Chapter 1
Living inside the NET:
The Primacy of Interactions and Processes

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ABSTRACT

Internet is one of the biggest revolutions throughout the history of mankind. It has been opening minds, flourishing new abilities and creating social inclusion chances, helping to lead people to economical growth and a feel of purpose. Internet and its branches also bring issues, inherent to the ways of production, share ability and copyright, empowerment and other new challenges. This paper aims to highlight some examples of researchers regarding their studies on literacy (and illiteracy) in the WEB, inviting readers to think about the creative usage of Internet, facing it as much more than a mere tool: as a rich and challenging part of our lives, questioning the thoughts that usually leads us to “on” and “offline” categories. This classification seems to do not answer today’s problems any longer, specially with the Internet of Things and Big Data reaching critical mass. Experiences with the School of the Future Research Laboratory - USP and more episodes are expounded, composing a peculiar landscape of the Internet as part of development of new skills and ways of thinking the world and mankind.

INTRODUCTION

Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding... – William Gibson, Neuromancer.

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and machineXmachine) as social relationships mediation surfaces within the growing flow of the communication among the connected actors.

From this broth of hyper connectivity, also emerges a new group of abilities and/or skills, formed after the usage of different technologies also called “digital literacies” and/or media literacy, reflecting a communicational reality that cannot handle any longer the process of mass communication reduced to the duality emitter-receptor from the past century. The new century brings in its DNA the concept of “new economy” presupposing new business models, the reciprocity of communicational actions and the hybridism of the traditional mass media as TV, cinema, radio and printed media with its younger brother – the digital media or new media.

The previously scenario drawn in this introduction converges to the statements from the sociologist Derrik de Kerckhove, in a lecture at the Advanced Studies Institute of University of São Paulo – USP (Dourado, 2013) regarding the centrality of technology in contemporary life. Disciple of the Canadian theorist Marshal McLuhan (1911-1980), Kerckhove is considered one of the most important specialists in the studies of the relations between digital technologies and society. He is a professor at the University of Toronto, where he coordinated for more than 20 years the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology. For him, in the transition to the contemporary technological society, the concept of totemism is reflected in a continuum between the human mind and the machine, whose result is a deep and decisive change in the ways they constitute and build the new identities, sociabilities and sensitivities of individuals nowadays. Self and digital networks interpenetrate each other and create themselves in relations of mutual interdependence; machines and technologies become extensions of the body; electronic identities and avatars circulate in cyberspace building new ways of living and of existence in the world and the internet becomes fundamental track of production, circulation and sharing of expressions, emotions and social action itself.

Passarelli (2012) researcher and coordinator of research-action projects on digital inclusion in environments of formal and non-formal education, recognizes two “waves” in the introduction of the Internet in Brazil. In the first “wave” that took place from the year 2000 when the commercial Internet began to be offered on a massive scale in the Brazilian context, the main focus was driven to access policies and infrastructure for the mitigation of the phenomena of digital exclusion and for the conquest of citizenship, aiming primarily the low-income population. The second “wave”, intensified from 2006, came as a result of the accumulation of experiences and information arising from public and private sector initiatives, creating the foundations for the need to adopt new approaches and research perspectives. These emerged concerned with the consideration about the reality of everyday usage of new technologies and the construction of identities and narratives by the actors in network, in different socio-historical and cultural realities and disembogu in the adoption of the concept of MIL - Media and Information Literacy to qualify the new communication skills, information search and knowledge production of connected actors.

In the context of empirical research, the author established in 2007, the Observatory of the Digital Culture at the School of the Future - USP as the locus for the development of empirical and theoretical-epistemological studies on the networked society, integrated by USP’s researchers; from other Brazilian institutions of education and research as well as by researchers from European and American institutions with which they have academic agreements signed. These researches have as their object both observe and describe the connections that maintain the “woof” of the network, as well as analyze its flexible, technical and socio-technical social axes, disproving a deterministic notion of the process, favoring the use of