

Introduction to Transforming Spaces

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This electronic publication problematizes the spatial character of the relationship between technology and human beings. It addresses two interrelated questions: To what extent do machines and media organize society three-dimensionally – thus ordering the spaces in which modern life takes place? And, conversely, to what extent do material and communicative structures open up new mental and physical spaces – thus transforming the boundaries of daily life? To denote our explicit concern with spatiality we employ the mathematical term “topology”.

The days are gone, when “technology” meant only the material means used by rational human beings seeking goals in accordance with principles of maximum efficiency and economic return. Today, researchers working within the interdisciplinary field of technology studies emphasize the symbolic and discursive character of our artifact-saturated universe, as well as the machine’s subtle perpetuation of social inequalities and political conditions. They tend to discuss technology as a medium rather than as instruments, as a human-created “ambience” that infiltrates interpersonal relations and permeates society. Focusing on the spatial dimension of materials and media, the contributors to this publication hopes to shape developments in the field.

Technology has become a kind of second nature in modern life. For instance, cellular telephones, computers, and the internet enable us to become more independent of physical location. The death of distance has been declared. Simultaneously, however, they have influenced mobility and cognitive patterns, as well as re-drawn the boundaries between the private and public spheres. By bringing out the spatial character of modern technology, the authors take seriously its “topological” nature – both on a physical and discursive level. And, by focusing on *technologies of visualization* (Part I), *new forms of entertainment* (II), *geographies of reality* (III), and *emerging daily practices* (IV), they investigate the spatial character of technology in various settings and from various theoretical points of view.

Technologies, we argue, are far more than passive physical presences. They mediate between human beings, they bridge physical distance, and they contribute to the transformation of individual identities. They allow people to interact at new places, they open up new mental spaces, and they help us to visualize new arenas for action. The spatial character of the human-made world is not limited to computers and other information technologies. Machines and media also impose on the world a certain multi-dimensional “order of things”. In urban settings

especially, buildings, streets, and lighting systems make up a set of material “dispositives” that strongly define what “degrees of freedom” citizens may enjoy.

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