernism” (Anderson 1998, 58)—seeks to reveal latent content hidden in the media environment, in particular through metaphors of networks and of maps, calling for the development of “a whole new technology, which is itself a reflection, or way to deal with a whole new economic world” (Jameson 1984b, 58).

Opening, then, with Jameson’s programmatic ambition to develop a mapping aesthetic by which to render relations of production visible, the dissertation proceeds as a history of ideas concerned with the search for location in a networked age. Drawing on

Michel Foucault's later historicism, and in recognition of Martin Heidegger's observation that "[w]hat seems natural to us [...] once struck man as strange" (1993, 150), I refer to my overall approach as a media genealogy. The narrative proceeds as a detective story, seeking to solve the question of "what happened to place?" While my prior work in the field of locative media initially drew me into the case (Tuters and Varnelis 2006), over the course of the dissertation I trace the disappearance of location back, for instance, to the birth of a new sort of thinking about space that Foucault claims to have emerged from innovations in liberal economic thought in eighteenth century Europe, in which new calculative techniques helped contribute to the relative deterritorialization of governance—repurposing a term of art used by historians of the Napoleonic period, in reference to the process through which sovereign principalities were forcibly annexed leaving the dispossessed sovereigns in the role of symbolic figureheads—a concept I refer to as mediatized location.

In addition to providing an overview of the dissertation, Chapter 1 offers an introduction to Foucault's genealogical approach to the writing of history, concerned with how small, independent technical innovations may be thought to constrain epistemology and thereby to afford forms of subjectivity. Not to be confused with genealogy in the sense of tracing the origins of ancestry, what has been called Foucault's "interpretive analytics of power, truth and the body" (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 104-125) rejects the premise that ahistorical absolutes underpin human history, such as, for example, in the Marxist assertion that the economy is determinant in the last instance. Following Foucault, then, the objective of a media genealogy is to problematize the resigned attitude of inevitability that greets media innovation, by rendering historical knowledge capable of opposition in order to discredit the unjustified claims of authority that ideas, innovations and institutions seem to hold over us. My approach does not purport to offer new facts based on primary sources, but

instead seeks to stage an exchange across disciplines allowing each perspective to speak for itself, in terms of how it theorizes those “experiences that ask questions of it” (Foucault 1994, 115), and furthermore to speculate on how, as Francis Bacon quipped, in some cases “the philosophies that men have learned or devised” may, in fact, appear as “so many plays produced and performed which have created false and fictitious worlds” (Bacon 2000, 42). A central concept through which I place the different perspectives in this dissertation into a dialogue comes from Bruno Latour’s pragmatist critique of critical theory discourse, which he condemns as having become “blinded [...] to the interest of the object” (Latour in Gane 2004, 82) as a result of its moral commitment to a politics of emancipation. Contiguous, then, with my search for location in a networked age, this thesis also concerns the proper role, scope and scale of critical social thought according to the perspectives associated with Foucault, Jameson and Latour—and though I strive to represent each perspective in its own particular context, I do not, however, always remain religious in my own intellectual agnosticism.

Starting from Robert Smithson’s provocative observation that “the artist seeks the fiction that reality will sooner or later imitate” (Smithson 1996, 91), Chapter 2 opens with a brief discussion of the architectural avant-gardes of the 1960’s whose work is read in terms of an attempt at representing the effects of dematerialization through the rethinking of space “not as a physical entity but as programming” (Varnelis 2003, n.p.). In particular, I look at the ambiguous images produced by Superstudio in terms both of a critique of the totalizing ambitions of modernist architecture and as visual expressions of an epistemological rupture of post-industrial capitalism (explored in detail by Jameson in Chapter 3), that arguably inaugurated a new metaphysical relationship to the concept of “the outside”—as one of their

Florentine peers stated at the time, “no reality exists any longer outside of the system” (Branzi 2000 [1970], 59).

Next, I go on to discuss the relationship between technological networks and territorial sovereignty, with particular attention to GPS. While geolocation scholars tend to focus on how such technology affords new relationships to locality, I discuss the innovation of a single globe-spanning coordinate system in which every point on earth becomes calculable, in relation both to the stabilization of nation state boundaries in the post-War period, and as an element of a military strategy that re-conceptualizes the field of battle on the model of a network, where population as opposed to territory becomes the target. This, in turn, leads to a brief historical discussion of the emergence of networked space discussed by Foucault in his genealogy of liberal economic governance with the example of how medieval defensive barriers in European cities in the eighteenth century were suppressed in order to encourage trade and to normalize the regularity of the population. As opposed to the autochthonous source of governmental power, Foucault actually treats the modern liberal state as the product of these milieus, as he calls them, which he defines as the material means for connecting together discrete realities in order “to account for action at a distance of one body on another” (Foucault 2009, 36). Exemplary, here, is his well-known analysis of the panoptic milieu as a “mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form” (Foucault 1995, 205) in which visible yet unverifiable surveillance functioned as a kind “coercive link” (Foucault 1995, 153) between the body and the milieu that served to inculcate and internalize norms of behaviour. Less well-known until their recent posthumous publication are Foucault’s thoughts on the emergence of a new milieu which he associated with “new techniques of environmental technology” in which governance is “brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than on the players” (Foucault 2008, 259–60)—a notion more famously explored by

Gilles Deleuze in terms of a shift from a disciplinary society toward a society of control (Deleuze 1992).

I illustrate Chapter 2's theme of environmentality—in which actions need not conform to restrictive norms of conduct so long as they are captured—through the example of Google Glass, presented by the company as the culmination of its founding vision “that eventually you wouldn't have to have a search query at all” (Brin 2013). Consistent with Foucault's stated objective to contribute “an element in a genealogy of the modern ‘soul’” (Foucault 1995, 29), I treat Google's ambition to model and predict human behaviour as an epistemological innovation, arguably capable of producing a new kind of subjectivity by altering the underlying conditions of knowledge. I consider how a fashionable amalgam of ideas from Marx and Foucault—that emerged from the same radical Italian student movement as did Superstudio—might, for example, consider Glass as symptomatic of how the capitalist mode of production in the post-industrial period has become increasingly parasitic on capturing the social know-how of labour; the latter often conceptualized on the model of networked computation as the source of a multitudinous new class politics, in which “class exploitation no longer functions directly through the exploitation of industrial labour-power, but through the imposition of command on this [...] surplus or excess of power” (Noys 2010, 110).

The result of this type of analysis is that “the network” is evoked as simultaneously representing “a dominant form describing the nature of control, as well as resistance to it” (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 4), from which perspective there is no outside position whence to develop a critique of “the system”. Indeed, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello argue that aspects of the traditional critique of capitalism as, for example, the source of alienation, may

be understood as having been recuperated to some extent by innovations in marketing culture that emerged together with the counterculture as a means of perpetuating the very system that they claimed to oppose.

Against the conventional account of 1960's youth movements as a single antinomian uprising on the political left, Fred Turner focusses on how the period's hippie counterculture may be understood as having pioneered a type of libertarian politics—one that would deeply inform Silicon Valley "cyberculture" 30 years later—which saw social transformation as a psychic task focused on nurturing global forms of consciousness through returning "back-to-the-land" and embracing small-scale "local" technologies. It is with this particular historical context in mind, that I frame the "technological imaginary" (Dourish and Bell 2011, 161) surrounding Google Glass as a sort of tool of transcendence—an ideal that arguably connects the roots of cyberculture with a gnostic tradition of revelation. Another strand of this story however traces Glass, as the latest innovation in environmental media, back to an "epistemological and ontological rupture" (Lafontaine 2007, 32) introduced by the field of cybernetics—its notion that purposeful action could be governed environmentally through self-correction in a bio-mechanical system, which in turn led to the "revolutionary [...] idea that the boundaries of the human subject are constructed rather than given" (Hayles 2008, 84). In Turner's account, cybernetics formed a key ideological component in the early history of multimedia environments that actively sought to nurture the ideal of the self-governing individual as the base unit of American liberal democracy. Returning to the idea that technologies such as Glass afford a new relationship to location, Chapter 2 concludes by proposing to frame the contemporary locational turn as, in some sense, replaying aspects of the counterculture's attempt to transcend "the system" by turning to the local and small scale,

only to paradoxically lay the foundation for the new network milieu of the so-called society of control; in relation to which *there is no outside*.

Within the growing body of literature on locative media, the notion of “site-specificity” is often theorized in terms of a kind of remedy to a diagnosis of technological-driven dematerialization. Departing from the grammatical definition of locative as denoting an essentially topological as opposed to topographical conception of space or of site, Chapter 3 explores a parallel relationship of diagnosis and remedy, as developed in a tradition of Western Marxist thought that I refer to in terms of positionality. In particular, I identify this problematic with Fredric Jameson’s programmatic vision for “the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale” (1984b, 92) as a remedy to his famed diagnosis of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism—the latter of which he describes as “the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects” (ibid, 84). Normative in its aim, universal in its scope and global in its scale—he views history as “vital episodes in a single vast unfinished plot” (1983, 4)—Jameson’s project differs notably, for example, from that of his contemporary François Lyotard, who famously associated the postmodern condition with an “incredulity towards meta-narratives” (Lyotard 1984, xxiv). Both theorists may, however, be understood as identifying postmodernism with the aesthetics of the sublime—in whose contemplation Kant famously argued that the critical individual positions itself in relation to a notion of totality—with Jameson’s approach building on a Western Marxist interpretation indebted to Georg Lukács (who held that the all-consuming nature of the capitalist mode of production paradoxically produced a universal subject position). Jameson’s thought may furthermore be understood in relation to a metaphysical strain of Marxism that extends the process by which capital comes to dominate economic exchange to



all aspects of reality, what another of Jameson's philosophical forerunners in this discourse, Guy Debord, would refer to as "eliminat[ing] geographical distance only to reap distance internally in the form of spectacular separation" (Debord 1995, 120). As a founding member of the Situationist avant-garde art movement, committed to implementing the Western Marxist critique in the form of practice, Debord and his colleagues sought to develop new aesthetic forms, often at the level of urban spatial practices, that were nevertheless addressed to the totality of society (Debord 2003, 29-42).

Coming to refer to his own approach in terms of a "spatial dialectic," (2009, 66) Jameson held architecture as the privileged aesthetic language of late capitalism—for its "virtually unmediated relationship" (1984b, 56) with the latter. While his approach would be cited as a substantial influence on the subsequent "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 himself may be said to have developed a somewhat idiosyncratic conception of space. Whereas cognitive mapping originally refers to place-learning behaviour in a branch of experimental psychology, Jameson associates the term with the navigational habits of city dwellers as studied by the famous urban planner Kevin Lynch (1960)—whose work subsequently became influential on interface design for environmental media—coming to define his version of the concept as an "extrapolation of Lynch's spatial analysis to the realm of social structure" (Jameson 1988, 353). And while there also exist different interpretations of Jameson own version of the concept, I look in particular at how new media theorists have positioned the "aesthetics of critical and dissident cartography" (Holmes 2009, 52) as a means by which to visually represent positionality in a networked age as contiguous with "the major intellectual project of the worldwide Left in the 1990s [...] to map out the political economy of neoliberal capitalism" (Holmes 2000, n.p.).

Given the relative ease with which contemporary software allows users to position themselves in networks of social relations, I go on to consider whether the cultural context today may have changed so dramatically from when Jameson initially proposed his version of the concept that, “instead of a situation in which the production of cognitive maps is impossible, we are locked in a situation in which we produce them—or at the very least approximations of them—all the time” (Chun 2011, 71). I conclude the chapter by reflecting critically on the philosophical project of positionality, in particular on its aesthetic evocations of unsullied forms of Marxism such as Situationism, as “symptomatic of the contemporary ebb and flow of aesthetics and politics, and of the transformations of avant-garde thinking into nostalgia” (Rancière 2004, 9).

Opening with an anecdote concerning the dissertation’s titular *search for location in a networked age*, in which two locavores try to determine the precise geographical provenance of their chicken dinner, Chapter 4 considers how the political and aesthetic philosophy of Bruno Latour may be thought to problematize the locational turn. Latour’s initially rather modest objective, as a trained anthropologist, is to merely trace the connections performed locally, as it were, between discrete entities in the formation of so-called actor-networks. Notoriously, Latour is indifferent to the proportions of humans and non-humans that make up these actor-network assemblages, conceptualizing material reality in semiotic terms of articulation and translation of propositions without fixed boundaries, thus always redistributable, thereby problematizing the naturalist view of the world as ultimately reducible to material elements. In place of substance, the notion of the network describes the process by which relations become stabilized, and rendered invisible, so that “each stage is matter for what follows and form for what precedes it” (Latour 1999, 74), and both substance

as well as space are conceptualized in terms of “radiating connectors” (Latour 2011b, n.p.), leading to the conclusion that “no place dominates enough to be global and no place is self-contained enough to be local” (Latour 2005b, 204). A fundamental axiom in this system of thought is that “there is no transportation without translation” (Latour 1996a, 119), meaning that, in order for an action to travel, it must have a medium that will in turn transform the action—an innovation in the history of metaphysics that been referred to as local occasionalism (Harman 2009, 82).

With this in mind, the task of the social scientist is to try and represent the series of connections and synchronous transformations that occur in the performance of a particular actor-network. While, in the ordinary course of events, “actors incessantly engage in the most abstruse metaphysical constructions by redefining all the elements of the world” (Latour 2005b, 51), from Latour’s perspective, social theories tend to reduce the questions raised by these entities in favour of methodologically misguided concepts that seek “to reveal behind the scenes some dark powers pulling the strings” (ibid, 22)—a criticism that allows Latour to argue, for example, that “capitalism does not exist” (1993a, 173), at least not in the all-engulfing sense that Jameson evokes, for the simple reason that it relies on the performance of innumerable local actors in order to sustain its existence. In any case, Latour believes that the role of the social scientist is “to make sure that the multiplicity of voices [...] is heard” (Latour in Barron 2003, 93), and “*not* to put some order into the world” (ibid, 81, emphasis mine), as is the case in the critical tradition associated with Jameson in the previous chapter.

Whilst Latour is known for articulating a *critique of critique*—which itself has been subject to critique (Noys 2010, 80-105)—it is less the case that Latour advocates an apolitical approach to social theory than that he holds a somewhat esoteric view on what counts as

politics. Consistent with his de-privileging of the human, Latour emphasizes the role of tools and experiments in both rendering individuals sensitive to their environments, and in holding together forms of public assembly. To this end, Latour's political philosophy places great significance on aesthetics, in the original sense of the term as pertaining to sensation, as well as on material things, also in the original sense of referring to a gathering or matters of concern. Following on from a discussion in Chapter 3 regarding a new so-called "techno-epistemology" (Rogers 2006, n.p.), Latour places great significance on the role of digital topological maps in "learning to be affected" (Latour 2004c, 206) by issues immanent in the environment. Consistent with Heidegger's attempt to replace the disinterested status of scientific knowledge with a situated relationship to things in the world—whilst at the same time embracing the objects of techno-science, in distinctly a un-Heideggerian manner—in what Latour refers to as the "post-epistemological situation" (2013a, 102), "[f]ar from opposing filters to an unmediated gaze, it is as if the more filters there were the clearer the gaze was" (1999, 137); mediation thus increases as opposed to diminishes the stable reality of the world.

While the dominant approach to studying the moral and political valences of technologies following Foucault has tended to focus on the production of human subjectivity (Marres and Lezaun 2011), Latour's approach has been influential on a so-called "object turn" in recent cultural theory, which considers how material things and physical locations acquire political capacities that are subject to public contestation (Marres 2012b). Based on a theory of representation in the political, scientific and aesthetic sense of the word, Latour proposes a pragmatist vision here for how crucial scientific debates might get taken up by self-critical communities of inquiry, for example, by using maps and interfaces to trace the logistical supply chain of consumer objects. While some have claimed that such new media

traceability “might force capitalism to become ethical” (Arvidsson 2008, 336), others consider such ethical consumerism as merely another depoliticizing instance of neoliberal environmentalism. In different ways, then, Jameson and Latour both conceptualize a solution to the search for location in cartographic terms, the former in terms of absolute positionality within a global topology and the latter in terms of relative proximity to a unique manifold. While Latour’s methodological critique of Jameson is compelling, a question however remains as to whether Latour’s approach alone might leave the proverbial locavores, with which I began the chapter, unable to transcend their own parochial interests. In the final chapter, I attempt to address the question of how to balance a politics of difference with Lukács’s challenge of totalization—that “[f]rom the ethical point of view, no one can escape responsibility with the excuse that he is only an individual, on whom the fate of the world does not depend” (Lukács 1972, 8)—by bringing together the relationship between the local and the global through the defining issue of the present era; anthropogenic climate change.

While drawing together ideas and approaches concerning the search for location from throughout the dissertation as a whole, the concluding chapter opens by returning to an image by Superstudio that envisions the world as one vast domestic interior, as an entry point into a discussion concerning past and present visions of global environmental governance. In light of the concept of the Anthropocene—that treats humans as a geological force transforming the planet’s land surface and atmosphere (Crutzen 2002) and which has been met with calls to “geoengineer” the planet (Brand 2010, 275-302)—I look at how the early ’70s rehearsed aspects of the contemporary debate over climate change and how the holistic thinking of this period—as signified by the slogan “think globally, act locally”—arguably masks the role of science as well as that of theology in the politics of nature (Latour 2004d).

In this chapter, I explore Bruno Latour's post-environmentalism, which calls for the construction of new tools, "equipment, instruments, skills, and knowledge that will allow experimental metaphysics to start up again, in order to decide collectively on its habitat, its *oikos*, its familiar dwelling" (Latour 2004d, 136). In contrast to the so-called "cabin ecology" approach of early-'70s-era environmentalism, with its image of Spaceship Earth, Latour offers an image of planet-scale connectivity without holism, of Gaia (the root of the "geo" prefix) as a living system, composed of particularity in the aggregate. To this end, he contends that the planet needs to be rendered "fully equipped with enough sensors" (Latour 2013a, 96) so that we, its inhabitants, will be able to feel the consequences of our individual actions in bringing about climate change. But while Silicon Valley visionaries champion the vision that "connectivity can revolutionize every aspect of society – politically, socially, economically [...] and] fix all the world's most pressing problems" (Schmidt 2012, n.p.), Latour distinguishes his project from the liberal governance tradition through his idea of *cosmopolitics*, which claims to do away with the flawed modernist epistemology of cosmopolitanism by radically expanding the concept of representation (in the political, scientific and aesthetic senses) as the basis of a much more diverse polity—in the antiquarian language of democratic theory, expanding bios by extending logos to zoe. While Latour claims that *oikos*, the old word for household and the common root of both ecology and of economics "is no longer able to unify or to pacify" (Latour 2013a, 129), practically speaking, from the perspective of the concept of environmentality as discussed in Chapter 2, it nevertheless appears that a planet-wide infrastructure—a *kosmoikos* as I call it—would need to be in place as the condition of possibility for his cosmopolitics.

Following Foucault's assertion that *oikonomía*, or the divine providential governance of human souls, constitutes "one of the fundamental elements introduced into Western

society” (Foucault 2009, 258), Giorgio Agamben claims the concept as basis of the contemporary phenomenon of addressability through which, according to the substantialist critique, “media are replacing people with their addresses” (Kittler 1996, 724). In contrast to Agamben’s and Jameson’s attempts to identify the metaphysical dynamics underpinning human history, the media genealogy approach developed in this dissertation is ultimately more modest in its scope, identifying the often unexpected resonances between seemingly quite disparate projects, from which perspective the concept of kosmoikos can be understood as a map of the world as a network without any outside, as seen from multiple points of view.