

Immersion, as the process of diving or plunging into water – or more general, into an other environment – thanks his cultural impact to its metaphorical use. The imagination of a subject getting lost in a virtual world, in a capturing novel or in an interactive game by feeling present in an other world, has entailed a wide discourse on the relations of symbolic orders (mostly images) and the dynamics of psychological constructions of a world.

Hence, immersion is always related to technics of as-if-modes and therefore to simulations. My aim is to pass by the semiotic dimensions of immersion and take this concept literally – which means to focus upon the history of knowledge of immersed bodies. Such a history looks at the technical, scientific, medical and media discourses that accompany the immersion of bodies in other environments. This history starts in the 19th century with the physiology of the train passenger and includes the construction of cockpits as well as the first computer simulations of human movements in the human factors engineering of the cold war.

In all these cases, the distinction between a felt body (as in german Leib) and the functional in technics is never a fixed distinction, it will itself be described as a reproduction, as a re-entry of differences through practices of simulation. Today, immersed bodies are not only virulent in the entertainment industry but they also reappear in disciplines like neurophysiology or robotics. These disciplines use

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computer simulations not to investigate the body but to construct new knowledge about the localization of the threshold between the end of the body and the beginning of the otherness.

Instead of focusing on the human body, their research looks for the construction of media-corporal-systems. Hence, immersed bodies are – so my thesis – a phenomena that grounds the simulation as an as-if-mode but that significantly changes through the use of computer simulations to a level where notions like the cyborg or the hybrid do not fit anymore. Moreover, new concepts could start with a historical perspective on the phenomena of immersed bodies to shape these new relationships of bodies and their environments.

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