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Technologies and Social Change in the Americas (Introduction)

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Technologies profoundly shape the development and the interaction of societies and cultures. Technologies are embedded in forms of social life and fields of cultural creativity. [1] They are catalysts for the creation of cultural divides and cultural networks. Technology and culture also directly influence each other. Cultural creativity spurs new technological development. Technological innovation brings forth new cultural media and expressions. Technology comprises of an entire cultural field with ideas and practices concerning how to interact between humans and to relate to non-humans. While there is a long debate on whether technologies are neutral instruments or, on the contrary, if technologies may foster undesirable social developments, it seems that this antagonism is more complex in the contemporary Information Age. Moreover, several technologic devices are integral parts of the body and the production of the social. In posthumanist thinking, technologies question traditional differences and recommend crossing boundaries and a more inclusive attitude towards non-humans, be they natural or artificial. [2]

In general terms, technological instruments often serve as a prolongation of the body. With that the boundaries between the human and the technical began to blur which is expressed in the concept of the cyborg. On the other hand, technological artefacts are increasingly not only understood as objects or instruments, but as actants (Latour 71) that have an own agency to produce the social. As concerns the relation between the human and technologies, American cultures have often been at the forefront of the development and cultural coding of new technologies for the redesign of communication in social and cultural media. Technological inventions often also inspire social innovations. In trans- and intercultural contexts, the appropriation and incorporation of external cultural elements have often triggered social innovations. Also new inventions and innovations accelerate new imaginaries of the social. For example, the automobile changed not only the perception of time, place, and space, but also changed the patterns of mass-production and mass-consumption. The rise of radio and the record industry have enabled popular music to become a force of social and cultural change and a message carrier between movements and scenes in diverse contexts.

In its early stages, the Zapatista Movement in southern Mexico started to adopt virtual communication as a mix of surreal poetics, art practices, and political statements, and influenced global social movements such as the Occupy Movement. The Silicon Valley media complex shapes the channels of entertainment, virtual communication, and new media interaction on a global scale. As the Black Lives Matter protests after the murder of George Floyd have shown, amateur videos produced with camera phones have become a powerful weapon in the struggle against police brutality and anti-Black racism, providing victims, witnesses, and activists with a means of producing evidence and documenting human rights violations in ways that have sparked worldwide antiracist mobilizations. In times of the Corona pandemic, the importance of webinars and virtual demonstrations, concerts, and conferences as platforms for transnational communication between activists, artists, and academics have increased significantly, opening

new opportunities for networks of solidarity and cross-cultural dialogues beyond geographical and social borders.

Nevertheless, in many cases technological innovations have also lead to dystopic imaginaries of the social. Contemporary fears of a society of control, dominated by powerful private enterprises are a case in point. Cultural Studies researcher Néstor García Canclini recently diagnosed the emergence of an "algorithmic governmentality" where under the leadership of tech-oligopolies such as Google, Amazon and Microsoft, state institutions are replaced by apps, public media by social networks, and—in the end—the citizen by algorithms. [3] The articles in this edition address technologies and their cultural, historical and social role in shaping societies and their interactions in the Americas. The editors define technologies in a broad sense as technical and cultural. Contributions address technologies like the railroad, muralism, cinema, television, internet and new media as well as topics such as art and technology, history and technology, literature and technology, technology and social innovation in an interdisciplinary fashion.

The article by Paola Ravasio explores the technology of the railroad transport and its literary representations and reflections as trainscapes in selected literary writings by the Asian American writer Maxine Hong Kingston, the African American author Colson Whitehead and the Afro Costa Rican writer Quince Duncan who all articulate a type of rail intertextuality along the categories of repetition and difference. As symbol par excellence of modern progress, the nineteenth-century rail transport revolution defined an entirely new collective experience of technology (Harrington 229), in which metropolises and rural areas, people of different social classes, time intervals, and tracts of land met in the carriages that traversed huge territories in the Americas. The railroad represented a life-changing innovation in transportation technology and, by extension, in modern capitalist economies, due to the compression of the categories of speed and proximity through mechanized travel. As the literary reflections show, technological progress manifests itself as a complex and conflictive process that, while creating a new awareness of geography and a heightened sense of mobility, it also expanded the colonial networks of exploitations as concerns land and people.

Gigi Adair draws on posthumanist thinking in her literary and cultural analysis of Earl Lovelace's 2011 novel *Is Just a Movie*. The novel imagines the arrival of the "age of technology" in Trinidad. Set mostly in the 1970s and 1980s, it ponders the apparent failure of the emancipatory hopes associated with independence in the Caribbean, then the radical politics of the 1970 Black Power Revolution to ask about the role of technology in cultural and social life, and the potential for technology and culture to remake the social. Refusing both technological determinism and development discourse, both of which are portrayed as forms of neocolonialism, the novel instead insists on the possibility of a politicized and emancipatory engagement with technology that emerges from a longer history of Caribbean proto-posthumanist thought and the cultural technology of the Caribbean Carnival.

Exploring contemporary expressions of muralism in Mexico, Rozenn Le Mur discusses the visual art form as cultural technology to reappropriate imaginaries about indigeneity. In order to commemorate the International Day of Indigenous Peoples and the International Year of Indigenous Languages, in August 2019, Urban Indigenous Youth, Raíces del Verso, and the Nahuales Collective organized the painting of the community mural *Y que nadie borre nuestras huellas* (And may no one erase our footprints) in the city of Guadalajara, Jalisco. They proposed to collaborate to make visible the presence of indigenous youth in the city, using public space to reconfigure and reappropriate the imaginary about indigeneity, in what they called a "political act of resistance." The essay reflects on community muralism as a tool to dialogue and reconfigure imaginaries, where the political is a fundamental axis. It builds its argumentation around the following questions: How is an artistic proposal such as this mural used to open a debate on interculturality, discrimination, and indigenous identity in the city? And in what way is the community mural *Y que nadie borre nuestras huellas*, as a discursive production, an act of resistance?

Television profoundly changed mass entertainment and the public sphere in the second half of the twentieth century. But as many technological and social changes before, television encountered obstacles and problems on its way to mainstream culture. Francisco Hernández Lomelí explores the initial weaknesses that the absence of a content policy meant for the consolidation of the television industry in Mexico. The article provides a general framework of the slow start of this medium in several nations (Germany, United States, and Great Britain) and draws a comparative perspective between different Ibero-American countries (Argentina, Colombia, and Spain). In doing so, the text demonstrates the precariousness of the programming proposals made by the promoters of public and private television in its early years, the financial insolvency of television companies and the relationship of dependence of television with respect to the rest of the mass media. In this way, the essay renders it possible to observe both the common problems faced by the television industry at the international level and the particular obstacles of each country.

In the 1960s artists looked intensively for collaboration with technology and engineers who were developing and using technology. Artistic networks like Fluxus, EAT, Black Mountain College, Black Arts Repertory Theatre, Sun Ra's Solar Arkestra, Teatro Campesino, Cunningham Dance Theater, and Judson Dance Theater produced performances in which artistic expression and social impetus were strongly embedded in collaborative art projects. Wilfried Raussert's contribution analyzes examples from U.S postmodern dance in the 1960s to explore the emergence of collaborative aesthetics as a matrix for new developments in the performance arts. In this context, creativity is defined as a collective effort and achievement; postmodern dance is interpreted as a laboratory for redefining community and rethinking the relationship between the human, the social, and technology. The essay argues that postmodern dance can serve as a blueprint for an artistic vision of new forms of social bonding.

Fabiola Alcalá Anguiano and Alejandra Sañudo Martín explore the close ties between cinema and the social world. As their article

argues, cinema is a reflection of the social world and the representation of certain social groups is significant when studying it. In particular, this text addresses aspects of gender and technology focusing on the representation of women in commercial or mainstream cinema, specifically reviewing the stereotypes and female archetypes that appear throughout the Star Wars saga, with the intention of reviewing whether they perpetuate certain forms of representation or if they propose some new ones. By focusing on three female characters, Leia, Padmé and Rey, the article explores particular case studies to shed light on the relationship of technology and representations of the social world in science fiction film.

In contemporary times social visions and freedom of expression are linked with the diversity of flows, streams, and blogs on the internet. Rodrigo Liceaga's text questions the assumption of the internet as a human right and of technology as fundamental for everyday life through inquiring into the relation between capitalism, technology, and coloniality. By drawing on a postcolonial approach to the constitution of a European/Western subject and bridging postcolonial studies and political ecology, the essay analyzes how and to what extent coloniality, capitalism, and technology might be intertwined. The main argument is that the internet, as we know it and expect it, to mediate everyday life has been possible as it is grounded on capitalism and coloniality as socio-ecological regimes embedded in technological devices. Additionally, the use of the internet by the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, is analyzed to demonstrate how their alternative use of the Internet redefines some of the basic traits of technology's expansion but not necessarily accounts for how the use of these devices and assemblages reproduce coloniality even in its use for activism and social transformation. Finally, the article proposes to look deeper into both the socio-ecological constitution of technology and other ways of being and understanding human, and non-human beings such as Tseltal and Tsotsil philosophy—Maya roots of Zapatismo in Chiapas—and mainly the idea of *ich'el ta muk'*—recognition-respect, to explore different perspectives to the one offered by capitalism and

coloniality, and concealed through technology, from which "non-technological" socio-ecological relations, and communities can emerge.

Endnotes

[1] See Coeckelbergh 2020.

[2] See Haraway 2000.

[3] See García Canclini 2019.

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