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Metaphors and Visual Associations of Virtual Reality

Digital media brought spectacular developments in the 90's: the World Wide Web and an innovative simulation-technology, Virtual Reality appeared. The two inventions meant a new vision about the future with numerous metaphors and great enthusiasm. It seemed, at the time, we were very close to the possibility of a new 4D world with the highest levels of manipulation. Today, these ideas mean other constructions: many of which help us manage the rationalization of the new media and not mainly its mystification.

New generations live together with the digital media and have their own online style of living, so earlier metaphors and visions have gained new meanings for them. Or have they? My hypothesis is that earlier metaphors give us a certain amount of freedom to reinterpret the phenomena of the new media. While the virtual environment becomes more and more real, we can analyse the earlier metaphors again.

To control my hypothesis I conducted empirical research about the interpretation of metaphors of virtual reality with the new generations in Hungary and with a control group in the USA as well. The results have shown that the novelty of digital media is measurable, but the interaction of virtual and real realities determine user's attitudes. An exciting result follows as a consequence: digital virtual realty gives associations and interpretations to general meanings of virtual reality, which may range from a dream to a journey.

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