

# SEMIOTICS OF DISTANCES IN VIRTUAL AND AUGMENTED ENVIRONMENTS

**Federico Biggio**

University of Turin

Department of Excellence of Philosophy and Educational Sciences

[federico.biggio@unito.it](mailto:federico.biggio@unito.it)

## ESSAY 45/03

DISTANCE  
IMMERSION  
ISOLATION  
AUGMENTED REALITY  
DISTANT READING

The interpretations of emerging media as virtual and augmented reality debate the theme of distance to highlight aspects of immersive mediation: from the rarefaction of enunciative and referential distance, to that which leads to the solipsistic isolation of the user behind the screen. By tracing the semantic articulation of these interpretations, the contribution aims to place emphasis on the way these media

remedy the concept of distance by investing it with new meaning. In particular, we will focus the illusory cancellation of the distance that occurs during an immersive experience and the establishment of a critical distance in the user, which can be linked to the emergence of a meta experiential competence, by means of the installation of an interstitial device such as the prosthesis and the interface.

INTRODUCTION. PRAGMATIC AND SEMANTIC  
DIMENSION OF VIRTUAL SPEECH

Distance is a semantically complex concept: it can denote either, quantitatively, the measure of an interstitial space between two or more elements or subjects of communication, or qualitatively, if understood as an adjective, a synonym of 'far', of 'not close to' in space and time. These meanings of distance open to two possible paths of analysis, to theoretically investigate the condition of the subject-user in the reception of a technologically mediated communication.

On the one hand, it is possible to locate the enunciative distance, which concerns the pragmatic dimension of the discourse. This is also intrinsically linked to the physical-topological distance between the subjects of a communication: this distance occurs since from the transition from oral to written communication in which a physical distance is established between the producer of a message (or enunciator), who writes within a written text his/her own simulacrum (*débrayage*), and the recipient (or enunciatary), which acts as an activator of the semiosis of the text through strategies of interpretation by interacting directly with the text.

On the other hand, we find the second conception of the distance, which instead concerns the semantic dimension of the object of speech. With the establishment of the enunciative distance, what was before the listener –now reader and user– turns out to be no longer able to immediately trace the identity of the author and to attest a semantic correspondence between the subject of the speech, i.e. the material referent and enunciator. This referential distance, by considering immersive mediation, is connected to an effect of sense of truthfulness and authenticity of the sign represented by means of image computing techniques.

In both conceptions there are effects of meaning. In the course of this contribution we would like to consider the ways in which, by means of immersive mediation, the referential distance can be illusorily deleted by the adoption of

enunciative strategies that simulate an enunciative proximity (by canceling, in this way, the non-referentiality effect of the physical-topological distance) and, secondarily, how this cancellation produces effects of meaning on the semantic, affective and value level. The illusory cancellation of a referential distance (which is remediated in a sense of immediacy with the digital objects of experience), and the cancellation of a physical-topological distance between the enunciator and the enunciatory create, as a whole, the effect of immersiveness, presence and cohesive hermeticism of the media environment within which the users find themselves during the experience. It is precisely this condition that social discourses interpret both in the dysphoric sense (immersivity as isolation) and in the euphoric sense (immersiveness as an experiential increment).

Both remediations will be understood as they resolve a pragmatic problem of 'writing technologies' that, as we will see, begins to be addressed since from the emergence of the paradigm of secondary orality with synchronous telematic communication.

#### THE TRAP OF THE DELETED DISTANCE

It is interesting to observe how, during an immersive experience, the enunciative distance is erased and, at a semantic level, it is remediated in an illusory sense of presence and a sense of simulated immediacy. In immersive media, the actuality of an enunciative act is simulated by leveraging on the synchronicity, immersiveness and geolocation of the communication, and this fact leads to the emersion of a sense of presence of the contents: among the various interpretations that we can give to the concept of presence, one is that which conceives it as the effect resulting from a communication (simulated and apparent as) located here and now. In immersive media, the user is 'implanted' into a computer-generated reality and enjoys a content which ap-

pears not as a reproduction (of an expression produced prior to its current fruition, as in writing), but as current, that is, it is perceived as if the interlocutor was close, in space and time, or even as if its expression depended on pragmatic acts of the user-enunciator.

Immersive media “simulate in the statement the situation of its enunciation with an effect of presence [...] and enhance our perceptual, cognitive and bodily abilities, installing real prosthesis of listening and gaze” [my translation from Italian] (Paolucci, 2020, p. 46).

By moving from these assertions, we can begin to highlight the main ‘risks’ of the cancelled distance, that several social discourses support and denounce, by valuing negatively immersive media. This problem had already been highlighted by Baudrillard’s philosophical concern (1981) for whom all media representations, especially those produced by the mass media, are *simulacra*, and hence must to be considered as the result of a specific discursive production that combines the strategies of narration of reality to those typical of the show. As for the immersive media, the referential distance that is deleted is no longer only the one between sign and referent, but also the one that regards the difference between the size of the virtual experience (generated by the computer) and reality (that is a physical-material dimension). This is still a problem of reference which however, by means of a non-veridiction pact, asks to be ignored by the judgment of the user. This is why the effects of presence and immersivity may have as a consequence the loss of the mediation’s awareness and of the same condition of immersivity in which users find themselves (which can ultimately lead to develop a sense of distrust and perplexity for immersive experiences in general). The illusory cancellation of distance in immersive media communication, therefore, begin to be conceived as a thematic isotopy that passes through a series of heterogeneous social discourses and texts characterized by equally heterogeneous rhetoric.

For economy of job, we propose in the first place the reference to narrative constructions that sanction a certain type of social practices –by considering them as alienating– and value negatively the immersed and distanced condition of the user. As in social network, where the user is conceived as confined within an ideological ‘bubble’, also in immersive media is difficult, if not impossible, to be in a direct relationship with the real world and the others: this requires to recognize the simulation process of the virtual representation and the difference with the physical space that denotes the real world.

At the level of expression, we refer to a series of practices of interactivity that characterize the immersive experience and that are well described (linguistically and visually) in some texts: from facts of socio-psychological relevance as *The blue whale*, to audiovisual texts such as the series *Kiss me first*, whose subject is directly inspired by this fact of news, from rhetorical journalism of the ‘apocalyptic’ type, to *Black Mirror*.

It is immediate to recall the concepts of filter-bubble and echo-chamber whenever talk about the condition of social isolation inside a metaphorical ‘bubble’ of the digital media user. The leap to computational media, compared to immersive media, is not a casual one. In fact, it is possible to match the individual’s enunciative distance (and isolation) from social reality (social isolation), with the cognitive distance, a condition that also concerns the configuration of scopic regimes within social media platforms –now much more on the agenda than futuristic immersive experiences. Obviously, the perceptive prosthesis that the user occupies –a filtering entity– has prepared by a social media platform and does not coincide with the individual (who is physically isolated from social reality), but with an enunciative position from which the user can see and know the world. Our thesis is that the ‘bubble’ of which the critical media discourses speak, by referring to the so-called filter-bubble and echo-chambers (which are effects of communication, but also software architectures with a specific configuration), share the same common basis with the isolated condition of virtual reality users.

Therefore, it is a matter of understanding how the isolation of the user, created by immersive media, led to the inability to recognize the enunciative distance, as that created by computational and algorithmic systems known as filter-bubbles, in which, in a similar way, the cancellation of the enunciative and semantic distances is concealed by the expressive possibilities of synchronic-telematic communication. As for immersive media, however, it is a question of understanding, on the one hand, how these concealments and simulations produce the enunciative proximity that affects the pragmatic dimension, and on the other, on the semantic level, how the evanescence of enunciative distance corresponds both with 'apocalyptic' interpretations, which connect it to a sense of social isolation and, positively, to a sense of engagement, empathy and closeness. In this perspective, distance becomes a positive and persuasive value that drives the viewer to enjoy of an immersive experience.

Whether it is a matter of enunciative distance, between the user and the object of communication, or a semantic one, between the object simulated in the sign and its referent, the issue concerns a series of questions: how the sense of distance is being articulated in interactivity with immersive and pervasive media of virtual and augmented reality, compared to that of digital writing with the computer or smartphone, that characterizes communication in social media and the paradigm of secondary orality (Ong, 1982)? How is the effect on user perception of immersive technologies interpreted? And how is the perceptive model (or scopic regime) of social networks, in particular that of the so-called filter-bubble architectures (Pariser, 2011) remediated and renewed in that of immersive media?

#### ISOLATION: THE PROBLEM OF SECONDARY ORALITY

Rosamaria Loretelli writes in the introduction to the Italian edition of *Orality and literacy*: "oral society is participa-

tory and magical, it has difficulty in separating the object from the subject of perception; writing realizes this distancing, even where the object of perception is the self, the own psyche” (Ong, 1982, p. 9). The enunciative distance between the producer of a written text and the recipient exists, therefore, in every communication (or representation), written or articulated by digital codes, and enables into the individual a new perception of self, both aesthetically and semantically, with respect to that of oral culture, which Ong calls “a sense of verbal and analytical precision” (Ong, 1982, p. 9).

It is precisely this –always in renewal– perception of the communicative self to foster the constant improvement of information and communication technologies. Writing technology<sup>1</sup>, for example, is well suited for the practice of solipsistic reading, but its effectiveness in interpersonal communication is problematic, as it presents high levels of latency. In this regard, Ong proposes the idea of “secondary orality” (Ong, 1982, p. 190) to denote both the forms of mass media communication such as radio and television (especially those of the subgenus of live transmissions) and, by referring to the ‘global village’ of McLuhan (1964), those typical of peer-to-peer communication in digital environments where users adopt more informal language patterns able to generate a communitarian sense, authorized by the synchronicity of communication.

Secondary orality activates a process in which the enunciative distance is remediated in the sense of presence, which arises from the synchronous nature of digital communication, able to simulate the enunciative act as current. With immersive media, secondary orality can be said to be completed.

A negative interpretation of the cancellation of the enunciative distance (completion of secondary orality) is the one that leads to consider as isolated, from a social and cognitive standpoint, the user immersed in a digital environment. Users who use an augmented reality app like *Pokémon Go* in a public space, for example, may be stigmatized

by co-present individuals for being inattentive to the real world; in this case, immersive media, instead of increasing, prevents and compromises the overall cognitive prehension of the real world.

Another consequence of the illusory cancellation of the enunciative distance is the establishment of a cognitive distance, which emerges from the progressive development of the processes of technical delegation (Montani, 2014) of the perceptive and cognitive faculties to the device. By adopting immersive technologies, simultaneously embodied (i.e. integrated in the body, able to translate motor inputs into machine instructions) and locative (i.e. equipped with GPS), the technologically mediated experience of the real space has to be conceived as phenomenological, and the semiotic process of spatialization through an augmented body as inseparable from that experienced by a computational entity like a computer-vision software.

Let's look at a specific case. Augmented reality applications, such as *Ikea Place* or *Metro*, delegate to computer vision software the perceptions' elaboration processes whose, by operating computationally and 'deeply', measures real spaces by returning an output to the user, who, in the meantime, is free to enjoy the medial experience and the sublime mathematical accuracy of the calculus. However, the user, by delegating to a computational entity the perceptual and operational faculties, can allow it to anticipate—for example through algorithmic strategies of recommendation—the contents to be experienced, by ending with the production of an image that is distanced from a heterogeneous and idiosyncratic representation of the world: "as Augmented Reality will become ubiquitous, it will likely take over most aspects of our daily interactions with surrounding objects and human beings, making it practically impossible to distance ourselves from this added dimension of future society, much in the same way that most people can no more leave their house without making sure they have their mobile phones on them" (Palermos, 2017, p. 134).

A very similar process is already evident in the social network communication.

At this point we would like to begin to sketch the connection between the semantic distance of the user in immersive media and the cognitive distance of the scopic regime installed by a social media platform: indeed, both computational architectures that govern such media environments, in which the user is virtually embedded, are currently designed to isolate it in a self-referential and illusory environment.

The observer-user is illusory conscious that the semiotic articulation of the experimented text (consisting of the set of contents displayed within a feed page) depends only on their contingent choices: the hierarchical succession of the post that follows would be unique and in a certain sense unrepeatable. But he does not know (or perhaps did not know, until a few years ago) that this articulation is instead the result of a complex deep work, carried out by algorithms based on data processing, and that, therefore, the possibility of encountering insufficient or deceptive representations of the world is far from lacking.

Here, again, we retrieve the problem of the reference of a subject of enunciation. The presence of an automated and computational interlocutor not only opens the way to post-truth (Lorusso, 2018) but, from a phenomenological and subjective point of view, can cause the emergence of unpleasant and disturbing sensations, which inevitably affect the meta-experiential level, such as the so-called 'Fomo', that is the fear of missing out an important event, or of not participating in the collective discussion that develops from this. In this case, distance is conceived as absence and it is related to a sense of social isolation.

Always at the level of the values, we can look to the extreme political consequences of the succeed of secondary orality; they concern the relationships of knowledge and power that are expressed in algorithmic language (Finn 2017). We can now understand how the isolation of the user within the media environment, created by an immersive media, is

semantically related to that created by the computational and algorithmic systems that govern social media platforms by creating echo-chambers. The computational and algorithmic systems that govern the functioning of social media platforms have been associated with the production of a filtering and echo effect (Pariser, 2011) and this form of power and influence on the fruition of texts within a common and shared space can be further associated with that characterizing the theory of *Panopticon* in Foucault (1975).

Finally, there is also the technological factor: the screens of the devices, such as glasses for augmented reality, are designed to be wearable, to incarnate and occupy the space closest to the individual, the intimate one, by making difficult to break free from the aesthetic and cognitive grip of the virtual world. They inaugurate a new typology of orality that subsists between human user, endowed with natural language, and computational entity, endowed with artificial language.

Therefore, the conceptualization of the distance in immersive media must be understood in the enunciative sense, and referred to the interstitial physical space between the couple user-text and the surrounding physical-material world, and referred to a condition of the user who finds himself alone and estranged, cognitively immersed and isolated in an extra-earthly dimension from which it is impossible to recognize the real world from the one generated by the computer.

This is the 'problem' of the secondary orality that proposes the sense of distance in relation to facts, objects and individuals who, although they perceive themselves as neighbors, are distant, or in any case do not belong to the situation in which they are present, are not *in situ*, and yet consider themselves true in order to feel immersed. The cyber-dystopian imagery of fictional narratives and the techno-phobia that develops from actual news events contributes, day by day, to feed the social and psychological concerns that arise from this problem.

## WHAT IS IT TO BE DISTANT?

At this point, a doubt can arise: the cancellation of the enunciative distance, that characterizes the immersive media (and in general, from the computational and algorithmic media), may be problematic to the extent that it may lead the users to alienate and lose themselves within the intimate and virtual space in which the reception and activation of a message occurs. But this negative interpretation of the totalizing mediation, we might say 'apocalyptic' (Eco, 1968), is just a first type of interpretation.

The simulation of the situation of enunciation within the text means that the perception of the enunciative distance between producer and text produces a sense of immersivity, hermeticity and presence. A phenomenal reunion occurs with the objects of speech, which appear as present and immediate: this reunion re-energies the affective and axiological dimension in the observer, and puts the emphasis on the spontaneity and corporeity of interactivity, by making the link with orality even stronger. The characters of a virtual reality film appear as present and current: with them the user can interact in a natural and immediate way and this has consequences on the sense of empathy, for example, that the viewer can try (Dal Pozzo et al., 2018; Arcagni, 2020). In addition, on a thematic level, many of the virtual reality products that provide an interactive component adopt languages typical of the videogames and, in this sense, the corporeity of interaction is the most important aspect of the immersive experience.

By looking instead to the communicative (and distributive) strategies for the commercialization of applications and experiences related to immersive media, it is typical to incur in persuasive interpretations of the cancellation of enunciative distance, which emphasize the increasing informational and aesthetics experience, the recovery of intersubjective experience, an humanitarian sense and empathy of interaction, by emphasizing the expressive possibilities of these innovative devices and their ability to develop meta-operational skills of

augmented cognition of the prosthetic subject, comparable to the sense of verbal and analytical precision of which Ong spoke. Unlike the previous interpretation, whereby the sense of hermeticism emanating from the virtual environment led to a condition of social and cognitive isolation, here it is the sense of immersivity to be connected to the cancellation of a critical distance linked to the use of telematic media.

The first positive interpretation of the cancelled distance goes in the direction of a recovery of the in-presence experience, in which the immersive media represents a tool of conjunction, and not of disjunction, between subjects. The augmented reality media, by visually connecting real world perceptions and virtual contents within the same display, put the user into the embodied experience and, in the case of alternate reality games like *Pokémon Go*, it physically places him within the public space shared with other players. The sense of the cancelled distance flows both from the process of visual augmentation and from the recovery of social interaction and the presence of bodies: it is no longer a matter of being always on, of alienating oneself in a fruition of only computer-generated images, of not “to go down more in the street and not to meet more physically” (Fadda, 2018, p. 21). It is instead a matter to be present and current in the place prescribed by the mediation, in order to become (re)enunciators—at each mediation—of a geo-localized content.

However, the enunciative act, experienced visually and aesthetically (in the sense of sensory), corresponds, as we have said, just to an illusory simulation of it: the simulation of the cancellation of the enunciative distance by the content’s authors. Players at *Pokémon Go*, in this sense, are still the target of an earlier, more or less conscious communicative and entrepreneurial project, which updates the issues related to the topological and axiological distance between enunciator and recipient<sup>2</sup>.

A second type of positive interpretation of the erased distance, instead, emphasizes the evasive character and the aesthetic distance from the place where the mediation takes

place, that especially virtual reality enables. Virtual reality movies like *Carne y Arena*<sup>3</sup> or exploration video games like *Apollo 11*<sup>4</sup> are aesthetically appealing insofar they are able to 'transport' the user in the dimension of elsewhere, physically and topologically, by letting user to perceive a reality otherwise impossible to experience through the human body; in the first case, exotic territories inaccessible for contingent reasons, in the second one, places no longer usable because physically insubstantial (in the case of *Apollo 11*, the distance is also temporal: experience consists of a sort of 'time travel' –and this helps to emphasize even more the referential distance from the laws of nature that regulate the real world to which the user is accustomed). In both cases to be pursued is an integration of the phenomenological and aesthetic knowledge of the individual, which acts by rarefying the topological distance between the user and the object of the visual content.

These two interpretations give rise to the idea that immersive media are innovative (positive appreciation) insofar they increase the knowledge of common users, compared to those of social media, by emphasizing a rediscovery of the value of the presence and proximity of bodies in space (whether real or virtual) and between bodies themselves. Immersive media bring users close, although to what is distant and difficult to achieve physically.

The most important aspect of these 'experiences of the distance' is the ability of immersive media to visualize something that is distant (like the knowledge) here and now, and to transform heterotopically the real space in which visual augmentation occurs in a space, precisely, increased: this is particularly evident with augmented reality. In these cases, the (cancellation of) physical-topological distance corresponds to that between the device and the confined space prepared to be increased, and has the function of facilitating the access to knowledge by users (let's think of the QR code installed near a historical monument or a bus stop): the emergence of incremental information occurs in the visual

space of the user, on the display of the device as well as on the retina of the eyeball: is close, in the sense of immediate, accessible by click<sup>5</sup>.

The third and final type of interpretation that we would like to discuss here concerns the metaphysical distance between the virtual dimension –otherworldly and utopian– and the real life, physically experienced. This is also an interesting example of the question of referentiality. In February 2020 in South Korea, Jang Ji-Sung met her dead daughter thanks to the Meeting You project, which allows her, wearing a virtual reality helmet, to see and interact with the digital representation of the body of the daughter: here the distance is not referential, because the child’s body and the place are insubstantial (the meeting takes place in a playground –a real place– that the two used to attend, but the illusion of presence of the living daughter leads to interpret this place as metaphysical); but it is neither traceable to the physical-topological enunciative distance between two subjects existing in the real world whose communication is mediated and whose presence is simulated technically (as the daughter is dead in the here and now). What is at stake is still a distance that, although it can be understood as a topological, is to be interpreted as a metaphysical one, liminal between life and death, which in interaction decays. The deceased, ghettoized in cemeteries at a distance from the world of the living, return to symbolically circulate among the living, proving to be full partners again worthy of exchange. They move suddenly from the periphery of the real world to the center of the virtual one [my translation from Italian] (Sisto, 2018, p. 72).

To conclude, it is clear that the cancellation of the enunciative and referential distance in immersive media pushes towards an extreme recovery of the idea of secondary orality and does not only lead to a positive overcoming of the ‘isolated’ condition of the social media user, but, positively, to an update of the sense of space itself, real, digitally increased, and shared, as well as of the categories of proximity and distance that articulate the processes of signification that occur within it.

## DISTANT VISION, DISTANT READING AND AESTHETIC DISTANCE

By promoting an affective and informational increasing of the natural experience, antithetical to the cognitive isolation, immersive media can be interpreted as a prosthesis of sensibility (Montani, 2014) which, through cancellations of the enunciative distance, increases –and not alienates– the experience of the individual.

The concept of prosthesis can be referred, in this sense, to that of apparatus (Foucault, 1975): it is therefore possible to consider the device of an immersive experience a factor that deeply affects the ‘formations of the self’. In particular, this affection promotes the development of a meta-experiential competence in the individual, which concerns the understanding and organization of trans-textual relations between elements detected within a media environment (Montani, Cecchi, & Feyles, 2018) and which constitute, as a whole, the object of the users’ augmented experience.

It is important to underline that, this time, it is not the cancellation of a distance to be decisive; on the contrary, to be decisive is its affirmation through the establishment of an interstitial technological device able to support the users, by providing them with an operational interface to organize the contents of the experience.

Firstly, we would like to give our own interpretation of the *Panopticon* technology, based on the theory of Foucault. It may represent the technology, or technique, characterized by the interposition of a distance between the observer and the observed subject, and that it is a necessary condition for the informational increasing of the observer. In the *Panopticon* of Bentham, the interposition of a wall, although adequately perforated to allow the guards to surveille prisoners, coincides with the establishment of a distance, realized concretely in the dividing and strategic apparatus: its peculiarity lies in the ability to provide the guards with a vision ‘at distance’ that allows to supervise several prisoners at the same time.

With digital technologies the same process occurs: by using surveillance cameras, the monitor is disconnected from the real world framed by the devices, and must be located within a control center in order to obtain a multi perspective vision of observable space.

We can affirm that the languages of the digital interfaces lead to the development of a meta-experiential competence which concerns the strategic organization of the media environment and the formation of the self on the basis of the functioning of certain perceptual models.

In the *Panopticon*, the interposition of a wall, despite it increases the operational capacity of the observer, decreases the amount of details of the observed subject perceptible. Besides, a reason for the theoretical success of *Panopticon* could therefore be attributed to the fact that this apparatus reduces the expenditure of energies necessary for the observation of a large portion of the world, and by the social sense (in this case of power and oppression) that emerges from the structural organization of space.

Therefore, combining the sense of hermeticism and isolation arising from the cancellation of the enunciative, topological and referential distance, with the process of informational augmentation and incremental perceptions, is not a simple task: in this regard we would like to recall the distant reading paradigm, developed by Franco Moretti (2005), in the field of literary criticism: this expression denotes a method of computational analysis of written texts belonging to a single literary current or referable to a single author (but the same can be done with visual texts). This method is able to bring out trans-textual isotopies and recurrent stylistic elements into a corpus of texts: “distant reading: where distance, is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes or genres and systems” (Moretti, 2005, pp. 48-49).

Understanding in what sense a meta-textual analysis of this type can lead to an informal increment of the close

reading experience (which assumes a certain degree of immersion) can be useful to define better the augmentation process and to understand how the process of developing meta-operational skills that occurs, for example, in augmented reality experiences.

The informational increment of augmented reality can be interpreted as an embrayage within the text, which brings an amount of information belonging to the extra-textual dimension to appear intra-textually, but that is necessarily semantically referred to the semiotic elements detected in physical space.

The vision 'at distance', which has been obtained computationally, allows to 'walk' within the network of trans-textual relations, by helping to define better and to understand in a critical way the single textual unit with which the reader interfaces here and now.

Although this paradigm seems at first to follow the organizational structure of the *Panopticon*, as it puts in place an overcoming of the focus over the single object and the adoption of a vision 'at distance' that captures the whole of a situation, it is detached from it for one reason: differently from the *Panopticon*, the distant reading paradigm provides, alongside the perceptual processes of the user, a second observant instance, the computational one, whose role is to observe the quantitative qualities of a corpus (faster and better than the human being would), to organize its units, to meta-contextualize them, and finally to return to the users an abstract representation of them, so that they could take advantage of an enhanced and enriched look over the single textual object. Computational analysis sets up a multi-focal view, at the same time oriented to the detail and the universal, by allowing the access to the single element only through an intermediate step, the interface, through which the internal organization and logical explanation of the contents appears. This in-between step corresponds exactly to the installation of an interstitial and distancing device. By adopting a vision 'at distance', the interface represents an environmental en-

tity that allows the users to grasp the relationships that exist between the various textual units: the interface is still something that has been produced, that has been enunciated we could say (for example from the production company) but, first of all, it is an interactive and user-oriented entity, which provides a set of tools to manage the contents, to understand and organize them into the actual mediated experience. Now, in all computational media experiences there is an interface that works in this way: but what about multitasking interfaces through which it is possible to control running applications, to choose those with which to operate, and those immediately accessible through a shortcut? In the latter case, the meta-operative and meta-experiential skills are decisive to understand and organize, at distance, the process of interactivity with the computational instance.

In this perspective a hermetic (and therefore isolating) immersive experience model can be theoretically imagined, that activates both a sense of presence and, at the same time, 'increased' visions of the real world and augmented by information calculated by artificial intelligence.

## CONCLUSIONS

The affirmation of secondary orality paradigm within the media landscape has already occurred (for example in social media platforms) and has led both to an enrichment of communication possibilities and to users' social isolation, that has been aggravated by the spread of so-called echo-chambers.

In the context of this contribution, it has been decided to consider specific issues concerning the impact of immersive technologies on the cognitive perception of the real world, in order to outline the general characteristics of apocalyptic discourses that insist on the theme of distance. Secondly, it has been decided to take into account also positive and persuasive interpretations of the immersive experience that the technologies of virtual and augmented reality enable.

On the one hand, the remediated forms of orality in the communication of social networks (which provides for the cancellation of the enunciative distance) leads to the reactivation of skills, rules and schemes typical of oral language (and this is a reason for users' persuasion). On the other hand, in the case of computational platforms, and by referring specifically both to phenomena of interpersonal communication mediated digitally and to immersive experiences in solitary, the sense of isolation can be problematic to the extent that it risks to lead to a cognitive loss of the user into the virtual world. However, the sense of isolation emerges just in front of the ascertainment of the mediation, of the identification of the computational interlocutor and of the algorithmic process that generates the hierarchical visualization of the contents: the users can therefore be thought as isolated cognitively not because they enjoy an image of the world that does not correspond to the real –referential problem– but because they enjoy an image of the world built *ad hoc* and 'caused' by directly its 'profile'.

This isolation, increasingly conscious and problematized by critical media studies, features the risks related to the habit of being constantly at the center of a virtual *Panopticon* (as in the case of social networks), able to observe and continuously to be observed (although the relationship does not need to be proportional) the surrounding environment; these risks are, on the other hand, readily concealed by sensational marketing strategies that leverage technological innovation, especially on the participation of users in public debate and the expression of individual creativity.

A possible future model of scopic regime in immersive experiences must therefore be able to combine the effect of the cancellation of distance enabled by immersive media, which risks isolating the user in a filter-bubble, with the adoption of a 'vision at distance', through the establishment of an interface able to trace the enunciative entity and the referential distance, and thus to allow the user to critically evaluate the object of observation, to detach from it and at the same time to be able to immerse in it with a renewed awareness.

The focal point is to encourage the creation and dissemination of media interfaces and architectures that could promote the development of new meta-experiential skills in the user: not only with regard to the biunivocal relationship, that which exists between the user and the computational system, but also for the ones that exists between social and computational subjects, in which it is not easy to distinguish a simulation from an enunciation in presence (at least in the now).

## NOTES

- 1 It should be noted that the writing technology to which Ong refers is purely that which operates by means of material and paper, not digital.
- 2 This is the case with *Pokémon* strategically placed near businesses.
- 3 Iñárritu, A. G. (Director). (2017). *Carne y Arena* [Film]. Legendary Pictures.
- 4 IDIA Lab. (2017). *Apollo 11 (Switch version)* [Video game]. Waterford City, IE: Immersive VR Education.
- 5 It is interesting to note, from a socio-semiotic perspective, how the remedy of the topological distance in the digital archive or in the database, by definition topoi of the custody of knowledge, does not coincide with a circumvention of the instances of mediation, but with a re-focusing of the services that they are able to offer.

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