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# The Re-Figuration of Spaces and Refigured Modernity – Concept and Diagnosis

*Hubert Knoblauch & Martina Löw\**

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**Abstract:** »Die Re-Figuration des Raums und die refigurierte Moderne - Konzepte und Diagnosen«. In this essay we want to make a contribution to developing further the spatial research in social theory by looking at spatial processes of change and the tensions involved conceptually and diagnostically as re-figuration of spaces. Starting from an outline of the key concept "re-figuration," we go on to argue that re-figuration is not just a general concept adapted to spaces, but a fundamental spatio-temporal concept. In a third and fourth part we will address relations between spatial figures and introduce empirically sensitizing hypotheses on mediatization, translocalization, and poly-contextualization in order to show tendencies in the dynamics of change. We will speak of "re-figuration" to refer to various socio-historical processes of spatial change, while "refigured modernity" refers to the diagnosis of the increasing tension between different dominant social figuration as the reason for the current re-figuration which will be outlined on the basis of recent research.

**Keywords:** Re-figuration, refigured modernity, sociology of space, communicative constructivism, mediatization, polycontextualization, translocalization.

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## 1. Introduction

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It is hard to overlook that the temporal order of contemporary society is dramatically changing. For example, people are speaking faster, sleeping less, and adapting more quickly to new technologies (Eriksen 2001). According to Rosa (2013), we have witnessed a massive acceleration of the temporal structures, in particular through modern legal regulations, the transformation of social welfare and its corresponding bureaucracy and services, and formalized educational pathways as well as insurance and pension systems. The recent reduction of social welfare systems and the spread of post-Fordist work organization, for example, are among the many factors that lead to new time structures and the diminishing importance of linear concepts of history and progress.

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As clearly as the temporal acceleration has been emphasized, spatial changes did not receive appropriate attention, even though, for example, phenomenon such as the increased complexity of globalization and complex regimes of presence and absence through digitization have been widely discussed. The little attention paid to spatial changes can also be attributed to the fact that the expansion of a social theory of space is still in its infancy (Fuller and Löw 2017). Although Simmel (1992 [1903]) and Durkheim (1965 [1912]) already conceived space as a social phenomenon, only a few authors subsequently turned to the development of spatial sociology. Lefebvre (1974) or Jean Rémy (1975), who played an important role in working on space as an important basis for understanding capitalism and society, should certainly be underlined.

Just 25 years ago, it began what came to be called the “spatial turn” (Soja 1989; Löw 2001), the “topographical” or “topological turn” (Weigel 2002; Schlögel 2003; Döring and Thielmann 2008). Since then, space has no longer been regarded merely as the environment of a society shaped by limited territories or defined by the code of ‘here’ and ‘there’; rather, space is now regarded as a central social category, the definition of which is based on social interaction, interdependence, processuality, and relations.

Inspired by the spatial turn, we can see a blossoming of spatial research in the attempt to understand the social dynamics in terms of spatial order more comprehensively and precisely (Schuster 2010; Weidenhaus 2015; Hoerning 2016). Yet despite an increase in empirical research, so far in social theory space has been discussed only marginally (Frehse 2013; Löw and Steets 2014; Lindemann 2017; Schroer 2017). Despite a growing number of publications on space and society in the last 20 years, many critics complain about the lack of further development, elaboration, and specification of the social theory of space (Massey 2005; Shields 2013, 1). Phil Hubbard and Rob Kitchin insist that space and place are still “relatively diffuse, ill-defined and inchoate concepts” (2011, 7). Many studies, such as Jureit (2012), note that relational theories of space are often only referred to rhetorically. In a similar way, Malpas (2012, 228) argues that many theoretical concepts are not conducive to understanding spatial arrangements better. Instead, spatial imaginations and rhetoric are being used to address political processes (e.g., Massey 2005). The lack of an elaborated spatial theory also causes methodical problems (Baur et al. 2014), since study objects are often (and unreflectingly) defined as mere container-like spatial segments, and opportunities of relational and visual analyses are not sufficiently exploited. Too many studies seem to imply that space remains a subject of special disciplines such as architectural sociology or urban sociology, while society is understood as a whole without reference to space. Only a few studies in sociological research refer to the spatial structure of their objects of investigation. In other words, spaces are seen as social, but society is not perceived as spatial.

This social-theoretical deficit in research on space becomes particularly clear in view of the profound transformation societies have experienced in recent decades. In fact, there are many indications that the spatial organization of society is changing. But since there is a lack of adequate basic theoretical concepts, these changes can only be described rather vaguely, as in the idea of the network society by Castells (1996), of fluid spaces by Mol and Law (1994), in the concept of “knots” by Deleuze and Guattari (1988), or, as in Appadurai (1996), by “scapes.”

It seems all the more important to deal with these changes, since many authors in the 1980s and 1990s still assumed that space would lose its relevance (Jameson 1984; Virilio 1986; Serres 1991). Even though there is now increasing evidence of the opposite development of a “spacing out,” a process of generating and expanding spaces (Jessop, Brenner, and Jones 2008; Simone 2011, 363), research has not yet adjusted to this increased significance of space and spaces. The definition of basic spatial figures is only slowly being given attention. A systematic analysis of the empirical studies available and the theoretical reflections on spatial figures suggests that four basic spatial figures in the sense of stable institutionalized spatial arrangements can be determined from the reciprocal placements: Territorial space, orbital space, place, and network space (Löw in print).

With this essay we want to make a contribution to developing further the spatial research in social theory by looking at spatial processes of change and the tensions involved conceptually and diagnostically as re-figuration of spaces. Starting from an outline of the key concept “re-figuration,” we go on to argue that re-figuration is not just a general concept adapted to spaces, but a fundamental spatio-temporal concept. In a third and fourth step we will address relations between spatial figures and introduce empirically sensitizing hypotheses on mediatization, translocalization, and polycontexturalization in order to show tendencies in the dynamics of change. We will speak of “re-figuration” to refer to various socio-historical processes of spatial change, while “refigured modernity” refers to the diagnosis of current change (cf. Knoblauch in print), as we go on to elaborate in the last section.

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## 2. Re-Figuration

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The concept of re-figuration draws attention to the question of how the current social order is being transformed because of social tension between different large scale figurations. Here we build on Norbert Elias’s concept of figuration. With the concept of figuration, Elias emphasizes interdependence with more or less unstable power balances (e.g., Elias 1978 [1970]). For Elias, the concept of figuration substitutes the static concept of structure. Figurations are processual and relational. Figuration refers to the relations of dependence between sub-

jects. For Elias, figurations are directly linked to social institutions. In other words, figurations always exhibit a subjective and an institutional level, e.g., subjectively we learn to close our mouths while yawning, objectively we begin to manifest societies as territorially composed structures to be closed with borders (Elias 1976 [1939]). For Elias, the centralization of France offers an exemplary example of the formation of modern society. The modern state with its monopoly on the use of violence extends directly to the body of each of its ‘subjects,’ and with its increasingly rationalist bureaucratic organization it also controls the relations and interdependencies between subjects and institutions.

Elias conceives of the concept of figuration itself in a figurative way insofar as it helps him to break up the reification of concepts. If we substitute the concept of re-figuration in terms of the transformation of society caused by social tensions for concepts such as social change, transformation, or re-structuring, then we can take up additional ideas suggested by Elias, such as (a) the reorganization of society is shaped spatially by the re-balancing of power, dependencies and relations; b) this spatial formation is processual; and c) the relation between the subjective level of “psychogenesis” and institutional “sociogenesis” (in Elias’s terms) helps to understand how in the process of change not only institutions but also the subjects themselves (as identities or singularities), their (e.g., geographic) knowledge, their imaginations, and their affective state (i.e., their sense of security in urban space) are being “re-formed.” Instead of starting like Elias from a gradual emergence of a global world state (Delmotte and Majastre 2017, 115), and instead of merely assuming a transformation from one figuration to another figuration, or putting figuration on a level with society, the concept of re-figuration implies that it results from the collision, from tensions or from the conflict between different (spatial) logics. In this context, the concept of logic is understood in the sense of a structure of the social, which permeates everyday actions, emotions, and imaginations as well as institutions and objectivations.

In contrast to rather open concepts such as social change, or very narrow concepts such as transformation referring to the transfer of one state or structural order to another, the concept of re-figuration highlights relations of interdependence between these states. It also allows to interrelate what may appear as separate structural levels (e.g., “macro,” “meso,” and “micro”), or scales, and helps to see how closely they are interwoven. The literal meaning of forming ‘figures’ makes it a concept conceived in spatial terms allowing for the integration of space and time by linking processuality and its (figurative) spatiality.

In principle, re-figuration is a concept that interrogates the change in quality of social processes and relations, including power relations. At present, there are sufficient empirical findings (Knoblauch and Löw 2017) supporting the claim that basic social structures, knowledge and imaginations, and everyday actions have been changing significantly in recent decades. Linking the con-

ceptual components taken from Elias with these empirical findings on social change, it makes sense to suggest that re-figuration refers to a process that

- a) is based on the simultaneity of various changes which can be discerned both in international comparison and as juxtaposition of different dynamics in one and the same place;
- b) articulates this juxtaposition as tensions that are indicative of binary polarizations without reducing them to these polarizations;
- c) includes effects both on a subjective as well as institutional level;
- d) is not only expressed by changing spatial figures, it also unfolds through them.

The changes are conceived as the result of tensions that do not develop in a linear way or result from dialectical processes, but as a consequence of spatially articulated forces, which explain the form and direction of social change. The effective forces, the specific tensions, the subjective reactions, the new institutional formations, and the specific spatial changes need to be investigated empirically. Because of the empirically obvious spatial changes as well as due to the relative socio-scientific neglect of the spatial dimension of these changes, we assume that it is through spatial analyses that re-figuration can be empirically accessed and understood.

How we conceive of re-figuration as a spatial dynamic can be seen in the fact that many processes of change discussed in the literature as megatrends (such as disembedding, transnationalization, etc.), as well as the typical modern structures (such as nationalization, centralization, etc.), explicitly or implicitly exhibit a spatial pattern:

Spatial compression	Disembedding
Centrality	Polycentricity
Hierarchy	Heterarchy
Nationalization	Transnationalisation
Boundaries	Transgression
Container	Relationality
Exclusion	Inclusion
Territory	Deterritorialization

Re-figuration designates the assumption that these spatial ‘logics’ can empirically be experienced in manifold relations and hybrids. The formations and consequences of the different spatial logics form a special subject of spatial-sociological investigations. If their extreme characteristics come into direct contact with each other, they lead to changes, connections or conflicts. There is a quite conflict-laden polarity between the tendency towards transnationalization, for example in the European Union, and the emphasis on the borders of modern nations between the ethnic or cultural imaginations of purity (e.g., in Poland) and multi-ethnicity and multi-culture (e.g., in France), and between the national refusal of regional autonomy (e.g., in Spain) or the provision of auton-

omy (e.g., in Great Britain). The relationship between cities and states is also experiencing what Soja (2010) calls a current reconfiguration: rapid urbanization correlates with a rescaling of spatial scales and hierarchical power structures and a counter-rotating de- and re-territorialization. In the ongoing process of re-figuration, we observe, on the one hand, that the (modern) order of social structuration and differentiation is retained, including their specific logics of specialized, formalized organizational structures. Simultaneously, we witness many processes that lead away from the classical modern centralized and hierarchical forms of organizations, such as the nation state. Re-figuration here also describes the consequences of the tension between two “figurations.” We do not assume that the dynamics of re-figuration can be understood in terms of Marx’s dialectics.<sup>1</sup> Re-figuration seems to not result in the elimination of previous “figurations” but rather in their superimposition, resilience, and new formations of interdependency in ways that cannot be derived logically but must be empirically explored. The opposing logics are ideal types serving (only) as analytical backgrounds and sensitizing concepts for these empirical explorations. As much as tension, conflict and even violence in the process of re-figuration can be seen as a result of polarized tension, the empirical cases cannot be exclusively explained by two contradictory principles. Rather they imply more specific processes such as mediatization, translocalization, etc., which we will elaborate below.

Moreover, the binary logic also needs to be qualified with regard to non-western societies. Whether, for example, post-socialist societies, which have, so to speak, experienced a shock when changing from a planned economic system to “cultural capitalism” (Reckwitz 2017) exhibit the same figurative tension is an open question that should be taken into account, in particular, in the example of Russia’s recent development into a neo-imperial power. In many societies of the global South, modernity has been more hybrid from the outset, and thus the tension-laden re-figuration takes on other traits. In Asia, for example, we find classically modern dynamics as formative forces in consistent smartification.

The examples show that re-figuration is not only a concept, but can also be a diagnosis as refigured modernity. Refigured modernity can be defined as that late phase of modernity in which the tension and simultaneity of conflicting forces and logics is characteristic. Once again, in terms of spatial theory, it is one of its features that neither territory nor empire are convincing as categories any more, leaving many people perplexed.

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<sup>1</sup> Any confusion with the “Dialectic of Enlightenment” (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002) should be avoided. Their concept is anchored in the tension between modernity and pre-modernity, even if it anticipates postmodern anti-rationalism and the traits of cultural capitalism in a certain way.

The intensification of re-figuration as a diagnosis does not claim uniqueness. Just as globalization goes back to pre-modern times, historians also identify other aspects mentioned above in earlier points in time. In fact, we are by no means claiming that these tensions are the first of their kind in modernity. Rather, we assume that the relevance of the concept of re-figuration has increased dramatically in recent decades.

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### 3. Re-Figuration of Spaces from State Territory to Globalization

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The relevance of a concept of change as described by the term re-figuration to systematically account for spatial changes and capture social change itself as a spatial phenomenon (and, as a consequence, as spatio-temporal process) becomes clear when one looks at the restructuring of spaces in the long-term perspective. Modernity has had a lasting influence on the social organization of space. Research on the early modernity of Western societies shows that even then territories developed into the dominant form of spatial organization. Although older models (such as the idea of the empire with its loosely defined territory, its inner ethnic diversity, and its more porous borders; Münkler 2007) continue to exist, three strategies of territorial marking that developed between the 16th and 19th centuries were particularly important for the limitation of the modern concept of space to national territories. The strategies that developed between the 16th and 18th centuries (Gugerli and Speich 2002; Landwehr 2007) included topographic measurements, statistical and cartographic recording, and the notion that territoriality can be produced by the state (e.g., Raffestin 1980; Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Osterhammel 2000; Günzel and Nowak 2012; Jureit 2012, 22).<sup>2</sup> Elias (1976, 1978) also characterized modern society in terms of a centralized structure based on the state monopoly on the use of force. The centralized figuration is linked to the concept of a state territory governed by the state.

The Western spatial model established by these strategies was transferred to other cultural regions, at least since the 19th century, and the interpretation of this transfer varies widely. While Randeria (2000) argues that the strategies themselves were embedded in a prior cultural transfer to the West, thus creating a mutual entanglement, the theory of world culture (Meyer et al. 1997) assumes that Western models followed their own logic of rationality, which was adopted by other societies with an adaptation of the model of the territorial

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<sup>2</sup> Cartography became the main medium of spatial representation and was successively integrated into everyday spatial representation, orientation, and perception (Mignolo 2000; Shields 2013, 64).



state. Eisenstadt, on the other hand, highlights how different cultural regions followed different rationalization paths, which ultimately led to “multiple modernities” (Eisenstadt 2002). Cultures transform the logic of the modern state, the modern economy, science, etc., when they adapt these forms. As diverse as the understanding and the transfer of the concept of the ‘modern territory’ may be, it is obvious that in the 20th century it became the dominant form of large-scale spatial planning. The diversity of power structures is increasingly centralized within territories, which is most clearly reflected in the state’s monopoly on the use of force (Elias 1939, 1976). Charles S. Maier (2000) has therefore declared territoriality to be the key to understanding the last century. Numerous examples in the field of sociology seem to confirm this. The position of modernization theory has been distinctly formulated by Parsons (1969, 295), who notes that “there can be no certainty of implementation of a normative order, unless the implementation of a physical force can be controlled – and controlled within a territorial area – because force must be applied to the object in the place where it is located.” Mann (1986, 109) also emphasizes these aspects of centrality and territoriality in his monumental reconstruction of the history of the state, when he defines it at its core as “ability to provide a territorially centralized form of organization.”

The monopoly on the use of violence and the associated expansion of borders and people within territories contributed to the enforcement of centralized state territories and the homogenization of spaces. This can be seen in the enormous number of borders, the forms of which, however, are clearly multiplying today. It also becomes apparent in the adaptation of the container-model of space to everyday spaces such as playgrounds, pedestrian zones, or recreational areas. The delimitation of space made it possible to construct spatial units that were increasingly understood as “containers” on a collective level (with a “nation”), and on an individual level (containers as metaphors for spatial knowledge).

The idea of space as a container ultimately goes back to antiquity. In the 17th century, Newton worked out the idea of an absolute space (1988 [1687], 44). In the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, it was finally connected with colonial ideas, the idea of “lebensraum” and large cultural spaces (Jureit 2012). It spread as a universal metaphor for space and as a partially ruthless ideological core for the violent expansion of power. Scientific research on space was also decisively influenced by this idea, if only because it defined and investigated space as if only the content counted and space as an environmental, fundamental condition could be excluded from the research design (Löv 2001, 63ff.).

The one-sided predominance of the container model in modernity is, of course, an idealization. Thus a series of tendencies can be found that are opposed to the modern concept of space as a container and its implementation. In the art forms of cubism and expressionism, in absurd theatre and in Dadaist

literature, for example, a relational notion of space was articulated. The modern city developed into a spatial counterpart of the national territory, forming a heterogeneous ensemble without clear boundaries. Through international economic interdependence, the territorially organized state itself increasingly became a circulation platform, which Conrad describes as “regimes of territoriality,” by which he understands “changing relations between nation, state, population, infrastructure, territory and global order” (Conrad 2010, 389). What is important is that the one-sided political, scientific, and everyday orientation towards homogeneous spatial concepts such as the territory or container came to an end around 1970.<sup>3</sup> A key driver for change was what is commonly called “globalization.”

Globalization is also a spatial phenomenon. Historians like Charles S. Maier (2000), or economists like Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), understand globalization as a process that began in the 16th century, for which a turning point can be identified in the 1970s. This turning point emerges already within national societies. In Germany, for example, a dramatic new destabilization of modernization and differentiation processes began to emerge in the 1970s (Schimank 2013). From a more comprehensive perspective of global history, a completely new character of globalization becomes apparent. Osterhammel (2000) sees this upheaval as being caused by the new communication technologies, the intensification of transnational cooperation in the economic sphere and not least by the reorganization of the political system following the fall of the Berlin Wall, which ended the ‘short’ 20th century.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the social processes since the 1970s can also be understood as part of the spatial re-figuration of the social order, which also includes the increasing dominance of capitalist economies, neoliberalism, and the associated withdrawal of the welfare state.

This process of change has further dimensions such as the increased relevance and significance of theoretical knowledge and communication systems in the production process (Bell 1973), a massive deindustrialization of Western societies, the relocation of future industries to other regions of the world, and the decline of industrial employment due to substitution by automated, digitized, and increasingly robotized means of production. These processes are related to new forms of trade in goods (Peiker et al. 2011). The principles of centrality, hierarchical order, and territoriality are frequently abandoned in favor of translocal labor organizations and decentralized network structures (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999; Willke 2001), manifested in the growing im-

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<sup>3</sup> This statement is true in this generality at least for most Western societies. There is evidence that societies lacking a reorientation phase in the sense of a “1968 movement” (e.g., Israel) have not experienced these developments to the same extent. There are also references to Asian and African cultures, which have never systematically harbored homogenous spatial concepts, but currently undergo a spatial reorganization triggered by processes of digitization.

<sup>4</sup> There is certainly a Western bias in this view.

portance of multinational corporations (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1989; Lash and Urry 1994; Barry 2006), as well as in the increase of international interactions and interrelations and networked production and commodity chains (Bathelt, Malmberg, and Maskell 2004). Instead of “spatially nested hierarchies” (Lüthi, Thierstein, and Bentlage 2013, 284ff.), there are networks that overlap spatial dimensions while at the same time bundling organizational principles in companies (ibid., 291).

The export of Western models of democracy is confronted with the growing problem of “governance in unbounded spaces” (Kohler-Koch 1998): transnational networks of experts and activists are increasingly defining local problems and demanding (and setting) standards (Haas 1992; Lidskog and Sundqvist 2002; Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006; Djelic and Quack 2012). Transnational review and benchmarking systems are comparing spaces in terms of “good governance” (Power 1999; Bruno 2009) so that knowledge-based authority replaces democratic legitimacy. At the same time, new communication technologies contribute to the power and transnational dynamics of political groups and social movements (Van De Donk et al. 2004; Chadwick 2006; Coleman and Blumer 2009; Hajer 2010). The expansion of the “network society” (Castells 1996) leads to small-scale local fragmentation, regionalization and an individualized public space, while at the same time new spatial forms such as infrastructural zones become more independent of territories (Barry 2006).

In theory models of late modernity, the substitution of the priority of politics by economy is considered to be a decisive step towards the reorganization of society (Giddens 1991). According to Giddens, late modernity is characterized by the disembedding of time and space. While space used to be connected to a place and a body, now access to other spaces is no longer given by the spatial limitation of one’s own body. This radical change of modernity is linked with the diagnosis of late modernity, but also with postmodernism (Bauman 1997), the “second” or “reflexive modernity” (Beck and Bonß 2001). The expansion of political, economic, and other spheres beyond the borders of national territories is often also understood as the emergence of a world society (Luhmann 1997; Stichweh 2000).

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#### 4. The Dynamics of the Re-Figuration of Spaces

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There is a great deal of agreement about the dynamic shift from territorial thinking and action to networked thinking and action. What many approaches also have in common is that they collect ample evidence of a fundamental social upheaval in the 1970s. However, in many works there is little room to reflect on the simultaneity of contradictory logics in the same place. Thus, the often constitutive tensions between simultaneously, but differently developing spaces do not come into view.

A first step is to bear in mind that the loss of legitimacy of the hegemonic territorial spatial concept does not imply that another concept has taken on the role, but that various other logics and orientations have become competitively effective. In a systematic evaluation of the literature on spatial theory, four basic spatial figures can be identified that follow different spatial logics: territory, trajectory, place, and network.<sup>5</sup> In the following, we will speak of territorial space, trajectorial space and network space in order to express the simultaneity of these spatial figures and at the same time to distinguish specific characteristics in these figures. For example, it becomes possible to reserve the concept of territory for the formation of spaces of states and to distinguish other territorial space arrangements from it, e.g. the zone or the camp. Hierarchically, territorial and network space remain superordinate insofar as both spatial figures can also consist of local and trajectorial spaces. However, and this is relevant for the analysis of tensions, numerous actions nevertheless follow a local or trajectorial logic, so that they must be analytically separated.

Territorial spaces have already been described in detail above. They follow a logic of placing and arranging, according to which clear boundaries are drawn to create an “outside” and restrictions of diversity “inside” are accepted (Middell 2019, 14; Rau 2017, 142). They are usually perceived as static. Territorial space is synthesized as surface space (e.g., territory, region, zone) or container (e.g., room, warehouse). From the point of view of power relations, territorial spaces may differ significantly. For example, in the segregation of people in camps, typical of modernity (Minca 2007), there is a radical centralization of power, whereas zones served to reduce a complex reality to fields of individual dominant activities (play, recreate, economize, etc.).

Even though the network space has widely stimulated the imagination of many social scientists in recent decades, it is the type of space described most imprecisely. Susanne Rau defines network space as “space with a topological

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Löw 2019 for a summary. There are only a few systematic proposals to capture basic spatial formats. With respect to political-economic restructuring, Jessop et al. (2008) propose to understand territories, places, scales, and networks as constitutive and relational dimensions of socio-spatial relations. Unlike Jessop et al. (2008), we do not understand scale as a spatial arrangement that develops in the process of communicative action between bodily subjects and material objects, but rather as a possible form of synthesis. Rau (2017, 142) proposes to distinguish between punctual spaces, path spaces, surface spaces, and built spaces. Yet “built spaces” are not on the same level of abstraction with other spatial formats, since they can be both places (punctual spaces) and surface spaces. Unlike Middell (2019, 21f.), we consider it helpful to open up spatial figures in a systematic way and not lean too closely to the empirical phenomena (for the period after 1989, he analyses these are: global cities, transnational spaces, regionalism, and neo-imperial behavior. The systematics of three different types of space proposed by Mol and Law (1996), region, network, and fluid space, is taken up here, but we base it on the territorial and trajectorial space concepts, in order to better illuminate the political dimensions of spatial constructions. Place is added to this.

structure” (2017, 151). Annemarie Mol and John Law emphasize that networks can be distinguished from territorial spaces (in their terminology, “regions”) in so far as territorial spaces closely cluster elements and the spatial construction uses boundaries, whereas in network spaces distant elements are related and the difference between elements is a defining characteristic (1994, 643).

Historically, the relevance of places goes back a long way. Ulrike Jureit summarizes the significance of places for the understanding of space in the Middle Ages and their successive loss of meaning as follows:

The fundamental change of political ideas of space in the early modern period can be summed up in the formula “From Place to Territory.” Travel notes from the 16th and 17th centuries bear witness to the fact that the perception of space that was no longer as selectively fixed as it was in the Middle Ages. What primarily designed the space travelled, was a succession of places rather than a spatial surface. (Jureit 2012, 36, our translation)

There are no indications that the relevance of place as a spatial figure has ever disappeared or may disappear in the future (Schmitz 2007). However, place ceased to be the dominant format that guided spatial perception or political action. Its relevance can increase again through re-figuration processes.

First of all, place is a location bearing a specific name and mostly geographically marked. As a specific site, place offers the possibility to store things. Through categorization and as a product of spacing, places are charged with identity. In this sense, the spatial figure of place gains relevance in the modern age whenever the identically-specific, historically-grown, one might even say the “soulful,” meaningful, living substance (Vinken 2008, 154) is spatially experienced as loss. This is the case, for example, if the location and thus the center in functionalist urban planning, which is oriented towards zoning and trajectorial spaces, threatens to disappear, or if experiences of globalization superimpose the perception of the specific local space (Berking 1998). In these cases it may be expected that, for the spatial constitution, places will become more socially relevant again in the sense of appropriation (Knoblauch and Löw 2017, 14f.). In particular, the increasing relevance of network spaces means that places can draw their meaning from their position in the network alone. The focus here is not on uniqueness or singularity, but on the possibility of creating selective densifications generated by the logic of the network. A particular conflict here is that for some people a place can be a local space (e.g., birthplace), while for others the place is a node in the network (e.g., a station where a cruise ship moors).

Trajectorial spaces are usually not among the relevant spatial figures, although only a few modern phenomena can be understood without recurring to the spatial figure of the trajectory. The concept of trajectorial space was developed by Gerhard Vinken (2008) in connection with a critical analysis of modern urban planning. Using Le Corbusier’s suburban visions as an example, he demonstrates how the contemporary city is, for the first time, consistently

divided into spatially separated, formally and functionally differentiated zones and how the trajectory has implicitly been established as a leading figure in urban planning.

Ulrike Jureit points out that these dynamics in modern society manifest themselves not only in urban contexts, but also in the voyages of colonial discovery. Explorers, land surveyors, and adventurers followed clearly defined routes on foot or on horseback with the aim of expanding their knowledge of space. In fact, the linearity of their routes transformed the paths they took into trajectorial space. The information gathered along the way merged into a single map, so that the spaces beyond the route remained white areas on the map, and were perceived as “empty space.” The trajectorial space, which is to be seen as the prerequisite for territorial space, unfolds its pervasive logic, as Venturi et al. (1977) describe, in the motorway and subjects driving on it in cars. Today, many new cities outside Europe show that an orientation towards motorways, cycle paths, pedestrian paths, courses for electric scooters, underground garbage transport railways and data highways radically compete with the local space (e.g., in the form of parks or architectural copies; cf. Löw and Stollmann 2018). Manuel Castells (2001) rethinks the “new spatial form” of the network society as “space of flows” (2001, 467). He, too, sets the space of places against the flows between “physically unconnected positions taken by social actors within the economic, political and symbolic structures of society” (2001, 479).

Thinking in terms of re-figuration, one identifies the figure of territorial space on the one hand, which, in the course of modernity, became the hegemonic construction of space. On the other hand, there is the network space, which is by no means a new form, but has become a legitimate competing figure in the course of globalization (and later through digitization). These formats, however, intertwine and mix via trajectorial spaces and places. Network and territorial space are already simultaneously effective spatial logics that are in tension, but the identity logic of places also stands against the difference logic of the network space. Finally, the hybrid mixtures allow spatial constitution to become a complex everyday achievement that is not much different from the time-related increase in complexity through acceleration.

A few examples may illustrate this: Trajectorial space depends on circulation and the material facilitation of circulation. It comes into existence through motorways and the cars rolling on it, through paths trodden and the land surveyor riding them, from the veins and the blood flowing in them (for the latter, see Mol and Law 1994, who call this kind of space figure “fluid space”). The trajectorial space does not suggest identity, as there is no need to distinguish one place from another if you are on the way. When it comes to local places, on the other hand, space is experienced as more historically specific, including all sensual, physical, affective aspects that are connected with spacing. Moreover, the relational aspect of place is experienced as subordinate in perception pat-

terns, memories, and imaginations that merge into the synthesis process. The network space, on the other hand, is a space that allows places to become nodes, which draw their relevance from networking and become less or not at all significant as individuals (Castells 2001, 468; Shields 2013, 145). Gunter Weidenhaus (2015) analyses that biographically relevant habitats are arranged in ways that can be described as a network. Different sites can be made relevant at the same time, permanently compared, without one taking precedence over the other. In order to be able to stay at the different locations, the biographers are dependent on trajectorial spaces. In their normal lives, however, neither a central location nor a trajectory is perceived as their space, it is rather the solidified network space that fulfills that function. This experience is alien to people who live a very localized life in one location.

The interdependence of different spatial figures also proves on a more structural level. For example, in the course of increasing economic complexity at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, the constitution of the nation-state, as territorial space, simultaneously strengthened global networking and thus promoted the development of a network space. The special economic zone is a novel form of territorial space, but its effectiveness is due to its function as platform for international circulation (Bach 2011).

In terms of re-figuration, globalization does not stand for a system of networks and trajectories with places as their idealized opposites. Re-figuration allows us to ask how different spatial figures are put into relation on an individual and institutional level, and what tensions and power balances result from this. Ideally, we recognize on the one hand a tendency towards flat, networked, and egalitarian social relations, institutions and institutional orders with the opening and transgression of spaces, the transgression of spatial structures and the transnationalization of subjectivity, collectives through communication, tourism, trade, migration, etc. On the other hand, we discern a tendency towards a revival and marking of modern territorial spaces, in which local, regional or national borders and national identities are emphasized. In contrast to the assumption that globalization necessarily leads to a world society (Greve and Heintz 2005), the concept of re-figuration takes into account counter-tendencies, as it implies that the tensions between different logics is constitutive for most current societies. It is from these tensions that political, social, or cultural conflicts result. Returning to Elias, we might ask whether conflicts on the level of subjective spatial knowledge, body regimes, or local environments (e.g., urban space) share parallels with conflicts on the level of national environment (i.e., at their borders) and transnational relations (EU, TTIP, etc.). Instead of assuming a shift from a modern order to a late modern, ultramodern, or postmodern order, re-figuration describes *the order resulting from these tensions*.

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## 5. Mediatization, Polycontexturalization, and Translocalization

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For the purpose of empirical research<sup>6</sup> we propose to operationalize our concept of the re-figuration of spaces by three hypotheses serving as sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1954): mediatization, translocalization, and polycontexturalization. These hypotheses will help to identify the dimensions and manifestations of re-figuration. We assume that polycontexturalization and translocalization are basic dimensions of communicative action. Mediatization seems to be a dynamic driving force of re-figuration, accelerated by digitization in the last decades. These hypotheses are kept relatively open in order to adapt them to the most diverse subject matters of empirical research and different disciplinary approaches in an interdisciplinary research setting (Knoblauch and Löw 2017). We hope that its various research projects will lead to empirically founded “middle range theories,” which will contribute to qualitatively specifying, supplementing, or revising the listed characteristics of these hypothetical concepts, as well as to being able to assess their validity, scope, and dissemination, which will be examined in further phases of the project.

Our first hypothesis relates to the role of new forms of digital mediatization. By mediatization we mean (a) the structural change of communicative action through mediation and the use of signs. Mediatization is thus very closely linked to the history of media and media changes. From this connection results (b) the historical change of mediatization as described by Krotz (2001) as a metaprocess. Mediatization is both one of the driving forces of the current re-figuration of space and takes on specific spatial forms itself. Mediatization unfolds its effect because it changes the way in which communicative action is transmitted physically (i.e., in its own form) or by means of other objects and technologies (Knoblauch 2016). It is well known that mediatization through writing on paper, telephoning, or television had an effect not only on the forms of physical interaction between those present, but also on the institutions of societies and thus on their spatial planning. In contrast to prior epochs where mass media had been dominating, the new information and communication technologies enable many-to-many communication as well as an enormous quantity, frequency, and density of one-to-one and one-to-many interactions (Couldry and Hepp 2016). In addition, they extend beyond the system of communication media and enable new forms of material production, for example in industry 4.0, new forms of transport, mobility, social control (monitoring sys-

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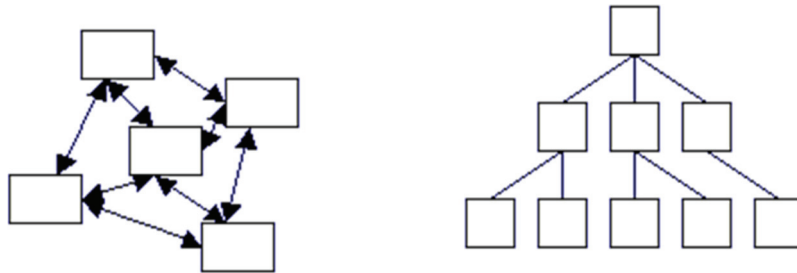
<sup>6</sup> We refer here to the collaborative research center 1265 “Re-Figuration of Spaces.” We are grateful to the German Research Foundation (DFG) for supporting this project and this article.



tems), and coordination (smart cities), even autonomous actions of the technologies themselves, such as self-propelled cars.

From the perspective of re-figuration, the spatial dimensions of digital mediation are of particular importance. It is characterized by two different logics: It is the conflicting logic of a centrally managed communication structure, such as the “Arpanet,” the precursor of the internet within a military context, and the decentralized network structure of the internet. Both can be found for example in the new media culture of monopoly organizations such as Facebook or the decentralized collaborative Open Source movement. One can sketch these two models in the style of Flusser (1998):

Figure 1: Topological Models in Conflict



With the worldwide dissemination of corresponding infrastructures, equipment, and organizational structures (managed according to both models), these models have solidified and thus potentiated their effects. Volkmer (2014), who deals with the structure of the media public, illustrates the two different models very clearly: She shows how, on the one hand, a “centrality of networks” is formed which, on the other hand, contrasts with the “networks of centrality.” In one case, it is the network structure that above all promotes forms of a participative, deliberative, and multilateral public sphere, while on the other hand tendencies towards a strong transnational, economic monopolization and technical standardization (algorithms, bots, etc.) become apparent. While Volkmer still hopes that the national centers will disintegrate, we use the concept of re-figuration to examine the ongoing tension between the two principles and the resulting dynamics.

Mediatization not only affects conflicting logics, but is also an institutional process that influences spaces far beyond the media system: it produces new forms of communication work, including industrial production processes, the dissociation of the classical formal organization, and the transition to network, circular, and transnational forms of institutional cooperation (Sauer and Altmann 1989; Schmidt 1990; Bechtle 1994). The increasing speed, volatility, and reach therefore contribute to “communicative deterritorialization” (Hepp 2013). Mediatization means that new media and technologies, such as computers,

mobile phones, and cars, are included in communicative actions. In this way, according to our hypothesis, not only the structure of action is transformed, but also the nature of the relationships created by action and the spaces generated by it. As a characteristic of communicative action, mediatization is also linked to subjective experiences, emotions, and imaginations, which represent what is meant by absence and presence in a new way and enable an intensification of local experiences (Schroer 2006). Mediatization connects the formerly direct communication with the mediatized communication not only in the one-sided manner of the mass media, but also opens up ways to interactively manipulate “absent” objects and subjects in physical, material and “intelligent” ways.

Because it intervenes, so to speak, in action, mediatization thus also affects the forms of appropriation of spatial knowledge, subjective orientation in spaces, and identities. Thus the space experienced as homogeneous in early socialization (Muchow and Muchow 1935; Pfeil 1965) becomes increasingly insular (Schulze 1994; Zeiher and Zeiher 1994; Reutlinger 2004, 122) and impacts on the subjective spatial knowledge of children in ways that can be empirically investigated. This insularization of subjective spatial perception is accompanied by new forms of orientation in everyday spaces. Maps are replaced by navigation systems, and the smartification of spatial practices supplements modern forms of location determination (Foucault 1965, 1977) with new forms of administration and control, such as big data and algorithms (see Amazon or Smart Cities; Baur 2009). Mediatization thus also affects large-scale spatial production projects: master plans are replaced by participative processes and multi-stage control, and planning itself is increasingly guided by digital technology, its visualizing processes, and gradually also by algorithms. Finally, mediatization also affects the spatial forms of knowledge communication, which are institutionalized in basic and secondary education (e.g., smart boards), in scientific discourses (PowerPoint), and in art (as, for example, nicely shown by video installations).

The second hypothesis, polycontexturalization, refers to the change in the relationships between spaces as social figures of communicative action. The constitution of spaces, as shown above, becomes increasingly heterogeneous and differentiated. However, the texture of spatial order no longer reproduces the pattern of functional differentiation that the classically modern city, for example, still followed with its tendency to separate zones, e.g., business, entertainment, or residential quarters. Therefore, we now speak of polycontexturalization. Based on reflections about the context dependence and subjectivity of logical operations, Luhmann (1997, 36) adapted this term for sociology to counter the argument that modern societies can no longer be described in the form of precise and clear functional differentiation. To the extent that functional requirements lose their uniqueness, communication is polyvalent and simultaneously follows different codes. For this reason, polycontexturality refers to the fact that communications can simultaneously have a multitude of refer-

ences. For Luhmann (1997), however, polycontextuality refers only to meaning, so that different sense relations are simultaneously established on different functional systems levels like economy, politics, science, religion, etc. (cf. also Jansen, von Schlippe, and Vogd 2015). It thus implies a kind of simultaneous “multiple inclusion” of actors in different functional systems. The term has also been used in network analysis, where it assumes a similar meaning to the “crossing of social circles” in Simmel (Holzer 2006). Apart from the multiple references of meaning and relationships, polycontextuality also stresses a material kind of coupling of spaces of action and spatial logics that come together in one place and in one action situation. While many social science concepts have long assumed that action takes place in direct situations embedded in indirect and then social contexts, mostly consisting only of meaning (like Russian Matryoshka figures), the concept of polycontextuality emphasizes the material connection of different spaces and spatial logics.

The recent changes of control rooms can illustrate this notion of polycontextualization. While classical modern control rooms were spatially oriented with their control systems to a specific material spatial infrastructure (e.g., the system of automatic locks in a certain area of river navigation), we see in the newly digitized control rooms an integration of different spatial infrastructures (different traffic systems, personal security in urban space, weather) on different scales (from individual human faces on surveillance videos to large-area weather movements), and comprising different areas (districts, cities, regions, countries, international air traffic). They are also by no means just meaning references or are only indirectly coordinated via interpersonal communication; digitalized technologies can increasingly be used to work directly and increasingly automatically (guided by algorithms) into these spaces from the centers, bringing trains to a standstill, emptying gas pipes, or causing explosions. With the concept of polycontextualization, we would like to emphasize the simultaneous embedding of actors and relationships in different spatial textures of action operating on different spatial scales, which enable, determine, and simultaneously limit the material consequences of action (similar to the phenomenon that Thévenot called “pragmatic regimes” in 2001).

A good example is Doreen Masseys analysis of Kilburn High Road in North London (1993, 155f.). She shows how walking, shopping, or just hanging about in the street is not only a local act but simultaneously integrated in the global economy, transnational relationships between the locals and visitors, including their different languages, religions, and consumer cultures.

As another example we might refer to Paul Gebelein (2015) who demonstrates how spatial figures are linked in a complex way for the practice of geocaching as a leisure activity. When searching for the geocache, the surface is searched and marked out (i.e., a weak form of territorial space is constituted). In the action of driving by car from one location to another, the trajectorial space becomes tangible. However, geocaching only makes sense against the

background of a network space consisting of logbook entries, favorite points, and the infrastructure of the global satellite navigation system (GPS) plus Internet database. Parallel to the acceleration of temporary structures, we assume that polycontexturalization means the intertwining of action in contexts on different spatial scales, dimensions, and levels.

Since mediatization and polycontexturalization no longer allow spaces to be captured as linear ordering systems, we propose a third hypothesis to better understand current processes of re-figuration – the concept of translocalization or translocality. Translocality is a term used in many ways. We will use it to describe the embedding of social units such as families, neighborhoods, and religious communities in circulations that connect the various places with each other. This can involve the mobility of people, the mediatization of communicative actions, or the movement of goods, technologies, and other objectifications, such as those found in commodity chains. Mobility, mediatization, and circulation are based on the existence, expansion, and integration of various infrastructures, the transformation of which probably changes the arrangement of goods as well as subjective knowledge about their origin (Baur et al., in print). They make it possible to relate the institutions, networks, and individuals that are specifically located to other places. Since embedding is no longer regarded as a given, it ultimately leads to a more conscious reference to places (Dalal, Darweesh, Misselwitz, and Steigemann 2018). Less self-evident and connected in more complex ways, places are also more often the subject of conflicts between individuals, networks and organizations.

A particularly vivid example is what Knorr-Cetina (2009) calls the “synthetic situation.” While classical theories assume that social situations are characterized by the local “presence” of bodies, digitized technologies and “scopic media” make it possible to link places of different actors, sometimes even a larger number of actors. For example, work at stock exchanges or brokerage houses is characterized by the virtual presence of others who are located in different places and at the same time act in so-called “response presence” to each other in order to engage in interactions including money transfers and other consequential activities. A further example of this is locative media which allows for the co-localization of specific kinds of persons using digital surfaces and virtual environment as a decisive feature for establishing social and physical proximity (Licoppe and Inada 2006; Lettkemann and Schulz-Schaeffer, in print). They are often connected to systems of “augmented reality,” which make it possible to extend the physically perceived spatial environment by computer-generated objects and thus synthesize virtual and real spaces (Azuma et al. 2001, 34). Synthetic situations do not have to be based on an immediate physical environment, but are characterized by the integration of digital interactive media and their representations into an “embodying” communicative action (Kunz und Pfadenhauer 2014) by means of new forms of “networked presence” (Licoppe 2004, 135ff.).

Translocalization is not only about digitized communication technologies, but it also refers to the circulation of people, things, and objects. Beck (2002), for example, sees global warming as a translocal phenomenon, because people produce local effects that have an impact for many other places. With regard to the circulation of people, translocality also concerns the type of social relationships between people that extend across countries and global and local regions. In this sense, translocalization also involves the creation of new spaces through the intensification of communication across digital channels (Faist 2000). We assume that this, in turn, increases the coupling of places and creates “translocal assemblages” (McFarlane 2011). With new, more selective, and reflexive forms of belonging to places (Watt 2009), one may also assume the development of a new “translocal subjectivity” (Conradson and McKay 2007), which is connected with special forms of spatial knowledge and corresponding modes of action and practices.

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## 6. Refigured Modernity

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Re-Figuration is, firstly, a concept used to analyze social change. It makes sense, however, to explore its diagnostic value, since we will be developing the concept along the lines of radical social changes since the 1970s. Refigured modernity can be defined as the late phase of modernity which is characterized by tensions and the simultaneity of conflicting forces and logics.

The current development towards a refigured modernity can be explained, clearly, by the increase in mobility, the densification of the circulation of goods, knowledge, and information, and, as a consequence, a general acceleration that is essentially based on developments in digital mediatization. In various waves – from informatization beginning in the 1960s to the expansion of the Internet and Web 2.0 to the Internet of Things, industry 4.0, and the increasing autonomization of digital technology through Artificial Intelligence – we see new forms of social situations, new spatial linkages, and hierarchies emerging, as well as translocal interactions that go hand in hand with new significances of places. Informatization since the 1960s and, above all, digitization since the 1990s have led to a “deep mediatization” (Couldry and Hepp 2016) that has one of the central processes of human relationships, communicative action, in a very momentous way: The temporal connections of action are immensely condensed and accelerated, showing clearly, for example, in financial trade settings, but also spatial orders are fundamentally refigured in this way.

Michael Storper shows that the spatial inequalities in the economic development of Los Angeles and San Francisco in California (Storper 2015), in the entire USA as well as in Europe (Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose, and Michael Storper 2019) have to do with the development of special milieus that unfold

within the framework of the last digital innovation cycle. They are part of a fundamental change in the economy, which, according to Storper, started in the 1970s:

The current regional disparities were set into motion by a major wave of technological innovation that began in the 1970s – stimulating output in high technology, finance and advanced service sectors that depend on agglomeration economics and therefore whose core, non-routine jobs favor large metropolitan areas and draw from pools of skilled workers in high turnover labor markets. (Storper 2018, 258)

These changes also affect the forms of capitalism, which have resulted in new patterns of stock exchange trading, the use of venture capital, and, as can be seen in the start-up sector, other patterns of organization and innovation.

We see Storper's works as contributing to an analysis of the refigured modernity, inasmuch as he regards the latest digital innovation cycle as an increasingly sharpened political, economic, and socio-structural polarization between regions and metropolitan areas, "buzz cities" or "superstar cities" (Sassen 2001). While the products of innovations are distributed everywhere, we see a concentration of the experts in the centers, and the number of jobs and income are increasingly disproportionate. The process of re-figuration therefore also includes a shift towards communicative capitalism (Dean 2005) with a new geography of jobs (Storper 2018). Although city centers are becoming more and more expensive, there is no gradual change. On the contrary, immigration into the new economies, the creation of new jobs in the centers and the divergence between left-behind rural and buzzing metropolitan regions are being intensified against all previous economic expectations. What is also spatially polarized is the logic of digital communication in new economies on the one hand, and spatial presence expectations in the popular districts and quarters of a few large cities on the other (Storper and Venables 2004). Face-to-face contact in these neighborhoods leads to an intensification of knowledge, which is also more attractive than the declining centers in which older industries are located (e.g., aviation or entertainment industries in Los Angeles). Apart from social skills, these places with their institutional interdependencies also form special milieux such as civil society networks in metropolitan neighborhoods or milieu of traditionalism in rural regions, as analyzed by Hochschild (2016), thus intensifying tensions between regions. Considering that current migrations are also characterized by polarization (so that, for example, migrations to low-cost southern regions and expensive centers may follow different principles) and that there are significant regional distributions in voter approvals for Trump, or Brexit supporters (Storper 2018, 250, 263), a clearer picture of a refigured modernity emerges.

Comparable dynamics of a refigured modernity can also be found in other regions of the world. Kyung-Sup Chang (2010) speaks of a "compressed modernity" for East Asia. For him, South Korea is characterized by a nationalism

based on kinship structures that is linked to a highly efficient economic globalism. The tension between the two, associated with an enormous performance orientation on the one hand and weak welfare systems on the other, differs from Western contexts, but supports the overall assumption of conflict-laden logics of re-figuration in a way that should be further defined in a transcultural social-theoretical dialogue.<sup>7</sup>

The multiple polarizations associated with digital mediatization (e.g., urban/rural, dense/areal, face-to-face/medial, etc.) should not blind us to the fact that we are dealing here with the dynamics of expansion within capitalist societies (which also include Chinese or Russian “Varieties of Capitalism”; Hall 2001), that, in spatial terms, could well be described as “land appropriation” of new spheres of life (Dörre 2012).<sup>8</sup> What is also remarkable is the ambivalent relationship to nature, which, on the one hand, is increasingly exploited instrumentally but also moralized and ideologized. Thus the tensions between the public debates about and political measures taken against the destruction of the environment or for climate change, and the simultaneously increasing numbers of private flights, sea journeys, or industrial farming are important dimensions of a diagnosis of the refigured modernity. As outlined above in the discussion of spatial figures and supported by the hypothesis of polycontexturalization, it seems appropriate to describe the tensions and polarizations of a refigured modernity without reducing them to poles in a strictly binary system. Nature, for instance, is a hybrid construction, which, in spite of polar determinations, always and simultaneously establishes a third axis towards the cultural domain. Overall, societies have changed in such a way that the old description of “modern industrial society” was replaced by characterizations such as information society, knowledge society, service society, etc., since the early 1970s (Touraine 1972; Bell 1973). Although the industrial sector continues to play a major role in the economy, the importance of industrial labor for political mobilization and orientation in Western societies has changed significantly. Religion, politics, and economics are still fields or systems with highly specialized cores, but there are so many cross-references and overlapping areas between systems

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<sup>7</sup> Wang (2018) illustrates different perspectives using Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan for a theory of modern society. This difference of perspectives is above all linked to a “historical perception problem” that is related to different experiences with (especially Asian) colonialism in nation-building.

<sup>8</sup> “According to the basic assumption, capitalist societies cannot develop without continuously taking possession of new land and motivating social actors in this process to act in accordance with that system” (Dörre 2012, 103). Land appropriation is initially a spatial sociological concept. According to Dörre, under the pressure of capitalism, the logic of the appropriation of land is extended to areas other than space. An essential difference between re-figuration and the land appropriation model is that in the latter, informatization, digitization, and mediatization appear only as a passive infrastructure and their productive, economically relevant, and thus in capitalism inequality and power asymmetry producing, side is not considered.

and fields taking shape that even proponents of systems theory have expressed doubts as to whether the idea of functional differentiation could still be maintained.

Despite all these changes of social relationships in families, friendships, or in professional life – and even in warfare – many typically modern elements continue to have an effect, from rationalization and bureaucratization to quantification of the social (Mau 2019) and insistence on territorialization. Re-figuration therefore not only describes the tense, spatial, multiscalar changes of society that we empirically investigate, but can also be considered as an essential feature of what comes to be a refigured arising out of the tensions between these different figurations.

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