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## CONCEPTUALIZING DIGITAL REALITY THROUGH METAPHORS: SEMIOTIC AND INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

The Internet, new digital technologies, social media, and more recently, artificial intelligence/machine learning services, have caused profound changes in people's lives globally, all within just one generation. According to Prensky (2001), the digital semiosphere is

inhabited by two main subcultures and to illustrate this concept he uses a now famous metaphorical binomial: *digital natives VS digital emigrants*. We argue that in how these two subcultures conceptualize a commonly shared digital reality lies an interesting semiotic problem worthy of scholarly discussion.

As Sue Thomas explained in *Technobiophilia* (2013), since the early days of the Internet, several metaphors and analogies have helped to shape the common imagery about what it means to be and to interact in and with digital realities. We all live in a world inhabited by different forms of life such as mouses, (anti)viruses, bugs, spam and thumbnails, that populate environments made of windows, ports, clouds, kernels, engines, platforms and so on.

Metaphors for digital realities are not only about static entities but also about processes. From expressions that evoke the sphere of human labor, such as "server farms" or "data mining," to those that describe human-machine interaction in terms of aquatic practices – from the idea of "surfing the web" to that of "streaming" – it is possible to collect different kinds of expressions through which digital uses are thought of.

These metaphors were originally used to gain popularity for important technological innovations that were impossible to commercialize in their "native" engineering terminology. They contributed to the domestication of digital technologies in the media ecology of the 90s. They fulfilled metaphor's primary function of transferring meaning from one well-known domain of experience to another that had yet to conquer its own semantic space. Finally, they have initiated a process of "resemantization" through which the material and technical properties of the digital have become increasingly difficult to recognize.

But Hence here comes a generation for whom something like a *reverse conceptualization* of reality is occurring: what was the tenor of the original metaphors becomes the primary reality of the semantic prototypes. This is when the first mouse you encounter is the computer mouse, when long before you've realized the functions of your own memory you're pestering your parents to buy you a console with bigger computer memory, or conceptualizing "freezing" when your computer constantly freezes because the air is... too hot for its processor, etc. Something like a derivative paradox of this complex semantic situation occurs in the field of education, where digital literacy is increasingly committed to promoting a critical and demystifying reading of the user experience. There, digital immigrants teach digital natives how to make it in a digitally dominated socio-economic reality. The communication problem is obvious,



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but it seems to be only on the surface of a deeper clash of worldviews, where there is a divergence in the fundamental values and even in the structure of temporality.

As we can relate, metaphors structure our understanding of digital media. It is necessary for us to highlight in this call that not only language metaphors are to be found and analyzed in digital ecosystems. Nowadays that screen-based technologies have become pervasive, it is the right moment to reflect on the changes and evolution of visual metaphors that convey meaning of computing processes – from desktop metaphors to extended reality (including virtual and augmented reality content and devices). They are often embedded in media languages but are also formulated by communities through interpretation. For example, several conceptualizations, from the filter bubble to the digital panopticon, have been advanced in recent years by media criticism to question the mode of functioning of (still non-domesticated) algorithmic and automatized media.

Moreover, as research on digital and procedural rhetoric has shown (Bogost 2010, Sack 2019), it is paramount to look at how our digital media work, what are their rules of behavior, and how their operational logic relates to ideologies and culture.

We look forward to contributions that develop and deepen the following basic questions without limiting it to them:

- **Digital metaphors we live by**
- **Metaphors we compute by**
- **The jargons of digital culture**
- **Digital natives VS Digital emigrants**
- **Eco-based metaphors for data-driven societies**
- **Conceptualizing metaphors in videogames**
- **Visual and graphic metaphors of the digital**
- **Metaphorical interfaces**
- **Metaphorical creativity in digital technology advertisements**
- **Digital metaphors and multimodal translation**
- **Metaphors and conceptual clashes in education**

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