Editorial

PRODUCING PLACES is a twofold topic. It can refer to places as sites that produce something, that are productive, that have operations unfold, or actions happen, or objects emerge. Or it can refer to the fabrication of places as specific entities themselves. With the extended availability and practicability of digital positioning, locating, and tracking systems, it has become evident that places are not just there, but that they are generated, that they are subject to media-technological operations and effects. Nonetheless, and at the same time, the aspect of places as being productive has also attracted considerable attention. Furthermore, in either perspective, a media-theoretical challenge has come up. It invests two different threads within the realm of conceptualizing not only space, but precisely place under conditions of media, both of them leading way back into the evolution of media societies and cultural technologies.

One of the most central assumptions of media theory looks upon every place or site as being a production site. According to this concept, places in their specificity and their qualities do have impacts on what is going on or what is to be found in those places—and vice versa. Hence, place and operation, or even action, are related in a way that ascribes to the place, in which an operation, an action, or production takes place—including the production of thoughts—a certain participation in the action or reflection that takes place in this very place. The production place of whatever product cooperates in the processes of production; hence it has a certain agency. Specific sites, or places, and their material qualities and spatial structures, put actions under conditions, they evoke specific actions to produce or at least make certain actions probable. Places are the conditions under which they put the world—in short, they are media. And as such, they are—to return to the first dimension of the twofold topic of producing places mentioned above—fabricated themselves, they are not only active in production, but subject to production. This theorem is widespread within media theory, e.g. it is to be found in the core of the key concept of the dispositif such as it has been developed by Baudry, Foucault, and Deleuze, or in the research on laboratories and laboratory work in science and technology studies (STS), or in modern debates on public spheres and political architecture.

But the theorem of an actively productive place can be traced back far beyond media theory: referring to the creative work of a human brain and body, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg noted that a large part of our ideas depends on the position

of what he calls the sitting room (*Stube*). The room clearly belonging to the realm of Cartesian res extensa, the idea belonging to res cogitans, Lichtenberg has the latter depend on the former, thus entangling them irreducibly, very much in the sense that recent media theory is directed to. Moreover, rooms have material qualities; they are not empty spaces or just geometrically located, measurable quantitative entities, but they are specific. Lichtenberg relates these qualities to those of the human bodies on the one hand and to the position of the respective room in the house on the other (and one could extend this to the position of the house in a city, in a landscape, and so on). And conversely, they are characterized by the position that they assign to the different objects in the room as well as by the objects obtaining places, and their material qualities themselves. Placing, hence, means relating (and hence placing) places, it seems. Lichtenberg's sitting room as the material medium in which the action of producing ideas takes place is not so much a mathematical (geometrical and arithmetical) entity, but a physical, and maybe even psychological one.

In some theories, such as in Michel Serres, and in Michel de Certeau, the idea of a creative place linked to human action, interaction, and experience productively relating the human and the world (e.g. the active consumer in the case of de Certeau, the traditional farmer or the walking randonneur in the case of Michel Serres) is opposed to the concept of space as an abstract, geometrical, neutral, and strategic construction. It is precisely at that point that the concept of a place producing something collides with another important concept in media theory, which is the concept of the address. Like the concept of a producing place, this second concept breaks away from the traditional Euclidean idea of space as an empty and neutral container of subjects, objects, movements, and actions. But unlike the former one, it does not contrast the abstract mathematical space and the qualitative place of experience, but, quite the opposite, conceives of places as numerically and hence digitally identifiable points and their relations. In this view, the dissolution of a coherent and always semanticized space as it is subject to human experience seems to be one of the most remarkable effects of media technologies, from cartography to the Global Positioning System, and from the postal system to cell phone numbers, IP addresses, and random access memories in computer hardware. According to such an understanding, there is no such thing as a place having qualities, or maybe having space; there are only discrete spots on the one hand, and operations which connect them on the other. Addresses are numerically identifiable points that no longer form a consistent and stable space or are to be located in one coherent space, but which are eventually and occasionally interrelated by more or less indexical (instead of symbolical) operations; by technical means of contact, coordination, and causation; by movement, by means of transportation of goods and bodies or transfer of signals and information. All that is

needed to identify, to activate, and to describe a spot or point is its alphanumerical address, beyond semantics and psychology.

Where Lichtenberg's concept of place secretly implied a human subject, the writer, in its very center, modern media seemingly lead beyond those anthropocentric categories mostly by means of mathematization and digitization. And this process has productive impacts and effects, too; it also relates place and production, for instance, in terms of control, and of circulation of information or knowledge, as Deleuze has shown in his concept of control societies as contrasted to disciplinary societies. Like the first concept of place as a qualitative category, this second one conceives of place as an active factor in making things possible. Going deeper into the tensions and relations of these two differing theorems about producing places—starting with the understanding of places as production sites— one way to merge them would be to detach the idea of the productive place having agency and taking part in the production of whatever emerges in that place from anthropocentric assumptions simply by stating that even the human is always being produced by—among other agents, forces, or agencies—a place. This assumption is even supported widely by modern philosophical anthropology. But still it is not clear how such an entity like a place in the aforementioned sense should be possible and should be produced within a universe of individually addressable spots. The question remains how—according to media theory, which ascribes such an importance to the place on the one hand, and on the other hand by conceiving of a completely discrete, mathematized non-space of isolated and individually recombined addresses undermines the concept of place—the notion of producing places is to be thought of. The perspective for a solution, as often, already lies within the question. As we have seen, producing places does not only—and not even in the first place—mean places which produce or participate in production of actions, thoughts, objects, and subjects, but the actions and operations, the objects and subjects, by which and through which places themselves are being produced and reproduced. By which means, and by which operations or actions, or by which supervening effects is it that from any space, be it continuous or discrete, Euclidean or not, places with all their specificities and qualities are being made up or emerge?

If one examines the types of operations which create places as specific entities, which in turn give way to specific types of actions to take place or objects to reside, which in turn participate in the reproduction of that very place, one comes to the point of discerning two basic types of such operations. The first type would be the operation of distinction. A distinct place presupposes operations of distinction (in space). The production of a place, and hence its definition, starts with its delimitation, at its borders. This holds true from very basic forms like plowing a rectangle into the soil to mark off a sacred place distinct from its surroundings, such as in

the case of ancient Rome, to all kinds of aesthetic operations of framing and cadrage. Drawing borders and setting up limitations is an overall operation from politics and law to fashion design and TV programming. In architecture, erecting walls would be a basic distinctive operation, which leads to the generation and specification of places. In semantics, as in logic, the basic operation of definition is an abstract operation of limitation, as are all kinds of articulation in the literal sense of the word. According to Spencer-Brown's topological ontology, drawing a distinction is the basic operation that immediately leads to the creation of physically or logically determined places, and the same could be said about Deleuze/ Guattari's concept of striated space. Operations of distinction lead to differences between inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, and they can be repeated in order to give inner structure to a place. Of course, the operation of distinction also gives way to its inversion, recursion, iteration, and reflection or its destruction as well, such as in deleting fringes or in crossing borders. The operation of distinction is basically a binary one, leading to logics of either/or, and/or distinctions. Places of distinction hence always operate the difference of identity and difference. We can conceive of those places as comprehending the most different kinds of beings or doings, whether they have much in common or not, by just sharing the being in that place.

The second type of place producing operations, in contrast to the first type, is based on a logic of more/less relations. It can be characterized as comprehending all operations of coupling. In this understanding, a place emerges from the relations and operations of relating, referring, touching, attracting, causing, and affecting between either entities or actions and operations, which intersect or cross each other in very different ways. In this case, a place, instead of being preexistent to whatever happens or is produced in that place, emerges from the operations and objects that it allows for. It is not necessarily stable in space. Very much in this sense, the sacred place in the biblical tradition, unlike that in the Roman one, the place where God resides, is right in the middle of the believers. Here the Heideggerian concept of *Being-with* (*Mitsein*) comes into play. In this type of place production it is the assembling of people, of objects, or of operations which constitutes a place in the first place. Thus a market place (which in the age of digital transactions of products has ceased to be a geographical or physical entity) can be described as constituted by the assembly of exchange operations. If the place has borders, they are accidental, and blurred, for instance, as in the case of a human crowd, the market, but also a galaxy in outer space, deriving from the continuously diminishing force of attraction or gravity or intensity in general. In this sense, pictures were to be understood as couplings, as in Flusser's concept of computation, or as fields of intensity. As we learn from Fritz Heider and Niklas Luhmann, couplings can be firmer or looser, so that not only the distinction of media and things—or place

and object—but, as a consequence, also the distinction of object and operation becomes a relative and transient one, very much like the one between place and space, place and non-place.

It is quite clear that these two types of place-generating operations are inter-related in their turn. The operation of differentiation is not possible without de-coupling of the formerly coherent and without a certain momentum of touch and tactility, as the operation of coupling requires distinct entities or operations, which are subject to the operation of coupling. The example of recent positioning and navigation technologies illustrates the interrelation of the two types very clearly. The question remains, though, as to how we could ascribe a place to such entities and operations, which do not interrelate, positively or negatively, and which do not touch each other, cross each other, affect each other, or attach to each other. Are there places that are being produced not via coupling, be it firm or loose, nor via distinction of identity and difference, but via an otherness, which doesn't even allow for comparison nor for contact? Are there places of and for objects and op-erations that do not share anything with other entities, which are unable to in-habit the same place? And, if so, would such a place still fall under the concept of producing places in the double meaning mentioned initially? Wouldn't it rather, instead of being productive, have no impact and no effect whatsoever, and wouldn't it insofar figure as a mere and pure place residing in itself, a sheer place of being? And if so, wouldn't we have to concede that such a place cannot be produced, but just arrive? The question is very relevant philosophically, but it is also of notable practical relevance as far as media cultures and places of media and in media are concerned. Different media, serving as tools of distinction and coupling, produce different places in diverse manners—but do they cooperate in placing operations, do they share places at all, do they even have places? In McLuhan, we find the metaphor of two galaxies (i.e. media cultures and media universes) crossing each other on their way through outer space without interference, without touching, without even contacting or affecting each other in the slightest way. Does this take place? Do they, and does their non-encounter, inhabit one place at all? How could we conceive of such a place? Do non-interference and disentanglement, and do refraining and abstaining from productivity and operativity have a sitting room?

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