

## TECHNOLOGIES AND LITERATURES

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### Summary

Technology is not a neutral or transparent instrument for the transformation of nature and humanity. Technological decisions are ideological and have consequences on the lives of individuals and their cultural models. The evolution and function of literatures have always been tied to different technologies that have installed them in different forms of orality or writing, and in different supporting materials, which have modified throughout time the creation and reading habits. Nowadays, we must appraise the magnitude of the literary production migration to new supports as a challenge regarding the maintenance of humanity's memory, as an opportunity toward democratization, and as a change in knowledge models.

### 1. Which Technologies for a Globalized World

Science and technology are essentially human, because they have been invented and developed by men for one purpose: the transformation of nature, which has as a consequence the transformation of man. Therefore, the technician is personally responsible for what he does before everyone that can be affected by his work. Science and technology are, thus, ideology (Habermas 1968).

However, since the nineteenth century, modern societies have institutionalized innovation until its transformation in the first productive force, above the work force of

the immediate producers. Thus technology has legitimized its dominance as independent variable, not subjected to judgment or control, with the subsequent loss of democratic control. Today modern technology is something radically different to the antique artisan technique. Now not only objects are fabricated to perform a specific task, but moreover machines are designed with multiple and open capacities that are modifying practices and possibilities, perceptions and actions. Consequently, the transformation of knowledge in works and in the direction itself of the technological progress can not be resolved in the sphere of individual education, but in terms politically relevant.

We are facing new challenges with an old memory, with metaphors and narratives highly modeling and creative. But the interaction with machines (digital or not) is far from being a natural activity, automatic and transparent, as neither the use of signs is neutral or ingenuous. All forms of writing are technologies that propitiate their own physical spaces, visual and mental, with ideological consequences. In particular, literature implies a leap from private experience to publication, where technological modeling couple to economical and to human factors.

This moment is, without doubt, one of historical acceleration which demands fast appraisals and/or risky prophesies. Since the creation of the first graphic interface in 1984 or the opening of the first website in the World Wide Web in 1991, we are witnessing a revolution that has just begun. It has already reached the editing and circulating formats of literary works, the digitalization of libraries and their book supplies, the reading spaces, the habits and genres of literary creation, the models of teaching-learning of the shared literary patrimony, the definition, in short, of being in the world. In this situation, some proclaim the utopia of computational gigantism, whereas others confess their angst toward the massive audiovisual consumption, which is leaving the word in the corner. Conscious of literatures everlasting dependence on material supports and technologies, we all ask ourselves if in the future literatures will be digital or will not be.

## **2. What's Really New?**

### **2.1. Substituting or Overlapping Supporting Materials**

If we review the history of the technologies which have served as a medium for literatures, we realize that the technological innovations have finally substituted the old media. For the time being, computers are accommodating books, but it is possible that the facility of access, the abundance of production, the transformation of reading models, as well as the creation of a type of literature exclusively made for the digital medium, become victors.

It has always been this way. If codices substituted volumes around the sixth century, it is because of the easiness of consult and reference imposed itself. Criticisms against the printing press since its birth are similar to the ones being thrown against the electronic supports, but arguments concerning the frailty of paper versus parchment, the scarce editing care, or the transmission of error *ad infinitum*, did not impede that the new production system imposed itself because of its capacity of diffusion and cost-effectiveness (O'Donnell 1998). Never until today has the diffusion of a literary work been cheaper, and this is thanks to electronic technology.

But the writing support material has always played a key role in the transmission of the literary, and this must make us think about the readers of the future. Those texts which were recuperated from the volumes and preserved in codices managed to obtain a longer life, not always deserved. Thinking about this change of support, taking rational decisions at a world scale, developing programs at every level, cannot be today a marginal endeavor in the literary and scientific fields, but a central activity that displaces, because of its urgency, all others.

In fact, if monastic orders spread throughout the world when they could count on manual copies of their regulations between the fourth and sixth centuries BC, and organized their forms of cultural dominance starting from a technology, those very orders lost their power when they failed to adapt to the technological changes of the sixteenth century. This can be the universities and cultural institutions' lot if they do not accept and adopt, in a massive and confident way, the new electronic technologies, the literatures generated by them, and the social mandate which has made them critical depositories of the historic memory of humanity. The lack of knowledge regarding the tools available for electronic editing suffered by the academia, who should be the leader of this scientific vanguard, can have serious consequences for the very safeguard of the acquired positions in a moment of technological change such as this one.

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### Biographical Sketch

**Amelia Sanz** (Madrid, 1962) is PhD on Philology at Complutense University. She has pursued several training research programs in France, Belgium and Canada. She is teacher at the Department of French in the Faculty of Arts, at Complutense University of Madrid. Her work focuses on Comparative Literature, studying particularly transference processes between French and Spanish Literatures from 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>

centuries. She has developed theoretical reflections on key concepts 20th century Critical Theory, such as intertextuality, systemic approaches, interculturality, transculturality and hypertextuality. Prof. Sanz is coordinator of the research group LEETHY (*Literaturas Españolas y Europeas del Texto al Hipertexto*) and director of the e-learning Program at the Faculty of Arts in Complutense University.

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